

# Nothing to do with you

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now let's turn to the end of John's Gospel and we look today at the verses 20 to 22. John 21 verses 20 to 22.

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, Lord, who is going to betray you? When Peter saw him, he asked, Lord, what about him? Jesus answered, if I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?

You must follow me. What is that to you? You must follow me. One of the major drawbacks in our spiritual experience can be a wrong concern for other people.

Now that may seem a surprising thing to say, because of course it's good to have concern for other people. We're commanded by the Lord himself to love our neighbour as ourselves.

[ 1 : 19 ] But there's such a thing surely as a wrong concern for other people. It's right to be concerned about people in the proper way.

But all too often, a concern for the affairs of others can be a thing that diverts attention away from our own responsibilities.

So that we focus on the needs or the problems or the sins of others and neglect our own spiritual well-being.

Now, Peter here was at least moving in that direction. We know that what he was doing here was something that the Lord did not approve of because he gave him, we may say, a mild rebuke, but a rebuke for it.

So let's look at, first of all, just what Peter did here so we can understand what's going on and understand Jesus' reaction to it. Jesus had just restored Peter publicly to his office as apostle.

[ 2 : 35 ] He was going to have pastoral responsibility to feed Christ's sheep, that is to feed his people and his lambs, his children. He had been restored in this threefold way, just as he had denied Jesus three times.

And then Jesus told him something about his future. He gave him a glimpse into what was going to happen. The indication is that it would be a death when he was old, but yet a death that was brought on by force.

Therefore, the implication is death by martyrdom. And then Jesus tells him to follow him at the end of verse 19.

We're told Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Jesus would glorify God. Then he said to him, follow me. Now we know that that command to follow Jesus, it reminded Peter, no doubt, and the others of that time when Jesus came to them, first of all, by the Sea of Galilee. And said that he would make them fishers of men and told them to follow him. So that it went back to that time when they really did the two things together.

[ 3 : 52 ] They physically got up and left their nets and they followed him. But also they were setting out on the life of discipleship, of learning from Jesus. So that from that time on, the words follow me have always had that higher spiritual meaning, as well as the physical meaning of simply walk after me.

But it would seem here that again, Jesus asked Peter to follow him. Because we're told that then Peter turned. We can imagine Peter following after Jesus, walking after him.

And he turns and he sees the disciple whom Jesus loved, that's John, following them. So we can have this picture in our mind. That Jesus there perhaps was leading Peter off from the group, perhaps to say something privately to him, we don't know.

Or it's possible that Peter misconstrued the words follow me. Perhaps Jesus was simply meaning to follow him in the sense of obey him and follow his way.

And Jesus was getting up to leave them. But Peter followed on physically. We don't exactly know the details of that. But the point is that here, Jesus had given Peter a command, which obviously includes the following of Jesus' way.

[ 5 : 15 ] The trusting in Jesus himself, the following out of the life of faith, trusting in Jesus and obeying his commands. So there was this command to Peter.

But immediately he's received this command. What does he do? His attention is diverted. He's distracted. Now, we can understand how his attention is distracted.

It was natural. He sees John following them. And he immediately wonders, now what about John? Has Jesus got something to say about John? Because, you see, John was Peter's best friend. It's natural that he should be interested in him and concerned for him. He wonders, well, now Jesus said something to me about my work and about my future. Now, will he have something similar to say about John?

Now, maybe Peter wondered this out of real concern for John. Or maybe it was just out of curiosity. We don't really know.

[ 6 : 19 ] But the point was that that's what he did. And that's what Jesus spoke about. Jesus gently but firmly rebukes such an attitude.

He says, in effect, it's nothing to do with you. You follow me. That's what he says. And these are the words that we really need to take home to ourselves today.

Peter's attitude, it would appear from what Jesus says here, was wrong for two reasons. It was prying into things that were none of his concern.

And also, it was diverting attention from his own responsibility, his own duty. And I think that's why we have this rebuke from Jesus.

These two things. Prying into things that didn't concern him. And diverting his own attention from his own duty, his own responsibility, which was to follow Jesus.

