

EXCEPT AND UNLESS

Except and unless are two powerful words found in Bible that are close in meaning. In fact, you can usually substitute one word for the other. For example, Jesus said:

Luke 13:3 "I tell you, no; but unless (except KJV) you repent you will all likewise perish.

As you can see, the NKJ and KJV uses both words, but the same strong message is given. If you do not repent, you will perish. You either repent or will suffer the consequences. Sometimes people do not like blunt messages like this, but that is exactly what Jesus is teaching us as he uses the these two strong words: except and unless.

When we study the Scriptures, we must learn to respect what the Word of God says even when we do not like it. While not always easy to do, we must rely on God's wisdom and not our own. Unfortunately, there are many today who are willing to compromise God's Word to either make themselves feel better about a sin they or family member is involved in, or they will compromise God's Word to appeal to our culture or what the majority deems acceptable.

As Christian, we must not allow ourselves to make such compromises or try to soften the impact of God's commands. Sometimes, we like to think we know best, but when we start thinking that way, we need read verses like:

Jeremiah 10:23 O LORD, I know the way of man *is* not in himself; *It is* not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;

Let us never get to the point where we think our wisdom is greater than God's wisdom. With this thought in mind, let us examine these two powerful words except and unless in more detail.

1. Psalm 127:1 Unless (except KJV) the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless (except KJV) the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.

What do these two verses tell you?

They tell me that if we do have God on our side by living our life for Him, then whatever we do in this life it will be done in vain. When God is not our priority and we do not take to heart His words, whatever we have done can and will eventually fail and we will not gain any eternal blessing from it.

Read Mt. 7:24-27. Discuss the difference between these two builders.

Can we be pleasing to God if we choose to worship Him our way instead of how He has authorized us to in His Word (Mt. 15:7-9)?

Notice the following Scriptures: 1 Cor. 3:7; 15:1-2; 10; 58

2. Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, unless (except KJV) they are agreed?

The meaning is simple. Unless two can agree, they cannot walk in harmony. There are at least two sides to this when it comes to Christianity because there is one way in which two people can disagree and not walk together yet both are right with God. Yet there is another way in which two people can disagree and only one will be right with God.

First, two Christians can disagree on a personal judgment not found in Scripture, yet still serve the Lord. We can see an example of this with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41) Apparently, Paul changed his mind about Mark later on (2 Tim. 4:11).

Second, two Christians can disagree on what God's Word specifically states about a matter, but only one Christian can be correct. The person who is trying to change, add, or ignore a command of God will not be right with God because he is overriding the Word God by his own authority. This kind of arrogance is spoken against in the O.T. and the N.T. (Duet. 12:32; Prov. 30:6; 1 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 22:18-19). Jesus rebuked the Jews who were doing this (Mt. 15:3ff).

Not only are those who refuse to respect the authority of God's Word separated from Him, we are taught not to fellowship or walk with that person (Rom. 16:17; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 2 Jn. 1:9-10).

There is a lot of religious division today. However, God's Word tells us that we should not be divided (1 Cor. 1:10-13; Rom. 12:5; Phil. 2:1-5; Jn. 17:20-21).

Consider what Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Paul is pleading that we all be of one mind and be unified, yet many religious groups cannot even agree on these seven things Paul has just listed. Most will agree that there is one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one God and Father of all.

However, many will disagree that there is only one body even though Paul has just said that there is:

Ephesians 1:22 And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church,²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The one body is the church (singular). Jesus told Peter:

Matthew 16:18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Paul writes:

Romans 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,⁵ so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

We learn Jesus is the Savior of the body:

Ephesians 5:23 ... Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

Also, many will disagree about the one baptism. Some will teach this is referring to Holy Spirit baptism, but Holy Spirit baptism only happened twice in Scripture (Acts 2, 10). Holy Spirit baptism was a promise that Jesus would administer (Mt. 3:11) and cannot be done by man, so the baptism spoken of by Jesus in The Great Commission (Mt. 28:19) would be a baptism we could do, which is water baptism. Water baptism is what is used in the conversions in the book of Acts such as (Acts 8:36ff, 10:47-48). Also baptism means to immerse someone in water and does not mean to sprinkle or pour. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), yet many say that is not necessary for salvation. Baptism puts us into to the one body/church/kingdom that Jesus will save (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:41, 47; Jn. 3:5).

If we fail to follow God's instructions on these basic teachings of salvation, then we have failed to be unified with what God has commanded. If we choose to believe a lie about the clear teaching of water baptism, then we are still in our sins and we are not part of the body of Christ.

One faith is another thing that some will disagree on because they think that it ok to believe however you want as long as you believe in Christ. Well, I believe we have already shown that this it not true. Paul certainly is not a liar, so there is only one faith.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

Paul clearly states that there is one faith, and that one faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Without faith, which comes from the Scriptures, we cannot be pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6). Let us never forget that we will be judged by the Word of God and not by the traditions or opinions of man (Jn. 12:48). If we are going to walk together in a way that will be pleasing to God, we must be unified in one mind based on what the Scriptures say and not what man says.

One way this unity can be found is by sitting down and discussing the Scriptures. If we find that we are teaching or doing things wrong, then we must be humble enough to change our ways to what God's Word teaches. Here are two examples: (Acts 15:1-2; 18:24-28).

3. Matthew 5:20 "For I say to you, that unless (except KJV) your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus statement could not be clearer. If our righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees then we will not make it to heaven. I have actually heard some preachers abuse the Scripture and say it means that we must give more than a tenth if we want to make it to heaven since the Pharisees and Scribes gave a tenth. If that were true that would go against what Paul taught in:

2 Corinthians 9:7 *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Now we can relate our passage with giving because when it comes to giving because we must have a righteous attitude about giving and realize that what we gives belongs to God anyways. We should be willing to give of our means to help further His kingdom.

Paul said:

2 Corinthians 9:5 Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which *you had* previously promised, that it may be ready as *a matter of* generosity and not as a grudging obligation. ⁶ But this *I say*: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Jesus illustrates this kind of bountiful giving in:

Mark 12:41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. ⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³ So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴ "for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

Giving is not about percentages or how much we give, it is about what kind of attitude we have about giving because when our heart is right it will cause us give what is right with a cheerful heart.

While exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees certainly can include our attitude toward giving, there is much more to this saying, which can be found by reading Matthew 23. (Point out the unrighteous behavior of the Pharisees and Scribes and point how we must not follow their ways).

4. John 15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless (except KJV) it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Read 15: 1-11

5. John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

6. Matthew 18:3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless (except KJV) you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

7. John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless (except KJV) one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless (except KJV) one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

8. John 20:25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless (except KJV) I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

9. Revelation 2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent.

10. 1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

11. 1 Timothy 5:19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

12. Matthew 19:9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

Many others examples could be looked at this powerful word unless/except (Jn. 19:11; Acts 27:31; 1 Tim. 5:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:5; 1 Cor. 7:5), but the examples we have seen shows that we need to pay attention and accept the limitations given to us in the Word of God.