

Miracles or Customs, Love or Law?

John 18:28-40



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FOCAL Read Responsively John 18:31-40^{KJV} Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: (32) **That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.** (33) **Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?** (34) Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? (35) Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? (36) **Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.** (37) Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. (38) **Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.** (39) But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? (40) **Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.**

PRAYER OUR FATHER, Who art in heaven, You are infinitely beyond the grasp of our understanding, and yet, Precious Lord, You bring us very near to

You through Your work as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is impossible for us not to love You! You are so full of goodness, so perfect, and yet You laid down Your life for us. You became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, sympathizing with us, married to us, dead for us and risen again for us — we cannot gaze into Your Holy Face without feeling our heart melt. We belong to You by faith, we are Your precious purchased possession. If any in this place be lost today, let us be lost in You. Your love is so hot for us, yet we - shamefully - are often so cold to You. We will at times not bow our knees. We are too dignified for this, we think. To dignified to cry, to bow, to raise our hands in worship for You, to melt in Your Presence. Lord, increase our love for You. You did first pluck us like brands out of the burning fires of hell. We remember well the day when You drew us from a corrupt world, and from our own self righteousness, and we believed on Jesus Christ. Draw us closer to You today. Let us become more completely consecrated and dedicated to You! May the image of Christ become more perfect upon us, stamp it deeper into our nature. We trust the image is there; but oh that it set still deeper into our very selves, that all might see that the seal of the Holy Ghost was upon us, in the likeness of Christ our Lord.

Our Father, we surrender this day to You. Oh sweet love of God, comfort us, teach us, change us. Cover all the rocks of life with Your nail scarred hand, and lift us above our trials. Lord, we are very weak, and in ourselves we have no desire to be otherwise, because when we are weak, then are we strong; but

we are very strong in Thee, and we do wish to have faith to perceive this. Take charge of this day, of our souls, of this Church, of this poor messenger, of this message, that You will be glorified and exalted not just here and now, but in our lives as we leave this place to serve You. For Your glory and honor we pray and ask these things. Amen.¹

ILLUSTRATE The other day I was standing in the fellowship hall of our Church when I heard someone pass by with their car stereo on "boom". Though this car was on the highway, several many yards from the Church building, I could feel every boom, every bang, every bass thump not only in my head, but also in my stomach. This noise was so loud that it reminded me of the time when I worked around running aircraft in the military. How someone could stand this sound is beyond me - yet, there it was. I turned to a young person nearby and asked, "How can anybody stand their music that loud?" I expected the child to defend this generation's music. The answer I received was unexpected. He said to me, "What music?" The child never heard (nor felt) what I did.

Many of our young people don't understand that the human body is a complex and wonderful device that, if abused or misused, can become permanently damaged. The ear is very sensitive to sound. How sensitive? The² book "Hearing Conservation In Industry, Schools, and the Military" tells us that **"The ear is capable of sensory response to sound whose pressure at the ear drum is no greater than two ten-thousandths of a**

1 inspired from the *Pastor in Prayer* by C.H. Spurgeon, pages 97-98

2 David Lipscomb, 1988, *Hearing Conservation in Industry, Schools, and the Military*, we read on page 303

millionth of barometric pressure." In other words, the ear is capable of hearing *very small sounds*. What a *miraculous* thing the human ear is! When high energy sound waves bombard the ear for even short periods of time, this assault can overstimulate and kill your hearing. You can destroy that miracle that the Lord gave you at birth.

I am told by many that the age of *miracles* is passed, that miracles no longer happen. I disagree. The human body itself is a miracle of the highest order, a superb creation from God. But let's go beyond that which is seen, and look at the teachings of Christianity. Our faith begins with a miracle, teaching that God loved us enough to come to live amongst us. God, Immortal, Eternal, and Infinite, became Mortal, Temporal, and Finite for us. God was born of a virgin, by His own hand, instantaneously. God then was born in the flesh, perfect and sinless, grew up to full maturity, and then, inexplicably, He went to the Cross to die for our sins. **That whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).** The miracle doesn't end with His death, though. God dies on that Cross, rises on the third day, and then ascends unto the Father. When God ascends to God, He promises to send God back to live *inside* of every believer, guiding us, helping us. Of all the miracles this, to me, is the most astounding. There is not a person in this room who will, if you're honest, not admit that you are a sinner. Not a *mistaker*, not a *tripper*, not a *fallible person*, but a sinner. And yet God, Who cannot look on sin, lives inside of you. If you are saved by faith in Christ, Jesus is in you! What saith the Scripture?