[ 7 : 26 ] So then, we can get a grasp of what was happening there. With Peter, John, and how Jesus viewed the situation.

But we've got to seek to apply these things to ourselves. We are not today sitting by the Sea of Galilee, around a fire where the fish has been cooked and so on.

Although it's interesting often to place ourselves in these situations by imagination. But the word of God comes to us today. We've got to take this great lesson that was being taught to Peter here.

And we've got to seek, by the help of the Spirit of God, to apply these things to our own experience. To our own lives now. What's God wanting us to learn from what he had to teach Peter here?

Because you see, God's word is not something that's about other people. We can read the Bible and it's all about other people. All about these different characters, Peter, John, and so on.

[ 8 : 34 ] And we could just read it as a kind of interesting story about these people. But God's word is not just for that purpose. It is to inform us about these things that really happened.

But it's a word that's relevant to us today. It is God's word. The Apostle Paul says that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful. Useful for our own situation.

For helping us in our own situation. So then, what is this great lesson here that Jesus had to teach Peter? What has it got to do with us today? How can it be applied in our situation?

Well, it can be applied, I think, first of all, to the situation where we have curiosity about God's secret will. Curiosity about God's secret will.

Jesus, you see, said to Peter, if I will, if I will that he tarry or that he remain until I return, what is that to you?

[ 9 : 39 ] He says, my will, my desire with regard to John is none of your business. It is something secret to me.

Or, if I desire to make it known to John, I can make it known to John. But it has got nothing to do with you. And here we're reminded of a verse in the Old Testament.

A tremendous key verse that we should really make part of our Christian thinking. The revealed things belong to us and to our children.

The secret things belong to the Lord your God. The revealed things belong to us and to our children. The secret things belong to the Lord.

How does that mean? It means that God knows everything there is to know. And God has certain plans and purposes.

[10:38] And he has made only some of these known to us. Not all of them. The Bible nowhere claims to be exhaustive truth. That is, everything that could be known about everything.

That would be impossible. For one thing, it would have to be infinite. Because God is infinite and his knowledge is infinite. But it doesn't even claim, as we see at the end of this chapter, as we look at it on another occasion.

It doesn't even claim to be all the truth about the things that it talks about. The things about God and his will for us and so on. It doesn't tell us all about the things that it touches on.

For instance, we could take just one example. Think about angels. Angels are mentioned in the Bible. By no means are we told all about angels. Or even all that we might like to know about angels.

You see, God has revealed some things and not others. Now this is true. This is true of his special revelation in the Bible.

[11:44] God's word. But it's also true in what we call God's works. Or nature. Because the Bible tells us that not only does God speak in his word.

He speaks also in his works. The heavens declare God's handiwork. The skies his handworks preach. In other words, what God has made also is a revelation.

Now I stress that because some people might think that this verse, the revealed things belong to us and our children, the secret things belong to the Lord our God, would prohibit things like science or investigation or whatever.

But that is not the case. It's not just the things revealed in the Bible that belong to us, but the things revealed in nature as well. God has made nature, to a large extent, an open nature, so that we can investigate, that we can discover, and we can use these discoveries and these inventions for the good of mankind.

So that what is being said here about the revealed things belonging to us and our children includes not only the written word of God, but also God's revealing himself and his ways and his laws in the natural universe also.

[13:04] But the verse also says there are secret things. Now this becomes clear from the scriptures themselves.

It becomes clear that we are told some things, but we are not told other things. There are things that are still mysterious to us, so that even the greatest theological brain, people studying God's word, ultimately come up against things that they do not know.

Ultimately come up against things that they find it really hard to understand. Sometimes, for instance, it's in things that appear to be contradictory.

They're not contradictory, but they can appear so. For instance, one of the best known ones is the divine sovereignty. God deciding whatever comes to pass.

And yet on the other hand, the responsibility of man to respond to the commands of God. No one has ever been able to satisfactorily reconcile these things to our satisfaction.

[14:21] Equally, we come up against things where we might like to speculate. Things that the Bible maybe touches on. I mentioned already angels.

