

Leave It!

(January 17, 2023)

We have a new dog as I've written about before and like our older dog, we are getting this new pup trained. We've learned with dogs, it's best to give simple commands and repeat them the same way so they will come to understand what those commands mean. This new pup is extremely intelligent and is learning very quickly. We've been working on his "recall" so that he will return or come to us when we call without hesitation because the last thing you want is a dog who won't come when called due to distractions.

Another command we use is the "leave it!" command. This we use when his nose starts directing his attention to something that we don't want him to mess with. When we go for walks, we are blessed to have 1300 acres across the road and the owners have given us permission to walk on them with our dogs whenever we would like. It's a fairly safe place to walk because it's away from traffic. However, there are plenty of things that can vie for a dog's attention so it's also a good training exercise.

Sometimes Scooby will find some armadillo excrement or cow pile that seems especially inviting. Most dogs will try to roll in these things because experts say they want to smell like their surroundings. Well, if you've ever smelled armadillo poop, it has no redeeming value. At least with cow poop, it has an earthy smell to it that is not bad normally. So, when Scooby seems taken with these piles of excrement, we say "Leave it!" not in a harsh way, but in an unmistakably authoritative way so he knows we mean business. He also wears an e-collar, which gives me the option of using a tone, vibration or static shock to drive the point home. I am impressed with how I rarely have to use that collar. He tends to obey voice commands and for such a young dog (5-6 months old), that is really remarkable on its own.

As we walk, if Scooby gets too far ahead of us, we will call out "Wait!" and because our older dog understands that command and stops, Scooby is picking it up too and will do the same thing. We ensure we give both dogs plenty of praise for their listening to cement the idea that following our "rules" is a good idea.

Our only concern is that Scooby appears to like running after cars, even though his right front leg was run over by one. Even though he is fenced in our gated yard and cannot get out, when a vehicle comes by that he thinks is going too fast, he will run along the fence (on the inside), and bark at the vehicle until it's gone. I'm not sure how to break him of that except to drive the point home with a strong "Leave it!" and the e-collar if necessary. Because of this, when we go camping, he will likely need to be on a run to ensure that he doesn't go after vehicles or leave our campsite to wander off. Our older dog, Buster, doesn't care about vehicles and will stay in our campsite area without the need of a lead or run, but he's also four years older and has a different personality.

It's important that our furry friends learn numerous commands because they are teachable, and it makes for an all around better situation in the home. Dogs are happier when they know they are doing the things that please. They become truly loyal and want to do what makes owners happy. For us, it is ultimately about keeping Scooby safe and happy.

Isn't it the same with Christians? God has rules and just because people become Christians, it doesn't mean the rules are set aside. We do *not* need to follow the Ten Commandments to *gain* salvation, but as Christians we should ensure that we are not actively breaking them, shouldn't we? Should we lie, steal, cheat, kill, take the Lord's Name in vain, commit adultery etc.? Obviously not. We avoid doing those things to remain in right relationship with God that allows continued fellowship. If we end up breaking a law here or there, we don't lose our salvation, though our fellowship with God will be marred until we admit and repent of our wrong. Salvation is not following a list of "do's" and avoiding the "don'ts." It is being in relationship with God first and foremost. As a result of that relationship, we should learn to live the do's and avoid the don'ts.

In his opening statements in **1 Peter 1**, Peter greets the brothers/sisters. Note he states that all Christians (not just those he was writing to), are "...*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*" (**1 Peter 1:2** NKJV).

But why else - other than our sin natures - do we struggle with being obedient? It seems so difficult at times, doesn't it? In fact, taking it one more step, why do we Christians seem to have a problem making good and right decisions consistently? I think Peter (like James), nails it down for us and we would do well to pay close attention.

Peter was writing to a group of new believers who had been scattered and were undergoing difficult persecution simply for being Christians. Peter encouraged them to not see that persecution as strange or even unwanted but to *embrace* it since it meant they were suffering for Christ's sake as He suffered for our sake. This is why I believe Peter reminds them of their heavenly blessing in **1 Peter 1:3-12**.

Peter spends much time even into **1 Peter 2** detailing the salvation that was foretold and then explaining the quality of that salvation that leads to an inheritance incorruptible. Then Peter tells everyone how to live *practically* based on the truth of salvation; in other words, what our response should be (**1 Peter 2:1-3**), to that Gospel.

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

What Christian does not want to live the way Peter tells us and follow the "rules" he outlines? Anyone who doesn't should probably do some serious heart searching to determine whether or not they are actually saved. I would like to lay all of that aside and once for all, but while that is impossible to do now, we can make great gains toward that as we wait to receive our full salvation that await us.

