

Biblical generalities and preferences equal God's word and commands. Proverbs 23:7 states that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. So what we have been taught affects what we learn; learning influences our thinking; and thinking leads to behavior.

I graduated from Seneca in 1969 at the glorious age of 16 and ventured off to Cedarville College in Cedarville, Ohio. How I selected Cedarville as the college to attend was supported by clichés and truisms and preferences that I had accepted as equal to God's commands. Let go and let God. Just pray about it. Lay out a fleece and test God's will for your life. I attended Pioneer Girl Camp in Canton, Ohio and was greatly influenced by the camp nurse, Jodie, who was a Cedarville graduate. Because I greatly admired her and dearly desired to go to a Christian college, I pursued attending Cedarville. I shunned all other wise counsel from my parents, youth leaders, and pastor to consider more than one option. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. It was the only college to which I applied, and my immature understanding of how to seek God's will for my life meant that I will use Susan's version of Gideon's fleece. This is the godly people speak of how God revealed his will through glorious emotional experiences and even told to test God and discover His will. But my admiration for my mentor, Jodie, colored consideration of any other way of thinking. So here was my Gideon's fleece.

I was a mediocre student in high school, doing well in the classes I like--French, Speech, and Drama--and not doing well in classes I didn't like--Algebra, Geometry, and Chemistry. So if I get accepted with a C average, then it must be God's will for me to go there. Wow, I got accepted! Hallelujah! God's will was revealed! I later found out that everyone who applied got accepted regardless of their grade point average. It was called academic probation. It was a great financial sacrifice for my parents to send me to Cedarville, but they were willing to give it a try under these stipulations. Dad and Mom sat me down and they laid down the law. Susan Deborah, we are not paying all of this money for you to make C's. You must maintain a good GPA, only an occasional C. We don't want you finding a boyfriend and falling in love and getting married before you graduate. And if you get married before graduation, we will not continue to pay for your tuition. I wholeheartedly agreed. So off I went to Cedarville, a Baptist college of arts and sciences with a wonderful pharisaical mindset.

Well, after understanding justification and had assurance of salvation, I continued my sanctified growing in the Lord phase of life. My shallow understanding of sanctification was read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow. But more importantly, be separated from the world. Come out from among them and be separate, said the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. In the age of miniskirts, the hippie revolution, and acid rock music, my actions were radical. I had my mother make all of my skirts mid knee length. I refused to attend movies, did not listen to rock music. I told my English teacher I would take an F before I would open the pages of A Catcher in the Rye. I did not swear, did not experiment with alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. I did not date much, so keeping myself from sexual immorality was not an issue. Guess what? I had no trouble with Cedarville College's student handbook because they had the same rules as I. See? It was another way to prove that it was God's will for me to go there. We were in agreement on basic fundamental biblical truths. In reality, it was because personal preferences loosely based on biblical generalities operated my way of thinking and believing. And I learned later that was what Cedarville thought and taught.

This was before GPS and Map Quest. As we were driving to Cedarville following a Kentucky-Ohio roadmap, and if you remember them, when unfolded it would cover the entire windshield of your car, and to fold it back to its original state was an Olympic feat. The Rubik's Cube is nothing compared to refolding a traditional roadmap. Daddy is driving along. Mother is helping him with the state routes to take. And behold, we're driving by cornfield after cornfield. Lordy, lordy, Susan. Is this college in the middle of a cornfield? Well ... when we see the sign, "Welcome to Cedarville, home of Cedarville College," we all cheered. And then we began looking for the college, and we keep looking and looking. We had to turn around, stop, and ask for directions. Imagine that, parked on the edge of Cedarville having to ask for directions to the college.

During that first week of freshman orientation, we girls met in my room to get to know each other, talk about our families and our churches. When I told them that I was a member of a Christian and Missionary Alliance church, guess what I was told? You probably aren't saved because you aren't a member of a GARB church. Oh, well. I knew better. And I told them so, because in my very soul I knew about the doctrines of justification and salvation. I had been taught those doctrines, and I was secured in my knowledge of them.

In the course of the week, all I kept hearing was GARB this and GARB that. And so I finally asked, "What's GARB?" General Association of Regular Baptist churches was the

answer. I about died. I thought I was attending a Southern Baptist college, not a regular Baptist college. I immediately called my daddy collect. "Daddy, did you know that I'm at a regular Baptist school? They aren't gonna do that snake handling thing, are they?" Well, my dad assured me that he had read the school's manual and that no snake handling was mentioned. If by the end of the first quarter I still had questions, we could talk about transferring. But until then, my dad's wise advice: Rely on the truth. I had already been taught. Later I learned what GARB meant: the General Association of Regular Baptist churches and what the General Association of Regular Baptist churches was.

I loved college, particularly the Bible classes. I loved the chapel. However, it was not long before reality set in. I carry everything with me and did not return to the dorm until all my classes were done for the day. I would stay at the library and study and eat the cafeteria meals and return to the dorm at the latest time possible. I was a super student. Nah. It was because I did not like dorm life for in the dorm is where true Christianity was played out. And my pharisaical mindset was fed. Along with the unit prayer meetings and Bible studies, we had dorm meetings.

You know, you have the fantasy that when you're in college you form lifelong friends, the ones that will travel miles to be the bridesmaids in your wedding, and the second ones you notify when you find out you were with a child. Well, in my case, it revolved around the discussions of how to break the rules and not get caught, the best places to go to make out with your date, which classes to sign up for that were easy, and complaining, complaining, complaining about the rules and why spiritual [UNINTELLIGIBLE] 00:10:06 never got caught breaking them. It was dorm life where I was taught to have a critical, judgment, and deeper pharisaical philosophy. I allowed other Christians' preferences and opinions to determine truth.