Romans 8:9-11 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. {10} And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. {11} But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Isn't that a wonderful text? Another illustration - for I want you to understand the miracle of Christianity, the miracle that Jesus formed in you, the miracle that you are before we go any farther. My wife was reading in the Rock Hill cookbook the other day (we need to do that again one day) a recipe for *sourdough bread*. You make sourdough by using a *starter*, some flour and water that has sat until yeast has formed in it. You put a little starter in every batch of bread, and the starter causes the unleavened dough to leaven and rise. The *starter* is what gives life to the next batch of bread. Since a little starter is used in every batch, you must keep adding a little flour and water to the starter, lest you use it all up. You see, the starter is *temporal*, usable, expendable. Apply that explanation to the above text: **He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken - make alive - your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.** Here is the miracle of Christianity. When sinful man repents of living his life in his own power, and turns to God,

believing in God's provision of salvation *through Jesus and Jesus alone*, then God comes inside of you. He is like the Starter that I mentioned in the sourdough recipe. But, unlike the sourdough starter, God the Holy Spirit living inside of the Christian never runs out, never depletes, for He is Eternal. It is God in you that guarantees that one day this old dead flesh will rise in glory to meet the Lord in the air!

Now let's look at our focal text.

1. Christianity Is Not A Set Of Laws or Customs, It Is A Teaching Of Miracles

FOCAL John 18:38 **What is truth?** And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

Pilate the politician had become so used to twisting the truth in order to please those around him - the Jews, the Gentiles, his Roman masters - that "truth" had no validity. Truth was just a word. Pilate stood inches from the Revealed Truth of God, Jesus Christ:

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, **I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.**

and asked **What is Truth?** Poor Pilate. Yet I grieve more for the poor religious people who brought Jesus before Pilate to be executed. These people had so twisted the **Law of God and God Himself** in their own minds

that they no longer had a clue as to what God was doing.

ILLUSTRATE I'm sure you've all seen or read the novel *Frankenstein*. In that story a scientist named Frankenstein sewed various body parts together to create his own human. What he created in the end was a monster. These poor misguided religious leaders, **so concerned about the Law of God**, brought Jesus to Pilate **in violation of every tenant of the Law of God**. Read with me:

FOCAL John 18:28 Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.

We read in the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 22:66 And **as soon as it was day**, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying,

According to the very **Law of God on which Israel was established** people were to be both accused and tried with all fairness. God told His people:

Deuteronomy 16:18-20^{HCSB} "Appoint judges ... **are to judge the people with righteous judgment. (19) Do not deny justice or**

show partiality to anyone. Do not accept a bribe, for it blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. (20) Pursue justice and justice alone, so that you will live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Trials were to be done in the light of day. If a person was guilty of a capital offense, that person could not be executed without at least two eye witnesses agreeing and testifying as to guilt. The person who accused the guilty of the capital offense was to cast the first stone, then the rest of the city was to execute the criminal. There was absolutely *no provision* in God's Law to do what these men were doing. We read in **Vincent's Word Studies**:

Early (πρωί) used technically of the fourth watch, 3-6 a.m. See Mark 13:35. The Sanhedrim {Jewish Law Court} could not hold a legal meeting, especially in capital cases, before sunrise; and in such cases judicial proceedings must be conducted and terminated by day. A condemnation to death, at night, was technically illegal.

These people claimed to want justice, but were ignoring God's Law. They were focused on ritual, but not on the reality of Jesus Christ Who they had before them.

FOCAL John 18:28 Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and **they themselves went not into the**

judgment hall, lest they should be defiled³; but that they might eat the passover.

The Pharisees believed that close contact with the Gentiles during a Holy Week (like the Passover) would *ceremonially defile them*. So these people brought Jesus before Governor Pilate, but would not enter into the courtroom where Jesus was to be judged.

