

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"Approving and Disapproving of What Others Are Doing – Part II"*

Here's the background to this message...

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse, and last week we covered **Luke 9:49-50**...

Luke 9:49 John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us."

50 But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you."

These verses teach us how to view the work and ministry of others who – as John puts it – are not **with us**.

John and the other disciples wanted to reject this man b/c of his affiliation.

- This was a problem in their day, and it can be a problem in our day too.
- We make the same mistake when we think our church or denomination is right and everyone else is wrong.

Jesus' response serves as a warning against an attitude of intolerance and exclusivity. There are churches, denominations, and non-denominations that are very different from each other, and they can still be very pleasing to the Lord.

As I worked on last week's sermon I knew it sounded very approving of the work and ministry of others, almost to the point of lacking discernment:

- As a result, I thought it needed a counterpart, b/c we can't always approve of the work and ministry of others.
- Sometimes we have to say:
 - *"No, we can't work with you."*
 - *"No, you can't help us."*

I'd like to illustrate this by sharing two accounts from the OT. We're going to need a little familiarity with Israel's history for them to make sense...

Israel was originally one nation, consisting of 12 tribes, but then it experienced a civil war and split into two nations, with 10 tribes in the north and 2 in the south:

- Because the northern kingdom consisted of 10 of the original 12 tribes it continued to be called Israel. Sadly, it quickly became an apostate nation – which is to say a nation that turned from the Lord:
 - First, they started worshiping Jeroboam's golden calves.
 - Then, when Ahab became king, he married Jezebel and they started worshipping Baal.
- The southern kingdom consisted of 2 tribes – Judah and Benjamin – and b/c Judah was the largest of the two, the southern kingdom was called Judah.
 - Some of the kings were good, and some of the kings were bad.

- We're going to read about Amaziah who was mostly good.

Look at **2 Chr 25:5**...

5 Then Amaziah assembled the men of Judah and set them by fathers' houses under commanders of thousands and of hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He mustered those twenty years old and upward, and found that they were 300,000 choice men, fit for war, able to handle spear and shield.

So Amaziah wanted to beef up his army, and everything was fine up to this point, but now look what he did...

6 He hired also 100,000 mighty men of valor from Israel for 100 talents of silver.

He paid them **100 talents**. 1 talent is 75 pounds, so this is 7,500 pounds or 3.5 tons of silver! In Amaziah's day – or our day – this would be a LOT of money!

Because Israel was apostate, look what happened...

7 But a man of God (which simply means a prophet) **came to him and said, "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with Israel, with all these Ephraimites.**

Ephraim was the largest tribe in the northern kingdom of Israel, so sometimes Israel was also called Ephraim.

And this prophet told Amaziah he couldn't go to battle w/ these soldiers from Israel, b/c **the LORD is not with Israel**. Since Israel turned from God, God turned from Israel.

And this brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: WE MUST DISAPPROVE WHEN WE'RE UNEQUALLY YOKED.

God didn't want His people, the Jews, working w/ the ungodly northern kingdom of Israel, b/c they were unequally yoked...and God doesn't want His people – us, the church – working with ungodly people for the same reason.

Please listen to these familiar NT verses...

2 Cor 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (and the Israelites were unbelievers at this time). **For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness** (Israel was definitely lawless – or w/o God's law)? **Or what fellowship has light with darkness?** **15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?** **16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God...17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them...and touch no unclean thing."**

God gives His people this command b/c He's holy and He's in His people – we're His temple – so He expects us to be holy, which means separate or set apart. That's why He said:

- **go out from their midst**
- **be separate from them**
- **touch no unclean thing**

We generally apply these verses to marriage - and there's definitely application for that - but they go beyond that to any close relationship:

- Could be roommates
- Could be business partners
- Could be close friends:
 - We can – and should be friends with unbelievers – but we shouldn't be CLOSE friends with unbelievers.
 - Our closest friends should be our brothers and sisters in Christ.

One reason I like this example w/ Amaziah is he's going to fight a battle, and with a battle the temptation is to think, "I'll take whoever I can get. Who cares what they're like morally or spiritually. As long as they can fight, that's all that matters!"

But God doesn't see it that way, and this has a lot of application for us, b/c we're fighting a battle too:

- We can be tempted to think, "We need as many people as we can get. We don't care what they're like religiously or spiritually. As long as they'll help us, we'll take them!"
- Instead we should think, "God can provide the help we need, and He'll make sure that help is equally yoked with us."