We could think also of the future, the events to come in the history of the world, and finally the new creation, the new universe, new heavens and new earth at the end of time.

Now the Bible touches on these things. It gives us very important truths concerning them, but there are other things it doesn't tell us about. So, even on that large scale, as we just mentioned, some of these important and clear things in the Bible, we can see that there's a distinction between what is revealed and what is secret.

We must be content with what God has revealed to us, and not pry into God's secret will.

We shouldn't be tempted to speculate about the things that God's word does not tell us about, or things that cannot be discovered from the natural world around us.

[15:34] Let's take some examples that move on to more the realm that we're thinking about here, as prying into perhaps things that concern other people, or things that will be distracting from us, and our own Christian experience.

For instance, trying to speculate whether a particular person is elect or not. That is God's secret will. Nowhere is there a verse in the Bible that says, so-and-so is elect. Not even a verse that says that you are elect. Although, you can make your own calling and election sure, by doing the thing that God commands you to do, that is trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

But that's emphasising the duty of God's word, not speculation, on the basis of things God has not spoken of. And in fact, that applies to us, particularly, it applies to you this morning, if you're in a position where you have not yet trusted in Christ, and perhaps you say that you are bothered about this question of predestination or election.

It is not something for you to pry into. Because there is nothing in it, in this doctrine, that will say that you are elect or not elect.

[ 16 : 59 ] The word that comes to you is the word of God that commands you to look to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is your duty. Jesus says, nothing to do with you.

You follow me. That's what he says. Then also, there's the question of what the future holds. Mankind has this incorrigible curiosity about what the future holds. So that if we don't get satisfaction from what God says in his word, many people are prepared to go to enormous lengths to try to find out what the future holds.

Many, of course, in the past and at the present, are prepared to go to the length God forbids. In other words, to consult fortune tellers, mediums, and so on.

God utterly abominates such things. He knows that they are utterly false. They are the devil seeking to deceive.

[ 18 : 05 ] But mankind has this incorrigible desire to know and to speculate about the future. And we see it also within ourselves as Christians. We would love to know a sort of clear, laid out pattern of what we should do step by step in life.

We would love that kind of guidance that would have, say, a chapter in the Bible that would apply definitely to us and would say, this is what you've got to do one step after the other. But the Bible is not a book like that.

The Bible gives us moral commands as to how we are to live our lives in different situations. And God's guidance comes to us primarily in that way.

We are to seek to live as God desires us to live, wherever we may be. and especially this question of speculating about the future or desiring to look into the future is especially harmful when we try to do it for others.

We may, in our own private judgment, seek to get God's guidance for our own lives about particular things that are not commanded in the Bible.

[ 19 : 31 ] But when we seek to do those things for other people, then that is extremely dangerous. When people come along and say, well, I feel the Lord is saying this to you and you ask for chapter and verse and they can't give it.

You see, God's word comes to us as our guidance. and it is wrong for us to pry into things that we do not know about and that we may only have feelings concerning.

But it's true also that we have this kind of speculation concerning the future in general. Now, I mentioned already the Bible tells us things about the future.

Jesus said he would one day return. The Bible says that one day the Jewish people will turn to God we may say en masse and be a great blessing to the world.

The Bible tells us that also there will be a great reaction against Christ. Many different things the Bible tells us in the future.

[ 20 : 40 ] But even when we try to put all these things together into some kind of scheme, even there we discover we're up against difficulties. We find it difficult to bring together all the different parts of the Bible into some kind of logical scheme.

Now, some people do it. But there are problems with all these different kinds of scheme. And so here again we've got to be extremely careful that we're not prying into things that really don't concern us.

We are to accept the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the future. That Christ is in control of it, he is the Lord of it, he is one day going to return, he is one day going to judge the whole universe. All have to appear before him and give an account of what they have done. All shall bow before him and confess that he is Lord and there will be a division, there will be a judgment, there will be a division of those who have trusted in Christ and those who have not so trusted and not had their sins taken away.

There will be a heaven and the hell. Now these are the great things that we ought to focus on and not just in general but in particular for ourselves and ask ourselves where are we placed in that?