When Jesus Christ is taken out of religion, it becomes a mechanical and ineffective thing. Unless God is inside you living out the principles of Christ through you, then you have not life! We who believe live, *not by the Law, but by Christ Who lives in us*. The Apostle said:

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Again, God is the Starter in the Christian. God is in you by faith in Jesus. We do not live by ritual, but by *relationship*. When we look at the hypocrisy of these Pharisees, we are looking at a good example of those who are **living by the Book but who do not have the Author of the Book inside them**. You can live by the Book, but in time your living will reveal itself to be

3 Aorist Passive Subjunctive G3392, *μυαίβο*, *miaínō*, *me-ah'ee-no*, Perhaps a primary verb; to *sully* or *taint*, that is, *contaminate* (ceremonially or morally): - defile., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)

godless, useless, and ultimately without value.

God *must* be inside you. You must be a miracle of God!

Even Pilate recognized that these Pharisees and Saducees had perverted God's Law. He tells them:

FOCAL John 18:31 ... **Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.** The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:

This was, as Pilate said, **YOUR Law**, not God's Law. Listen Beloved, if you are saved by faith in Christ, you are not saved by ritual, but are saved *by the supernatural intervention of God*. You are a walking, talking, breathing miracle because God loved you and gave Himself for you. The Jews became more focused on what they were doing rather than on Who God was. This is why the Apostle wrote and explained:

Romans 2:28-29 For **he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: (29) But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.**

There will be many Jews, just like these men we're reading about today, who did all the *right* things. They

were circumcised on the eighth day. They kept the Passover meal, and all the feasts. They maintained Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Every ritual was kept. Yet they did not set their hearts on Jesus. They did not worship Him and adore Him and get to know Him Who died for us. The love of God was not in them, for God was not in them. As the Scripture says:

Romans 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because **the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.**

2. We Must Carry This Teaching Of Miracles Into The World

I find it interesting that Pilate - not even a believer - was the only one in this religious crowd trying to save Jesus. He tells these misguided religionists:

FOCAL John 18:38-40 ... I find in him no fault at all. (39) But **ye have a custom⁴, that I should release unto you one at the passover:** will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? (40) Then cried they all again, saying, **Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas**

4 G4914, συνήθεια, sunētheia, soon-ay'-thi-ah, From a compound of G4862 and G2239; *mutual habituation*, that is, *usage*: - custom., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries). **Mishna, Pesahim 8:6** tells us: "They may sacrifice (a Passover lamb) for mourning the loss of his family, or for one that clears away a ruin; **as well as for the one who has been promised to be released from prison.**"

was a robber.

We must carry the faith that we profess into our world. Pilate was looking for a reason to release Jesus, and the world, I believe, is looking for the miracle that we have. As servants of God we are to carry this message of the New Covenant to the world. We, unlike Israel, are not ministers of the Letter but ministers of the Spirit. The Apostle said:

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; (6) Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

The letter of the Law killeth. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus in us, gives life. My life is not in the Law of God. My life is IN JESUS. The Scripture says:

John 1:4 In {JESUS} was life; and the life was the light of men.

Does the Law save? No, the Law *condemns*. The Law is a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. The Jews did not feel the whip of that schoolmaster, did not learn their lessons, but became enamored with the outward trappings, the rituals of the Law. I remember when I was in school, and I was taken to the principle's office. I remember being

found guilty of being a malcontent, then the principle paddling me. Yes, I know in our silly society today we don't do this, but they did it when I was growing up. And, by the way, it made me a better person. The paddle first bent me over, then it straightened me up. Let's see if it does the same to us all today.

The *first three commandments* tell me that I must love God above all else (**Exodus 20:2-7**). Jesus has even told us that we must love Him above all else. He said:

Luke 14:26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Do you love God more than your own children? Would you, like Abraham of old, take them to Mount Moriah and sacrifice them to God? Or are your children, your husband or wife, your relatives, your friends, are they more important to you than God?

The *fourth commandment* shows that I must set aside time to worship God. The *seventh commandment* tells me that I must remain sexually pure, and Jesus expanded this to teach me that

Matthew 5:28 ... whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Are you feeling deficient yet? If you have ever hated, carried a grudge, then you are in sin. If you have lied you have violated God's *ninth commandment*. Stop, stop, stop I say! Enough! I am a sinner. How can GOD dwell in ME?

