

Sermon

"The Bible: Our Manual"

(Elder Larry Shean)

The year was 1999.

It was heavy on my heart to do something to give back to my community,

So I decided to join a fire department.

Tommy Squib and his brother John who are close friends of mine, actually, they are more like brothers to me, were members of Station 71 in Bradenville, where Tommy was the Fire Chief and John was the Sergeant at Arms, so it was a no-brainer what Dept I wanted to join.

After I joined the Fire Department, I attended Fire School at St Vincent College where I learned the basic skills needed to become a fire-fighter.

We were given a manual to study so we could learn the basic principles of fire-fighting.

Our manual was an instructional booklet outlining the basic principles that we needed to learn to become a firefighter.

In our training during the week of Fire School we were taught the proper way to carry and stand up a ladder and how to lock our bodies onto the ladder while we were using various tools to accomplish our task at hand.

We were taught how to stabilize a vehicle and use the Jaws of Life and other tools needed to safely remove people who were trapped in vehicle accidents.

We were taught how to use our SCBA's, which is the Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus, which is the technical term for an oxygen tank and mask which is used to keep ourselves safe while fighting a fire so we can breathe fresh air.

We were taught that if your oxygen tank runs out of air, you can set your hose nozzle on fog pattern and put your face as close to the end of the nozzle that you can,

And you will get all the fresh air you need until someone gets you a new tank.

We were also taught the proper way to connect the fire hose to a fire hydrant or a fire truck

And how to tell the difference with our eyes closed, which end of the fire hose was the male end and which end was the female end just by feeling the couplers on the end of the hose.

The female coupler has a swivel on it and the male coupler does not.

I'm claustrophobic, so there was one training exercise which I was not very fond of.

We put our SCBA's on and the instructor covered the face-shield of our masks with duct tape so we couldn't see.

The instructor turned us around a couple of times so we would be a little disoriented to where we were

Then he placed the fire hose in our hands and we had to follow the hose until we came to a coupler, then we had to determine if we were heading in the direction of the fire truck or in the direction of the mobile home.

Knowing that the female end of the hose is connected to the fire truck, and as I mentioned earlier that the female end has a swivel coupler on it,

So remembering that while you're following the hose and you come to the male coupler first, then you know that you are moving in the direction away from the fire engine and moving closer to danger.

But if you come to the female end of the hose first, you know that you are moving in the direction towards the fire engine and towards safety.

So we had to figure out which direction we had to go to follow the hose into the mobile home, throughout the rooms and back outside, trying not to lose hold of the hose.

Not knowing that the instructor had the hose tossed up over the furniture and also had other hoses crisscrossing the hose which we were following.

So we had to follow the hose which the instructor placed in our hands into the trailer, through the trailer and back outside.

We were taught to keep both hands on the hose at all times so we wouldn't lose the hose and get lost and not be able to make it out safely if it were an actual fire.

When we came to the hose which was laying across the hose that we were following,

We had to feel our way with one hand up over the hose which was laying over the hose we were following and then follow the hose back to our other hand, then we were able to get past that hurdle .

Which is harder to do than you think, especially when you can't see what you are doing. I remember being nervous, but I had to try to keep calm because if I got worked up, my breathing would increase and then I would use up the oxygen which was in my tank faster than normal and risk running out of oxygen before I made it back out of the trailer.

With normal breathing, an average size oxygen tank could last up to 30 to 45 minutes,

But with increased breathing, you could use a tank of oxygen up in about 10 to 15 minutes.

As long as I kept a hold of the hose and paid attention to what I was doing, I would be safe and make it back out of the trailer before I used up the oxygen that was in my tank.,

But if I didn't pay attention to what I was doing , I was asking for trouble and most likely run out of oxygen before I made it back out of the trailer.

All of this was written in our manual

It was our manual to read and study, not just once, but continually until it became second nature to us.

It was basically our manual to live by.

According to Merriam - Webster Dictionary, a manual, as a noun, is an instructional booklet or handbook.

We as Christians have a manual to live by and help us navigate through life safely.

Our instructional booklet that we are to follow in life is the Bible

The Bible is the inspired word of God.

God uses prophets to spread his teachings and to get his point across.

Our manual, the Bible starts with the book of Genesis and how God created the world, mankind, and all of the animals.

And ends in Revelation, which describes the end times, and what will take place during that time, and tells us about the new Heaven and new earth.

In Genesis 2:12-17 we are told:

God took Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

And God commanded Adam that he is free to eat from any tree in the garden, but he must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when he does, he will certainly die.

God said that it is not good for man to be alone, so God created Eve.

Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden when Satan first appeared to them.

Right from the beginning Satan has been there to tempt mankind.

In Genesis chapter 3 we see where Satan starts with his craftiness.

Satan casts a shadow of doubt on the word of God.

And uses his craftiness, that he is so good at doing,

and discreetly contradicts God and substitutes his word for God's word and says to Eve,

“Did God really say, you must not eat from any tree in the garden?”