Look what else the prophet said to Amaziah...

8 But go, act, be strong for the battle. Why should you suppose that God will cast you down before the enemy? For God has power to help or to cast down."

The implication is:

- If you take the mercenaries w/ you, God can make sure you lose.
- If you send the mercenaries home, God can make sure you win.

You can probably guess Amaziah's concern associated with sending the mercenaries home? "What about the money I've spent on them!"

9 And Amaziah said to the man of God, "But what shall we do about the hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?" The man of God answered, "The LORD is able to give you much more than this."

He knows he's about to lose 3.5 tons of silver, but the prophet gives him great counsel: **"The LORD is able to give you much more than this."**

You might circle, highlight, or underline the words, b/c they contain a wonderful truth for us to keep in mind. If you're ever tempted to compromise to make money:

- Maybe fudge on your tax return...
- Maybe not give to the church the way you should...
- Maybe fail to pay back all you owe...

Turn to these words to be encouraged to do what's right:

- Don't worry about the money; God isn't broke.
- He owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

Now let me be clear about something...

It might've sounded like I just said:

- *Obey God, b/c He'll bless you in return.*
- *Do what's right, and God will give you more than you gave up.*

There are two reasons I DON'T want you to hear that from me:

1. First, we shouldn't obey God b/c we think He'll bless us in return. We should obey God...because we should obey God...whether we're blessed in return or not.
2. Second, notice the prophet said, "**The LORD IS ABLE to give you much more,**" versus "**The LORD WILL give you much more.**"

There's no guarantee that when we do what's right God is going to bless us in return...and this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: OBEDIENCE DOESN'T ALWAYS RESULT IN BLESSING.

Let me give you three examples...

Think about Joseph:

- He resisted Potiphar's ungodly wife.
- She lied to her husband about Joseph.
- Then Joseph got thrown in prison for his integrity.

Think about the prophet Micaiah:

- He tells King Ahab the truth, so Ahab throws him in prison.
- Ahab brings him out of prison to hear from him again, and he tells Ahab the truth...that if he goes to battle he'll die...he basically tried to save Ahab's life.
- And Ahab threw him back in prison and gave him only bread and water until he died.

And let me give you a third example. Watch what happens with Amaziah. Look at **verse 10**...

10 Then Amaziah discharged the army that had come to him from Ephraim to go home again. And they became very angry with Judah and returned home in fierce anger.

They were probably angry for two reasons:

1. First, they were insulted at being hired and then sent home like there was something wrong w/ them.
2. Second, they were counting on the plunder and spoil from the battle.

11 But Amaziah took courage and led out his people and went to the Valley of Salt and struck down 10,000 men of Seir (or Edom). 12 The men of Judah captured another 10,000 alive and took them to the top of a rock and threw them down from the top of the rock, and they were all dashed to pieces.

Amaziah shouldn't have done this. He had a huge victory over the Edomites, but victories can lead to pride. This is one of the dangers associated with success. We don't have time to read the rest of the chapter, but Amaziah became prideful enough that he started worshiping the idols of the Edomites. You should read the rest of the chapter as a family and see how poorly Amaziah finished after starting off well.

Now look what happened with the angry mercenaries he sent home...

13 But the men of the army whom Amaziah sent back, not letting them go with him to battle, raided the cities of Judah, from Samaria to Beth-horon, and struck down 3,000 people in them and took much spoil.

When the mercenaries headed back to Israel, they walked through the nation of Judah and raided the towns and killed thousands of people. They did to Judah what they would've done to Edom if they had been able to go to battle.

This happened to Amaziah b/c he hired these men – so yes he suffered as a result of his foolishness – but at the same time, you can't miss that:

- He obeyed God in sending the mercenaries home, and this is what happened.
- He did what was right, but he still ended up suffering!

The lesson for us is...

You might obey God and:

- Make less money...
- Lose some friends...
- Maybe lose your job...
- Lose a relationship with a family member...
- In some countries, missionaries and Christians obey God and lose their lives.

To apply the main point of this sermon, perhaps you disapprove of the work of others b/c it conflicts w/ God's Word and:

- People get angry w/ you...
- They criticize you...

Even though you were standing up for the Lord.

Doing what's right is no guarantee you're going to be blessed!

