

Have you ever made a wrong turn and found yourself going the wrong way on a one-way street? I did that not long ago. It certainly was unnerving. One man, who made this mistake said, "I just figured I was late and everyone was coming home."

God has a clear one-way street for living the good life: "***Believe in me and serve your neighbor.***" That's what the sabbath day is about: rediscovering God and our neighbor. Anything short of that is as self-defeating as driving your car against traffic on a superhighway.

Of course, that doesn't seem to be so now. As a matter of fact, the opposite seems to be true. At first glance, it seems that those who disregard God and neighbor are the big successes in life. Appearances are sometimes deceiving. **Things are not always what they seem.**

The Pharisees in our text BELIEVED IN GOD. Many people today say they believe in God. Sometimes people who say that they believe only appear to believe. **Appearances can be deceiving.** Not everyone who says they believe really believes.

In the famous Grand Inquisition passage in Dostoyevsky's Brothers Karamazov, the man who has put others in jail for not believing, or for believing the wrong things, is himself found to be without faith. The Grand Inquisitor, the expert in theology, is trying to preserve a certain tradition about faith, a certain policy of the church, *but underneath it all he is not a believer.* The *Inquisitor is the Christian equal of the slanted Jewish Pharisee* in Jesus' day. **He knows more theology than almost everyone, but he shows us that knowing something is not believing in it.**

Knowing in the sense of head knowledge is a good thing, BUT IT IS NOT THE SAME AS FAITH.

Ideally, knowing about God and theology should enrich a person's faith, but it doesn't always work out that way. Some people who are very knowledgeable about the things of God and the history of Israel and the church, **drift away from both God and church.**

The appearance is that both the Pharisee and the Inquisitor are at the top of the religious ladder of faith. Things aren't always what they seem. Knowledge is not the same thing as faith - at least not as we normally use the term "knowledge."

In the Bible, "knowing" is often used in a different way than we use the term today. *In Hebrew, for example, the word we translate "to know" is YADA. YADA means personal, first-hand relationship with another, not information about another.* Concretely, the Old Testament often refers to knowing in sexual terms: *"He went into the tent and knew his wife"* means that they had sexual intercourse.

The same verb, YADA is used in Psalm 46: *"Be still and know that I am God."* To know God means personal first-hand relationship with God. **That is the real meaning of faith.** *Faith is more than head-knowledge. Faith is also more than following the rules.*

The ancient Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with the rules. In Mark 2:23-28, the accusation against Jesus is sabbath breaking. The Pharisees tithed, prayed regularly, debated the religious regulations regularly, and were generally regarded as the most religious folks around, but many of them got trapped in the vice of religious rules. When Jesus appeared on the scene, speaking and acting prophetically, and advocating a change back to basics and a focus on people, the Pharisees were offended. The Pharisees decided to strike back. **They would trap Jesus in some fine point of the Law and thus cause him to lose face before the people.** Time and again they tried. "Should we pay taxes to Caesar?" they once asked. "Render to Caesar the things which are Caesars," Jesus replied. Here, too, Jesus reverses the question, takes the Pharisees out of the spotlight and shines it brightly on God. *"The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath."*

Rules and regulations can be good things if they center in God, not ourselves; but even at their best, rules do not substitute for faith. Neither is believing that there is a God.

To believe that there is a God is not the same as believing in God. For example, if you say that you believe that there is a God, that costs you nothing. It is a convenient stance, since most other people say that they also believe that there is a God. You don't have to go anywhere or give anything. You can just pop out this semi-truth at the convenient moment: "I believe that there is a God; I just worship him in my own way." In case of emergency, if you hit an occasional bump in the road which you can't handle, it may be convenient to have God in your hip pocket. ***The "God of the hip pocket" is not God at all.***

Believing in God is different from believing that there is a God. In the first instance, God is in control; in the second, you remain in control - or at least, you try to remain in control, as did the young lawyer in the familiar story in Luke's Gospel.

One of the key stories in the New Testament is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). This story clearly shows that faith is more than head-knowledge, different from following the rules, and much more than merely believing "that there is a God." ***Faith is, rather, a living relationship with God which results in the fruit of concern for the neighbor.*** The religious lawyer (or scribe) in this story ***was going the wrong way on a one-way street.*** He didn't really believe in God. How do I know? ***It's clear: he didn't know who his neighbor was!***

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" the lawyer asked. Jesus replied with a question (like the good Jew that he was): ***"What is written in the law?"*** The lawyer replied, ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself."*** ***"Do it,"*** said Jesus, ***"and life is yours."***

But the man, seeking self-justification (trying to stay in the center and not lose face), asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus never answered his question. Instead, he told a story about being a good neighbor; he thus reversed the conditions to require not accepting an idea about the neighbor but rather doing something for the neighbor in need.

Jesus asked, "Which of these men - the priest and Levite (who passed by on the other side of the road when they saw the man in need by the side of the road) or the good Samaritan - was the good neighbor to the man who was hurting?" "Why ... why ... the one who took pity on him," the lawyer replied. "Go and do likewise."

The point of the story is not... ... humanitarianism, nor the elevation of the Samaritan, nor good works, nor the priest's insensitivity, nor the lawyer's hard-headedness. ***The point of the story is that faith must be active in love.*** ***Someone who says that he loves God, but does not serve his neighbor, is lying (1 John 4:20).***

The purpose of all the laws of God, including the law about the sabbath day, is to serve the neighbor. The human being needs rest. The human being needs worship. The day of worship is set aside for renewal of the human spirit. ***Anyone who uses the law about the sabbath to manipulate people has missed the point altogether.*** ***The point of the sabbath is to get our eyes off ourselves and onto God and our neighbor in need.***

This point flies right in the face of our modern "Me Generation," the popular tendency to take care of self-first, last, and always. ***Sometimes this tendency shows up in surprising places.***

Not long ago I phoned a man named Oscar about a car problem. Looking at the bill he had given me, I found the phone number he had written on it and tried it. Busy. I tried it again. Busy again. Busy. Finally, I looked more closely at the bill. ***The number I was calling wasn't Oscar's at all. It was another number he had written on the bill.*** It was my number. I was dialing my own number! No wonder I wasn't getting through. ***Whenever you dial your own number, you don't get through.***

THE PURPOSE OF SABBATH WORSHIP IS TO GET OUR MINDS OFF OF OURSELVES AND ONTO GOD AND THE NEIGHBOR. ***Service to the neighbor in need is the necessary extension of faith in the Lord.*** You can't have one without the other. ***"You can't love God whom you do not see unless you love your neighbor whom you do see"*** (1 John 4:20).

"The sabbath was made for man," Jesus said. The Pharisee had tried to trap him by pointing out that he was working on the sabbath - picking grain from the fields on a holy day. *"You've missed the point," Jesus said. "you've still got your eyes fixed firmly on yourself, your ideas, your narrow theology, your little world."*

God is there to be worshiped. The neighbor is there to be served—TO BE CARED FOR. The sabbath was made for that discovery.

I made a wrong turn. I suddenly discovered that I was faced by onrushing traffic - all pointed at me! I stopped, pulled over to the side of the road, turned around **and headed in the right direction.**

Along the right way, I FOUND GOD, I FOUND MY NEIGHBOR, AND I ALSO FOUND THAT I WAS GOING HOME. AND YOU, WHAT DIRECTION ARE YOU CURRENT HEADING? Does it feel RIGHT for you—Is God and Neighbor A Part of Your Journey? Amen.