Peter also notes that Jesus was *the* Stone that became the Chief Cornerstone, even though He was fully rejected by the religious leaders of this world. Peter notes that they "stumbled" over Jesus because that is what they were destined for (**1 Peter 2:8**). The remainder of this chapter is filled with admonitions to be obedient and to submit to God in all things. I've dealt with it on numerous occasions when I dealt with **Romans 13**.^[1]

Here's the reality that I think Peter is discussing in the remaining part of **1 Peter 2**, then in chapters **3, 4** and **5**. The question really for all of us is *how* do we follow our Lord consistently, even if not perfectly in this life? There appears only one way and many writers of the Bible discuss this with Jesus pointing it out as well.

In order to be as consistent as possible in following Jesus in this life, we need to fully understand how we are to live (what the Bible tells us), and then we are to work on being separated from this world *emotionally*. Too often this concept may be understood to mean that we must separate from the world *physically*, but it appears this is not what the Bible teaches.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The above text, from **1 John 2:15-17** is plain. If we love the world *emotionally* (love is often felt), we will be constantly drawn to the things the world produces to the point of coveting them strongly. These things will take up residence in our hearts, pushing out our commitment to God. The more we love the world and the things in the world, the less *discernment* and *wisdom* we will evidence and draw from in our lives because our focus will be on earthly things.

I can look back over my life and actually see the times I failed miserably (but didn't know why at the time). It was due to the fact that I was enamored with the things of "Egypt" (the world), and wanted them in my life.

John's words above show and remind us that Satan's system of commerce throughout the world is one that is designed to capture our hearts and minds. That is *not* to say that everything we enjoy in this world is wrong. It's not. What it *is* to say is that if/when the things of this world capture our hearts and emotions, we are often pulled away from following our Lord because something in this world has unseated Him as Lord of our life.

To circumvent this, I think it is very important to go through the things you own and the interests you have on a regular basis and ask yourself what you could do without. This is the process of "coming out" of the system of Babylon and it is interesting that the same author of **1 John** also authored **Revelation**, where he includes the warning he hears in **Revelation 18**, about coming out of Babylon. If God warns His people to come out of "Babylon," there must be a good reason for that. Again, this doesn't mean we cannot avail ourselves of the comforts of this life. We simply should not put our faith in those things nor should we give them room in our hearts where only love for God belongs.

When John hears that warning, I tend to think of it as the *final* warning for Christians alive during what many believe to be the Tribulation; the final seven years of human-led history prior to our Lord's return. We should always live in a way that keeps us from becoming in love with the things of this world.

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues..." (Revelation 18:4).

John hears the warning that those who do not come out of Babylon, will:

- share in Babylon's sins, and
- receive Babylon's plagues

Why? Because they won't have the wherewithal, discernment or wisdom to see any of it coming. They won't be awake to God because they will be too enamored with the things of this world. It seems clear that God does not want His children to be in on the receiving end of the plagues that will destroy "Babylon," the world's system.

This whole subject reminds me of Lot. Had Lot not gotten out of Sodom/Gomorrah, he would have perished as the people of those twin cities perished. With great haste, the angels directed Lot, his wife and two daughters out of the area. It was a very close call (cf. **Genesis 19**). Yet, Lot's wife was too caught up in Sodom and could not separate emotionally from it.

Truly, Lot should have never settled in Sodom and certainly should have left once he realized just how corrupt and evil the people and the system were there, but he didn't. He seemed to go along with it. Why? Likely because of the amenities and the conveniences of living there. It would have been harder to live in an area that didn't have the type of things Sodom had so he put up with the corruption because of it. The one time he did speak up, the men of the town were ready to literally take him apart for what they saw as a "judgmental" attitude.

It seems clear to me that this is the problem that the believers in the book of **Hebrews** experienced as well as the Corinthian believers. Moreover, if we look carefully at the seven letters to the seven churches in the opening chapters of **Revelation**, it is a clearly repeated problem. Christians who lose their dedication and zeal to their first love by being enamored with aspects of the world's system tend to move away from fellowship with God. The result is a lack of blessing, including God-given wisdom that creates discernment within us. The more we have of the world, the less we have Jesus.

Just as we are teaching our new pup to "leave it" when it comes to specific things, Christians need to be doing the same thing. Throughout the day, temptations come and we need to recognize these temptations and be willing to "leave it" so that we can remain in fellowship with Jesus.

What can we choose to leave that we might have more of Him?

[1] <https://studygrowknowblog.com/?s=romans+13&searchbutton=Go%21>