But even when you obey and suffer...you were still right for obeying. Suffering doesn't negate that you did what's right. You have to resist the strong temptation to say:

- *I shouldn't have done this.*
- *I wish I would've done this instead.*
- *I was wrong for obeying.*

The next account I want to look at is in **Ezra 4**. Please turn to the next book after 2 Chronicles. Let me first give you the context...we have to go back to our history lesson...

The nation of Israel never turned from their idolatry, so in 722BC God sent the Assyrians to conquer them. When Assyria conquered a people, they prevented the nation from rebelling by resettling the land. They brought in lots of foreigners and the inhabitants intermarried with these people.

Listen to this verse...

2 Kin 17:24 The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of [Israel].

So when the king of Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, he put all these different people in the land, and what do you think they brought w/ them?

- They brought their own religions.
- They brought all their idols.

And they mixed with the worship of Israel.

Listen to what happened as a result:

- **2 Kin 17:33 [The people who were brought into the land] feared the LORD** (so this sounds good...) **BUT ALSO SERVED THEIR OWN GODS.**
- **2 Kin 17:41a These nations** (that were brought into the land) **feared the LORD AND ALSO SERVED THEIR CARVED IMAGES.**

When these pagans assimilated with the Israelites, it made a new group of people:

- The Israelites stopped being Israelites, and became half-Israelite and half-foreigners.
- They half followed Judaism, and half-followed these other religions.

The capital of Israel at this time was Samaria, so this new group of people were known as Samaritans.

If you understand this, then the Gospels make much more sense. This is why the Jews hated the Samaritans:

- They thought they were half-breeds and not true Israelites
- They thought they betrayed their nation by marrying foreigners
- They thought their religion was half-Jewish and half-pagan.

And this brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: TODAY'S CULTS ARE LIKE THE SAMARITANS' RELIGION.

When I say cults, I don't mean Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam. Those are pagan religions that don't claim to worship the God of the Bible.

When I say cults, I mean religions that share some number of similarities with Christianity and claim to worship the God of the Bible. For example:

- Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Catholics fall into this category.
- I would also include followers of the Health and Wealth Movement, or Prosperity Gospel, b/c they embrace some tenants of the Christian faith, but they've distorted the Gospel.

And when I think about the Samaritan religion, it reminds me of the cults, b/c it shared a lot with Judaism – or the foundations of Christianity – but it was twisted.

Think about when Jesus spoke to the woman at the well:

- She said, **“We worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him [all these years].”**
- She thought she was worshiping correctly - she sounds just like the cults - but Jesus said, **“You Samaritans worship what you don't know...”**

In other words, you don't really know God, “You think you're worshipping God, but you're not!”

This was the case with the Samaritans in Jesus' day, and it's the case with the cults in our day.

Jesus said these important words to her and He would say the same to us...

John 4:23 “True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

It isn't enough to be sincere in our worship. It isn't enough to just really mean it. We have to worship God in truth – which is to say – according to the revelation He's given us in the Word.

And when people don't do that, we have to disapprove of them!

Now hold on to this for a moment, b/c now you have half the context for Ezra...

The southern kingdom of Judah was better than the northern kingdom of Israel, but they engaged in idolatry too. So God sent Babylon to conquer them and destroy the temple.

The Babylonians did things differently than the Assyrians. They brought people into their land and hoped to prevent them from revolting by providing them with a comfortable existence. So – believe it or not – when the Jews could leave Babylon and return to Judah, most of them didn't want to go!

But – before we’re too hard on them – think about their situation: they had been in Babylon for decades...

- They established roots.
- They had homes.
- They had businesses.
- And what did it mean if they returned to Judah?
 - A 900-mile, 4-month trek across the Middle East.
 - Returning to a destroyed city that had been desolate for 70 years:
 - They had to rebuild the temple
 - They had no walls, which meant no defenses

So I’ll say it like this...

If there’s ever been a group that had a lot of work to do and could really use other people’s help, it was these Jews.

And guess what?

When they returned, they had a LOT of help!

Look at **Ezra 4:1**...

Ezra 4:1 Now when the adversaries (these are the Samaritans who had been in the land. I’ll explain in a moment why they’re called adversaries) **of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles** (or the Jews from Babylon) **were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel, 2 they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, “Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here.”**

First, look at the words **ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here**. This is referring to when the king of Assyria brought the foreigners into the land to resettle it.