In most of my classes, I was taught what to know and what to think, not how to think, and apply God's word to everyday life and living. In my immaturity I preferred to be told what to think by someone else. It was safer and it was much easier to memorize material and regurgitate it back for the test. In the classes that I had where I was provoked to think, my pharisaical mindset took over. And I complained. The professor wants us to do his job for him. Why doesn't he just tell us what we need to know and be done with it? The philosophy of knowing the material for the test and knowing how to think and reason to determine God's word and what it said about kingdom living were at opposite ends of my spectrum.

You know the definition for preference? It means a choice, selection, a greater liking for one alternative over another. The idea of preference being the same as the inspired word of God permeated my thinking. And if you did not have my preferences, you were the one that was wrong. This was a pattern of thinking fed by the college. Why were attending movies immoral? The College's answer, "Because it's in the handbook." My answer, "Well, what if Jesus came and you were in the theater caught watching The Ten Commandments?" I had one of my dearly beloved professors say about the movie Charlotte's Web, which was her favorite children's book, "I would really like to see it but will have to wait until it comes on TV." Why was facial hair on men breaking God's commands? The College's answer, "Because it's in that handbook." My answer, "It connected one to the hippie movement and rebellion, and Christian men were to abstain from all appearances of evil. Facial hair was an outward expression of a hippie heart."

By the time I graduated, I began to question my pharisaical preferences and why I held on to them so tightly. It was because of some hippies I had met from Yellow Springs, with whom I was trying so feebly to witness, challenged me to begin to think differently. It was because I believed what I had been taught, that a sanctified Christian lived by rules, determined righteous by those in authority over you, not by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. I built my Christian faith upon those preferences until I met Wayne St. Denis the spring of my freshman year there at Cedarville. He was a gifted intelligent man and delighted into getting me into arguments about what was right and wrong with my thinking, not about what was right and wrong, but my thinking. We fell in love and were married after my graduation from Cedarville in 1973. I kept my promise to my parents. I did not get married until after I graduated.

He was a pre-seminary student, and we were planning on going into full-time Christian service. Until the draft. After losing his student status, he was drafted into the Army in 1971, the height of the Vietnam War. Because the Army misspelled his last name, he spent a year in Korea instead of Vietnam. Go Army. We were married in July. My brother helped him find a job in Tipp City, and I was hired at Xenia Christian to teach sixth grade. The government paid for Wayne to go back to school on the GI Bill. All was well with our world.

To be a teacher at Xenia Christian, we had to also be members of the church. We were told that it was because teachers were considered employees of the church. Later I realized it was to keep a heavy hand of control on the staff. The pastor was new to the

church, and he heavily endorsed the teachings of Bill Gothard. All sermons were a regurgitation of lessons from the Bill Gothard seminars even to the use of Gothard's transparencies. The teachers were required to attend the Bill Gothard seminars every year. And some of his curriculum was even required to be used in the classroom. For those who are not familiar with Bill Gothard, he is a name, a big name, in the patriarchy movement.

After teaching there a few months, I was called to the principal's office and reviewed. "You are not a submissive wife because you walked in front of Wayne down the hallways instead of behind him." I was called to the office a second time. I was beginning to think I was spending more time in the principal's office than some of the disobedient students. And I was counseled again. Wayne had purchased a bracelet for me, you know, just one of those because I love you gifts. And like any newly married girl, I showed it off to the other teachers. I was reviewed. "Wayne should not be buying me gifts. The money should be used for eternal things." I managed to stay out of trouble for three years. And then, "We are not prepared to renew your contract." I asked why. Wayne had grown a beard because he hated shaving. Daily self-sacrifices were not his preference, he always said. I had long hair down to my waist. I was told by the principal that we gave the appearance of hippies and sent a message of rebellion to the parents and students. So if Wayne shaved and I cut my hair, my contract will be renewed? Wayne trimmed his beard, and I had my hair cut shoulder length. And voila, my contract was renewed. I quickly learned that outward and keeping one's mouth shut were keys to being a teacher in a Christian school. That personal philosophy worked for fifteen years.

You have to have qualifications to teach school, but you did not need qualifications to teach in a Christian school. The Christian curriculum spelled out in the teachers' manuals were a foot thick and told you what you were to teach, how long it would take, what to assign, when to quiz, and what to quiz. I put the manuals on the shelf and closed the classroom door. I wanted to expose my fifth and sixth-graders to the wonderful world of thinking. Guess what? I was called into the principal's office. My students weren't finishing the 350-page Math test by the end of the year. And I was reading out loud too much from books by C. S. Lewis and Lloyd Alexander and Elizabeth George Speare. I was told that the only good teacher is a Christian teacher in a Christian school. And Christian schools teach by the manuals. I kept my mouth shut because I needed the job.

What I want you to take from my second talk, preferences are not to be equated with God's commands. Paul tells us of the great liberty we have in Christ in the book of

Romans. A greater liking of one alternative for another is not immoral if it does not contradict God's law and commands. We are capable of building our thinking and doing if we build our lives on the rock, every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Teaching selectivity and wise and Godly choices based upon biblical principles is far more effective than requiring that one follow a list of preferences that have been dubbed Christian and have no foundation on biblical principles. Teach your children not just what to think but how to think and reason. Teach your children how to build their lives on the rock, every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. They will be put to the test, especially when they become young adults. And if they have not learned how to apply God's principles to their daily lives and co-labor with him in the sanctification process, they will crash and burn. My crash and burn came and lasted for over thirty-four years. And that will be the subject of my last talk.

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