Then comes the sweetest music I have ever heard. It's melody is Jesus. It's chorus is Jesus. The Bible says:

Romans 3:23-27 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; {24} **Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: {25} Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; {26} To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. {27} Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.**

God says to us, **Yes, My Child, I know you are a sinner. Here is your salvation. Believe on Jesus. Call on Jesus. Trust in Jesus.** You believe, and call, and trust - and I will do. God says:

Titus 3:5 **Not by works of righteousness**

which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

You are Mercy's Child, if you have been saved. You are God's Children, purchased with the Blood of Christ. Walk in love one toward another, for He loves you!

We must carry Christ in us into the world around us. Pilate's statement "**What is truth?**" is echoed by our government, by our schools, by our courts, by even our children today. If we do not allow God to live through us, if we do not carry the message of the Cross to this lost and dying world, then we will continue to see the sorry state of affairs that we see in America today.

FOCAL John 18:38 Pilate saith unto him, **What is truth?** And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, **I find in him no fault at all.**

"I find no guilt in Him^{NAS}."

Jesus said two things to Pilate I want to focus on in closing:



Y kingdom is not of this world, if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants

fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but **now is my kingdom not from hence.**

We who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior are **His Servants, His People**. We are not called to overthrow our present government by revolution or by fighting it. We are to *live for Jesus no matter where we are*, and thus change our society from within. Not by fighting, but by *living our faith in love*.

1 Peter 2:11-12^{NIV} Dear friends, **I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. {12} Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.**

The early Church understood how important it was to live *in society* without being effected *by society*. They, like Jesus and to His honor, lived in love one toward another. They impacted their society by being the

Matthew 5:14 ... **light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.**

Tertullian, a pastor who lived from 160-240 AD wrote:

"We are but yesterday, but already we fill your cities, islands, camps, palace, senate, forum. We have left you only empty temples".

Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, and we *are* stranger and pilgrims on this planet. But the way we live our lives for Jesus and in Jesus *will* impact our society. The early pastor Justin Martyr (103-165 AD) wrote of early Roman society:

"There are no people, Greek or Barbarian, by whatsoever name they may be distinguished, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgiving are not being offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father."

Listen Beloved, quit moaning about this world and do something about it. Love others, let Jesus love others through you. Pattern your every move after Him. We can preach against those in sexual sin and drug sin in all of their terrible varieties, or else we can preach the solution, Jesus Christ our Lord. You can shout at a corpse all you want and it will stay a corpse. Only God has the power to bring a corpse to life.



O this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

George Barna, who surveys religious trends in America, recently noted⁵:

“Spirituality is in vogue in our society today,” he commented. “It is popular to claim to be part of a ‘faith community’ or to have a spiritual commitment. But what do Americans mean when they claim to be ‘spiritual?’ The recent Grammy awards were perhaps indicative of this breakdown between self-perception and reality. The members of the group that won the award for best song thanked God for the victory then immediately followed with profanities that had to be bleeped from the broadcast. It seems as if God is in, but living for God is not.”

May I ask this question: are you part of the problem, or are you part of the solution? The Pharisees and Saducees were part of the problem. They helped kill Jesus, and so did Pilate. On that terrible day so long ago there was only one Person Who was presenting Himself as the Solution, and that was Jesus Christ.

You are called, as Christians, to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Jesus said:

John 10:27-28 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: {28} And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

ILLUSTRATE If you are saved, God is in you. If you are saved, Love is in you. You love God - all of God. You love God enough to believe all that He wrote, from Genesis to Revelation. You love Him enough to trust that He created the world and all that is in it in six literal days - for any other faith cannot be Christianity. It takes this immensity of God to create in me new life. You love God enough to believe that He created man, then woman, and designed us to live together in intimate bond to one another - one man, one woman. You love God enough to know that man sinned, and fell, and now all are born physically dead but spiritually alive. You love God enough to know that He loves you and has made a way for you to be with Him both now and in eternity, and that Way, that Truth, that Life is by faith in Christ. Not a mere spoken faith, but a living faith. Not a mere ritualized faith, but a faith that does as Jesus did - living in love both with God and with your fellow man.

May God touch your hearts with His Spirit and His Word.

5 Barna Update, March 6, 2006: found at <http://www.barna.org>