[ 21 : 59 ] If it's speculation just about these things so that we can work out a fine system for ourselves that we can say oh we know all that's going to happen. Then Jesus says to us it's got nothing to do with you, you follow me.

and that's true of so many things in that way of thinking when we try to build up systems for ourselves that make us feel good and knowledgeable and great as Christians.

Another area where this kind of thing can be true is where we try to speculate about reasons for God's providence. Why certain things have happened to me or to somebody else.

You see the disciples tried to do this remember there was this poor man who was born blind and the disciples asked Jesus see this man born blind is it because he sinned is it because God knew he was going to sin and therefore he punished him beforehand by making him blind or is it that his parents sinned and therefore that's how this man is punished.

Now apart from the fact that that betrays a wrong idea completely of God's dealings it was wrong also in the sense that it was speculating into things that they that was not revealed to them and they could not know about.

[ 23 : 26 ] Jesus said it's nothing to do with that it's not that the man was born blind because of his own sins or the sins of his parents it's that the glory of God may be shown.

In other words Jesus looks upon this not some kind of intellectual conundrum so he's got to try to work out why God did this in the sense of did this person sin or that person sin but rather he's viewing it as a practical occasion for doing good.

It's as if he's saying again to the disciples that's got nothing to do with you you follow me and his example was to work the works of him who sent me while it is day for the night comes in which no man can work.

In other words it comes back to personal responsibility of how I am going to live not how clever I'm going to be at speculating. And so you see it's wrong for us especially to look at the life of somebody else as Peter was doing here looking at John and trying to speculate about God's dealings with them.

Something happens to them they may be ill they may be going through certain trials and we think oh well God's doing this or that with that person. You don't know. You don't know anything about it and you're not asked to judge about it.

[ 24 : 45 ] It's got nothing to do with you. You follow me. That's what Jesus is saying. But then there's another whole area where this great lesson applies. Not just curiosity about the secret will of God but also curiosity about the character of others.

You see this first of all in criticism of Christians. All of us as sinners we have this kind of critical tendency.

The thing Jesus warns us against Matthew 7 judge not. We want to judge. We want to sit in judgment over others. Things that people do and things they don't do.

Things they do that we wouldn't do and things that they don't do that we think should be done. And we look at these things and very quickly that kind of thing leads on to this critical attitude, this judging and saying well so and so can't be a very good Christian.

They don't do this, that or the next. Now here I'm not thinking of things that are say clear contradictions of God's moral law. We have a clear pattern laid down by the Lord Jesus for that.

[ 26 : 08 ] If we think our brother has offended against us or have been caught in some wrong we should go and speak to him. We should go and speak to him personally and we should bring that before him.

And the whole matter may be sorted out there and then. We may be able to help him or it may have been a misunderstanding or whatever. Or it may not be sorted out there but Jesus lays down a pattern of events.

He says well if you're still convinced that he's in the wrong and he won't admit it then you have to involve the church. And so we have the whole system for instance in a Presbyterian church like our own of a system of discipline whereby things like that, breaches of God's law, offenses to God's people and offenses to God himself can be dealt with in a way so that the attempt is made to reclaim the person who has gone wrong and the glory of God brought about.

But here I'm thinking not so much of these things, but I'm thinking of things that if you were to be asked for a chapter and verse in the Bible for whether this is right and wrong, you wouldn't be able to find it.

Things that you believe to be right and you do in your own life, but somebody else does something differently. And that's the area where so often we tend to be so critical of others.

[ 27 : 33 ] Jesus says, judge not lest ye be judged. And as we were thinking about recently in Romans chapter 14, Paul there says, what have you got to do judging the servant of another?

Before his own master he stands or falls, and he will be able to make him stand. So you see, here we're being reminded of this again. a curiosity about the character of others in the sense of criticising them, making judgments about them as to whether they're good Christians or not. But then too, this kind of curiosity about the characters of others can work in a different way, we may say almost an opposite way. It may work in the way that we have an undue regard for the character of certain Christians.

