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ONE SERVING

Most Americans are familiar with the nutritional labels that come on packaged foods. One of the items on that label is serving size. For instance, three Ghirardelli Squares chocolates equal one serving. We may not pay much attention to what is called a serving. A bag of microwave popcorn is considered three and a half servings, but most people will eat one bag in a sitting, without sharing. Those serving sizes are really a simple way to standardize the rest of the label, so that you can compare sodium levels or sugars. Ideally, though, we should consider a serving size the right amount that we need of a given foodstuff. In the same way, the Bible lists a serving size.

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. (Lam 3:22-24)

The Lord is one serving, and one all-sufficient serving. Americans tend to want more than the recommended serving, and God may give us more; but all we need is a single serving. This was a lesson that God taught the Israelites in the wilderness. They begged for food and he provided. He provided just enough.

And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they knew not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did measure it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. (Ex 16:15-18)

God said an omer was a serving size. Then he miraculously made it so that whatever a man gathered to meet his needs, that was an omer. Anything that was left over to the next day spoiled, except that on the day before

the Sabbath they were allowed to gather twice as much without spoilage. For forty years God said, this is your serving size, your portion. Thus the idea of a daily portion became ingrained in the Jewish mind.

When the apostles asked Jesus to teach them to pray, then, part of the prayer was "give us this day our daily bread." (Matt 6:11) This was the equivalent of asking for the manna. In one sense Jesus is teaching them to be content with their proper serving size. Give us our daily bread, and that will be sufficient. And when God gives our daily bread, that is sufficient.

Sometimes we say that in Roman times people got paid by the day. They then bought their bread for that day. It may be true that they could not conceive of buying a weeks' or months' worth of groceries. It may also be true that they would not have been able to understand such excess. God gives us enough for a day, why do we need to purchase for days that may not come?

In America we have refrigerators and freezers. We have the means of storing and preserving enough food for several days, or even weeks. In most places we have the ability to do so, and it would not be wrong to save time and effort by buying in bulk. In doing so, though, we sometimes forget to consider that we might not be around to eat all that food. We need to buy with the attitude of James, "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." (Jas 4:15) As we walk through the grocery store we should look at nutrition labels, if only to remind ourselves that "the Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him."

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GO YOUR WAY

When Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks of the group Fleetwood Mac broke up, he wrote the song *Go Your Own Way*. Since that time it has morphed from a breakup song to an anthem of the independent thinkers. It has been used in automobile commercials, and more recently an ad for a COPD medication. Mr. Buckingham probably didn't realize it, but the phrase "go your way" is biblical. It appears 19 times in scripture, and can be interpreted in three distinct ways.

Go Your Own Way

One of those ways accords with the Fleetwood Mac song. Frequently it is simply a command to depart, similar to *bon voyage*.

When Abraham went to Egypt he told everyone that his wife was his sister. The Pharaoh took a liking to her, but found out she was Abraham's wife. So he gave her back to Abraham and said, "take her, and go your way." (Gen 12:19) In this case it was more than a mere

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good bye; it was a command to get out of the country.

In Matthew 8, Jesus told two people to go their way. The first was a leper that he had healed. He said, "go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." (Matt 8:4) He told him to go his way, but that his way needed to be via the priest, because he had been healed of his leprosy.

The second instance in that chapter also involved a healing. A Roman centurion came to Jesus to have his servant, probably a Jew, healed. Jesus offered to accompany him to his quarters to heal the servant, but the centurion asked him not to come. Instead he said that Jesus could command and the healing would happen. After remarking on the Roman's faith, Jesus said, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." (Matt 8:13) It was permission for him to leave, and reassurance that the servant would be healed.

When Paul preached to Governor Felix, he was told to "Go thy way for this time; when I have a

convenient season, I will call for thee." (Acts 24:25) He did call for him frequently, but only because he believed he could get a bribe out of Paul. This was a simple command to go your way.

There is a difference, however, in just going your way and going your own way. The latter implies a choice and a determination. It says that nobody should challenge the way you go. It is the way of the independent spirit. The problem is, it is not always the best way.

Jeremiah recognized this fact. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (Jer 10:23) When a man tries to direct his own steps, and directs them in a way God did not recommend, he is likely to get into trouble.

Americans and Australians are especially known for their independence. Nobody can tell them what to do. If someone tries, they are likely to do the opposite. Following the anthem *Go Your Own Way*, however, may simply lead to trouble.

Naaman was a leper. He consulted Elisha, and the prophet told him to dip in the Jordan seven times. His reaction was to wonder why he couldn't do it his own way, in his "better" native rivers. His servants prevailed upon him to do it God's way, and he went away cleansed of his leprosy. (2 Kin 5)

There was a young prophet who was told to preach against the idols in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was told not to eat or drink while there, and to go home by a different route. An older prophet lied to him and said that God told him to come home with him to have a meal. As a result, the young prophet was killed by a lion on his way home. (1 Kin 13) He died because he chose to go his own way. Some might argue that he had been lied to, but his instructions had been clear. Twice he had told people what his mandate was. When he chose to listen to falsehood without verifying it he chose to go his own way.

Go the Way of the Crowd

Another choice is to subject your own way to that of the crowd. You go your way, but your way is determined by the majority. This, too, can be dangerous.

Jesus put it another way. "Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?" (Lk 6:39) The one that goes this way in darkness is about to fall into a trap.