Eve said to the serpent,

“We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say,”

“ You must not eat fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”

The serpent said back to Eve,

“You will not certainly die, for God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Satan uses his words to make it sound pleasing and desirable to eat from the tree which God told them not to eat from.

Eve fell for the lies and deception of Satan, and not only did she eat the forbidden fruit, she also gave some to Adam, who also ate the forbidden fruit.

After they ate the fruit, their eyes were opened and they realized that they were naked,

So they sewed some fig leaves to cover their nakedness.

They heard the sound of God walking through the garden, so they hid among the trees of the garden.

God calls out to Adam and Eve, "Where are you?"

Adam answers, "I heard you coming through the garden, I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid"

God asked Adam, "who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

Right away Adam says, "the woman you put here with me gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it"
Adam didn't hesitate to throw Eve under the bus.

If we go back to Genesis 2:15 to 17 again,

God put Adam in the Garden of Eden, and told him not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

For when you eat from it you will certainly die"

What or who do we see is missing

Notice that Eve is not in the picture or even mentioned about at this point,

But she comes into the picture in verse 18, when God says,

"It is not good for the man to be alone.

I will make a helper suitable for him."

Adam knew that they shouldn't have touched the tree let alone eat the fruit from it.

Adam didn't even try to take responsibility for what they had done,

He just put the blame entirely on Eve.

Some scholars believe this was the first time sin was committed,

They feel that Adam should have taken the blame for it himself since Eve wasn't created at the time that God told Adam that he was forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil

But Adam put the blame right on Eve.

God said to Eve, "What have you done?"

Eve said, "the serpent deceived me and I ate the fruit."

God then cursed the serpent,

God then said to Eve, “I will make your pains in child bearing very severe”

And to Adam God said, “Cursed is the ground because of you, you will painfully toil the ground, and by the sweat of your brow, you will eat food from it until you return to the ground”

God then banished Adam and Eve from the garden, and placed a cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

This is the judgement upon man.

This does not mean that God put up a roadblock,

It means that the way of life was kept open for man to come to God,

But now that way is not through the tree of life.

Salvation must come through a sacrifice, and when man looked back, the blood of the sacrifice is what he saw.

Thank God that He did not let man live eternally in sin and that God is not going to let us do that.

That is really a blessing.

Further into the Old Testament, we read that the Israelites were God’s chosen people.

His chosen people were in bondage in Egypt.

In the book of Exodus, we read about how God chose Moses to lead his chosen people out of Egypt and into the promised land

We also read in the book of Exodus how God redeemed the Israelites with the Passover.

If we remember the Passover,

God instructed Moses to tell his people that they were to place some blood from the Passover lamb onto the top and sides of the door posts to their homes.

During that night, when God would pass through the town, He would pass over the homes which had the blood from the Passover lamb on its door posts and spare the first born from the sword.

After the Passover, Pharaoh released the Israelites from captivity,

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and towards the Promised Land.

God guided them through the wilderness by a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night.

God provided them with all that they needed, but yet they were a rebellious generation.

God provided manna for them to eat,

And then they complained that they didn’t have any meat to eat,

Then God provided quail for them to eat.

And they still complained.

It seemed as though they were never satisfied,

And they continued to sin against God.

When they reached the desert of Sinai, God called Moses up onto Mount Sinai, and from a burning bush, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments established the core laws which are known as part of the Old Covenant, between God and the Israelites.

The Ten Commandments was to serve as a guide to their worship, establish social order, and reveal God's holiness and human sinfulness.

God instructed Moses as to what the people were to do when they sinned against God.

In the Book of Leviticus, it details the sacrifices which the Israelites had to make and how they were to present the sacrifices for various sins.

The specific sacrifice depended on the type of sin and the rules for making the various sacrifices.

Some sacrifices were burnt offerings

Some were grain offerings,

Some were fellowship offerings,

And there were also sin and guilt offerings.

The requirements varied by the type of offering being offered and the social status of the person making the sacrifice.

This was known as the Old Covenant.

Since the Israelites broke the Old Covenant which God had made with them,

He decided it was time to do something different.

In the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the two prophets predict a time when God would make a new covenant with his people.

This future covenant would not be based on external laws, but on an internal law written on people's hearts by the Holy Spirit.

It would be a covenant of forgiveness where God would not remember sin anymore.

Jesus is the new Covenant which was mentioned in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

We may ask, what is a Covenant?

A Covenant or a Will is a binding, sacred agreement, or a promise between two parties,

Most often between God and humanity

But, let's not forget that a Covenant, or Will only takes effect after the death of the one who made it,

So the New Covenant went into effect with the death of Jesus.

Jesus took our sins upon his body when he was crucified on the cross.

So it is through Christ that we are redeemed and called children of God.

Since the New Covenant is Christ Jesus, we no longer have to follow the Old Covenant.

God provided Jesus as the perfect sacrificial lamb that covers all sins, once and for all, the sins which we already committed and the sins which we didn't commit yet.