Second, notice they said **we have been sacrificing to him**. Since there was no temple at this time, they were worshiping according to their own religion that sort of looked like Judaism.

Third, notice they said **we worship your God as you do**. It’s astonishing how similar these Samaritans sound to:

- The Samaritan woman at the well and the cults in our day.
- These words are really at the heart of what we’re discussing. Whenever people in cults talk to you they almost always make it sound like they’re the same as you.

The leader of the Jews at this time was Zerubbabel, and look how he responded in **verse 3**...

3 But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, “This is fantastic. We could use all the help we can get. We have been exhausted trying to do all this ourselves. Most of the Jews didn’t return with us. We sure are glad God sent you along so we can get the temple finished!”

Nope!

3 But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, “YOU HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH US IN BUILDING A HOUSE TO OUR GOD; BUT WE ALONE WILL BUILD TO THE LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.”

In other words:

- *We are unequally yoked!*
- *We do not approve of you helping us!*

And this brings us to Lesson 4...

LESSON 4: WE MUST DISAPPROVE OF THE CULTS.

Even though the Jews had a tremendous amount of work to do, they very clearly said, “You will have nothing to do with our work for God!”

God exiled the Jews in Babylon because of their idolatry. Fortunately, they were wise enough to recognize the Samaritans’ religion was wrong – despite what the Samaritans’ said – and so Zerubbabel – and it says **the rest of the heads of fathers’ houses in Israel** – rejected their help.

This was a terrible partnership that would have gotten them into a lot of trouble...just like it can get us in a lot of trouble if we compromise and work w/ cults. More than likely, if the Samaritans took part in the work on the temple, they would also be able to take part in its use and worship w/ the Jews. And this is the problem when we approve of the cults: they’re going to be able to join our worship and be part of our fellowship.

And let me ask you two questions...

What do you think many people would’ve said about Zerubbabel when he rejected the Samaritans’ offer?

- *I can’t believe he wouldn’t let them help...*
- *How unloving...*
- *He’s so intolerant and judgmental...*
- *And he calls himself a Christian!*

This is the same thing the outside world says about us if we disapprove of the cults.

But more interestingly, what do you think some of the Jews themselves might’ve said to Zerubbabel?

- *What are you thinking...people came to help us and you sent them away?*
- *Are you crazy? We can use all the help we can get!*

This is the same thing people might say in the church too if we disapprove of the work and ministry of those we shouldn't partner with.

Or one other common objection:

- *Wait, wait...if they join us, we can witness to them!*
- *If we partner with them we can share the Gospel with them.*

You don't have to partner with people to share the Gospel with them:

- If you want to share the Gospel with them, then simply share the Gospel with them.
- If there are people who NEED YOU to share the Gospel with them, that's pretty good evidence you're unequally yoked!

Let me draw your attention to one more thing. Look at **verse 4**...

4 Then the people of the land (this is the Samaritans) **discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build** **5 and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia** (this was about 16 years!).

The Samaritans got angry and started causing the Jews as many problems as possible. You can read about it in the following verses. It's interesting how similar this is to **2 Chr 25**:

- What happened w/ the mercenaries when they were sent home? They got angry and caused problems.
- When the Samaritans were told they couldn't help, they got angry...this is why **verse 1** said they were **adversaries**.

Both times you got to see their true colors when they didn't get what they wanted.

Look back at **verse 2** one more time...

2 they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you, for WE WORSHIP YOUR GOD AS YOU DO..."

And this brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 5: NOT ALL WHO CLAIM TO SEEK GOD ACTUALLY DO.

Jesus said it best...

Matt 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' **23** And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Jesus disapproved of these people!

- He might sound harsh. We think, *“This isn’t right. These poor people are sincere in their faith. They even call Him Lord!?!?”*
- But these people weren’t really worshipping the Lord, despite what they said. Jesus said He never knew them.

Many people have broken free from cults. Those who seek the God of the bible will find Him. God didn’t have trouble getting:

- Phillip to the Ethiopian
- Or Peter to Cornelius
- Or Paul to Lydia

Isa 59:1 says **Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.** He can save those who reach out to Him.

Let me conclude with this verse: **Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.**

Not all those who claim to seek God actually do...but those who seek Him with all their heart will find Him.

Where are you today? Are you seeking the true God with all your heart? His arm is not too short to save you!

Let's pray.