And we say, well, look at so-and-so, I could never be as good as that person, look how good they are. And we put this person on a pedestal, and maybe we do that, maybe we do that and we're unbelievers, and we say, well, I could never be like that, so I can't become a Christian.

Jesus says to us, nothing to do with you, you follow me. You see, we will use, and the devil will use through us, any kind of reason for turning our attention away from Christ.

[ 29 : 04 ] Jesus says nothing to do with you, you follow me. You see, we do not know God's dealing with any other person. A person may appear very good outwardly, they may have had tremendous struggles with temptation inwardly, that you know nothing about, and your desire to be like them, if it were actually granted, would be a destruction of you rather than the reverse.

You don't know. So don't put people on pedestals, don't look up to them in a wrong sort of way any more than you should look down on them. It's nothing to do with you, Jesus says, you follow me.

And of course, perhaps one of the most common ways in which we do this kind of thing, is in applying sermons to other people. I say sermons, but anything.

When you read God's word, when you sing God's word, when you hear a sermon being preached, when you read something in a Christian book, and your immediate thought is, not, now how does this apply to me, but you think, oh yes, now that's like so and so.

Of course, sometimes that may be true, it may be like so and so, you're reminded of it, but ask yourself the question, does it teach you something about yourself as well? And if you find yourself sitting, listening to a sermon, and you think, oh yes, that's a very good description of the sins of so and so, or the sins of the world around us, or whatever, and you're never thinking that it may apply to you, then there's something far wrong.

[ 30 : 42 ] Jesus says, nothing to do with you, that application of that to somebody else. God's spirit will apply it to them, you can't apply it to them, it'll do no good, you're going over it in your mind, because the temptation there is that you're just going to work this into something that will make you feel better, because you can look down on somebody else.

No, Jesus says, nothing to do with you, you follow me, you ask, how does this apply to me? If this is a sin that is being exposed, how does this expose me?

Am I guilty of this sin? If this is something that is being taught with regard to pointing us to the Lord Jesus, are you saying, well, that applies to me, I should be looking to the Lord Jesus?

That's what he's saying. That's got nothing to do with you, you follow me. So, Jesus commanded, in all these different situations, comes to us as it came to Peter.

What is that to you? You follow me. You see, our temptation is that we cry into all those things, those areas we've been looking at, and maybe many others as well.

[ 31 : 59 ] We try to meddle in them, and they've got nothing to do with us. And we think that crying and that meddling so often is being religious. well, it may be religious, but it's not the true religion, it's not Christianity.

It's got nothing to do with you, all these areas, and many others. The great question is, are we following Christ for ourselves? And until we get that right, and until we are sure of that, then don't meddle in these other things.

There is nothing that will make you colder, or will put you further from Christ, than meddling and prying into all these things. And when you do come to Christ, and when you do get that right, that you know that you have to be put right before God, then you'll discover that there's no place for prying or meddling in these affairs either.

Because as you are putting Christ first, as you are following him, your eyes are looking to him, and not primarily to other people, only to other people, as you will try to help them, and encourage them,

and be properly concerned for them, and not in any of this kind of wrong judging or speculation that we've been thinking about this morning.

What is that to you? You follow me. Let us pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have been so merciful and gracious to us.

[ 33 : 35 ] We thank you that your word comes to us, rebuking and exposing our sin. For we would not do it ourselves. We try to hide our sin away, our inconsistencies and our pride, our arrogance, our contempt of others, all these things that are so hateful in your sight.

But gracious Lord, we thank you that your word exposes us, and it brings us again to the foot of the cross, to our need of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For he alone is the one who has dealt with sin, not dealt just with its results, not tried to paper over the cracks. He's the one who has dealt with the root of sin.

He has paid the price of sin, and he has made available a justification, a forgiveness to all who look to him, enable us then, gracious Lord, to look to him and to follow him as he commanded.

And we pray for the blessing of your Holy Spirit upon us, that our eyes may be opened, and our minds instructed, and our ways directed by your Holy Spirit applying the truth of your word.

[ 34 : 53 ] We ask all of this in Jesus' name, and for his sake, amen.