There is a theological concept that "we are born into sin", which refers to the idea that we as humans are born with an inherited sinful nature, which is often called original sin.

This concept originates from the first sin of Adam and Eve.

While we inherit this sinful nature, God's mercy and the forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ are central to the Christian understanding of this issue.

In the Old Covenant, the animal sacrifices were brought involuntarily,

Meaning, that they didn't have a choice.

But Christ voluntarily gave up his life to redeem us from our sins,

He knew full well the understanding and consequences of his sacrifice.

He didn't just sacrifice his blood,

He sacrificed His entire human nature.

When the Israelites were traveling through the wilderness,

They worshipped God in a tabernacle,

Inside the tabernacle there was a curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

In the Old Covenant, only the priest could go into the Holy of Holies which was behind the curtain,

But when Christ died for our sins,

That curtain was torn in two from top to bottom,

We are no longer separated from God

We are saved by the grace of God.

But what does it mean to be saved by the grace of God?

We were dead in sin and completely unable to save ourselves,

God steps in and by His grace, He reaches down to us.

But why does He do this?

He does not find the reason in us,

He finds it in Himself.

When God came down to deliver Israel, it wasn't because they were good, righteous people,

They were not.

They were a stiff-necked people, and idolators,

They worshipped a golden calf while God was leading them through the wilderness.

But God heard their cry.

Why did their cry appeal to Him?

Because He loved them

And He loves you and He loves me.

However, He doesn't save us by His love,

He saves us by His grace.

We find this in Ephesians 2:8 - 9

Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians,
"For it is by grace you have been saved,

Through faith , and this is not from yourselves,

It is a gift of God,

Not by works, so no one can boast."

So God saves us by His grace.

What is the difference between God's love and God's grace?

While doing my research, I came across a book,

"Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee"

I liked his interpretation of the difference between God's love and God's grace.

He says:

“God loves all of us, don’t lose sight of that,

But God cannot, on the basis of his love,

Open the back door of heaven and slip us in under cover of darkness.

He cannot let down the bars of heaven at the front door and bring us in because of His love.

God is also the light of the world.

God is the moral ruler of this universe.

God is righteous, He is Holy and He is good.

All this adds up to one thing,

God cannot do things that are wrong - that is, wrong by His own standard.

So God couldn’t save us by love.

Love had God strapped,

We could say it put Him in a bind.”

Let’s stop and take a look at John 3:16 and let us remind ourselves of what this scripture passage tells us.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son ,

That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish,

But have everlasting life.”

Mr. McGee goes on to say,

“Does it say that God so loved the world that He saved the world?

No, that’s exactly what it doesn’t say

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

You see, God couldn’t save the world by love because He goes on to say,

That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.

You and I are going to perish. We are lost sinners, and God still loves us,

But the love of God cannot bring us into heaven.

God had to provide a salvation, and He paid the penalty for our sins.

Now a God of love can reach out His hands to a lost world and say

“If you will believe in My Son, because He died for you,

If you will come on that basis - I can save you.”

God doesn't save us by His love. He saves us by His grace.

God is rich in mercy and grace.

God loves you and He loves me,

We cannot keep Him from loving us,

If we turn our backs to God and get out of God's will,

We lose God's favor,

But, if we recognize our shortcomings

And how sin and neglect have affected our actions,

And we turn back towards God and come back to Him through Christ,

He will save us and we will experience God's love.

The Old Covenant was an impersonal, external legal code written on tablets of stone and given to a nation that merely provided for temporary covering of sin.

The New Covenant, on the other hand, promised an internal law written on the hearts of individuals,

And provided for the full and final forgiveness of sin.

When Jesus died upon the cross and was resurrected, He now sits at the right hand of God the Father
Jesus is now the Most High Priest and became the mediator between us and God.

In John 14:6, Jesus tells us,

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.”

If you believe that Jesus died for your sins,

And you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior,

Then you are saved and it is through God's love and Mercy that you get your salvation.

We are kept in Jesus's heart by His love for us as He sits at the right hand of God

If we think that the tabernacle was beautiful that God dwelt in with the Israelites when they were traveling through the desert,

With all of the scarlet linens and all the gold, which was made by human hands,

Just think how much more beautiful heaven is going to be,

The place which was made by God himself,

And that's where he wants us to be, with Him in heaven.

Every day we are faced with temptations,

Merely because Satan is doing what he does best,

Manipulating God's word and trying to deceive us, and trying to get us on his side.

So the next time you are in a situation and you're not sure of which decision is the correct decision, and you feel lost, and tempted,

Remember our manual, which is the Bible,

And think about the training exercise that I went through in fire school,

And grab ahold of that firehose, which is God's word,

And when you come to a coupler, which is temptation,

Feel that coupler and think of which way is the correct way to follow the hose to safety, which is with God,

And not further into the fire with Satan.

We need to read our manual, the Bible,

Until how we are to live our lives becomes second nature to us.

Trust and believe in what we are told in John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Amen.