It is easy to go the way of the crowd. After all, "wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." (Matt 7:13)

The theory is that the majority knows what they are doing. If “everyone” thinks this way, then it must be right. Even in scripture, though, we find evidence against this. When Paul was in Ephesus and a few men started a riot, it says, “Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.” (Acts 19:32) Sometimes the majority is blindly following a few fanatical leaders.

The wise man wrote about going the way of the crowd. The first several chapters of Proverbs advise against following the crowd in sin.

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. (Prov 1:10-16)

There may be times when it is appropriate to follow the way of the majority. If their way coincides with God’s way, it is right. But the decision must be a personal one. An individual must decide on their own to do right, not because it is popular or commonly accepted but because they know it to be right.

The Way

As they came to Jericho, the son of Timaeus, who was blind called out to Jesus. When the crowd finally stopped trying to quiet him, Jesus asked what he wanted. All he wanted was his sight.

And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way. (Mk 10:52)

There is a third choice of a way to go. That is God’s way. Sometimes it is the hard way, but it is always the safer way.

After Saul was brought into Damascus after seeing the vision of Jesus, God appeared to a man named Ananias. He told Ananias to find Saul (later to be called Paul) and preach the gospel to him. Ananias objected that Saul was there to persecute the church. God’s response was: Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. (Acts 9:15) Ananias was convinced to go God’s way, and that changed the world.

Apparently one of the early designations of the church was the Way. This was a recognition that the believers accepted it as the only way to live. Paul was carrying letters to Damascus to bind those who were of “this Way.” (Acts 9:2; Acts 22:4) Demetrius the Silversmith in Ephesus caused a stir about “that way.”

(Acts 19:23)

This makes sense. Mark quoted prophecy to introduce his gospel, saying, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” (Mk 1:3) During the Last Supper Jesus spoke of the way.

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (Jn 14:4-6)

Some people teach that it doesn’t matter what faith you follow, as long as you believe in God. If Islam is your path, then follow that. If you choose to be a Buddhist

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you can reach God in that way. Never mind that there are fundamental differences in doctrine between the great religions. Other say you must be a Christian, but it doesn’t matter what flavor of Christianity you choose to follow. If you reject immersion for the forgiveness of sins, that is the path you choose. If you accept veneration of saints as mediators between you and God, that is a different path. After all, they say there is one God but many paths to get to him. The problem is that whoever “they” might be who says this, they are, according to Jesus, wrong. He is the only way to the Father.

How could there be more than one way? All roads may lead to Rome, but only one leads to heaven. If there is one God, as there is, then he is not divided. He does not tell one group of people that they can get to heaven, that is to Him, by one path, and then tell another group that that path is wrong for them.

There is one destination, and only one way to that destination. It is the way that God has determined is the only way. As Jesus said, “no man cometh to the Father, but by me.” Not by the prophets. Not by a prosperity gospel. Not by man’s choice.

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” (Prov 14:12; 16:25) On the other hand, it is possible to go your own way and be right; but only if your own way follows the way God has prescribed, through his Son.”

FOLLOWING PROCEDURE

Back in the late 1990s the Navy, and many industries, implemented a system known as Total Quality Leadership (TQL) or Total Quality Management (TQM). As a result, Ford Motor Company started using the tag line, Quality is Job One. There were several aspects to TQL, including measurement of effectiveness, standardization, and cross-function cooperation. One of the tools that became the bane of many a secretary was the writing of Policies and Procedures (P&Ps). The purpose of a P&P was to define why a process or action was important to the company and give the steps to accomplish the procedure in a uniform manner. The theory was that if everyone followed the same steps, waste would be eliminated. Of course, that assumed that everyone would follow the procedure as written, without taking shortcuts.

Jesus once established a P&P for interpersonal relationships. Many Christians claim to follow it. Unfortunately a matter of translation into English has probably altered what Jesus intended.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matt 18:15-17)

The procedure is simple. Its early steps are pretty straightforward. If you have a problem with someone, the best way to deal with it is to talk to that person. It may be that you don't understand why they did or said something. It may be that they didn't intend to offend. If that person

hears you, you have gained a brother or sister. The principle behind step one is that the fewer people involved in a dispute, the better.

It may be, however, that they intended to wrong you and they are unwilling to change or correct the problem. Under ideal conditions this can be fixed by cutting off all association with that person. If that is not possible, step two comes into effect. Take the issue to two or three witnesses. Talk out your differences before some disinterested parties, so that the issue doesn't degenerate to "he said/she said."

The witnesses are valuable in step three, and this is where many people make a mistake in following the procedure. Jesus was a Jew. When he spoke, he spoke in a way the Jewish people would understand. When he articulated this procedure the church had not been established. When he said to take the matter to the "assembly" (a more accurate translation), it is likely that he was telling the listeners (and they would understand him to be saying) to take it to the *beit din*, the Jewish court. This would still fall short of airing their dirty laundry to the whole world. The court would then make a decision in the matter, and most people would be none the wiser.

In the church, the elders are the equivalent of the *beit din*. Unfortunately, many people bypass the elders and broadcast the issue to the whole congregation. People then take sides and churches have been unnecessarily split. The principle of the fewest people being involved is violated.

How much heartbreak might be saved if we followed the apparent intent of what Jesus said? What if we interpreted the "assembly" to be the church leadership rather than the whole body? After all, the elders are the ones who have the authority to take action.

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