

WD February 6, 2023

“Following the Recipe”

As you watch this today our church will have had its Chili Cookoff. However, full disclosure, I am filming this the day before the event. Along those lines I want to talk about recipes.

As you have probably heard, each year I make my veggie chili for the cookoff. I have never intended it to win. I started bringing it because one of our members was a vegan but couldn't eat any chili because they all had meat in them. So I started making it for her in hopes that she would at least have one chili to eat. I've been bringing every year since.

The recipe is simple. A red pepper, yellow pepper, green pepper, orange pepper all get diced up along with an onion and then put into a bowl. Then I pour into a crockpot, a can of strained chick peas, a can of corn, a can of whole tomatoes that I chop up in the crockpot, kidney beans, and mix those altogether. Then I mix up a sauce made of Ketchup, chili powder, honey, cayenne pepper, and some garlic and mix that together in a separate bowl. Once everything is ready, I pour in the bowl of peppers and onions and pour in the special sauce. I let it cook on high for about 5 hours and then let it mellow in the frig for a day before bringing it in to church.

I'm a meat eater but I like this particular chili. It's got so many veggies in it that it remains pretty thick and hearty. For those who want it, a little cheese can be added to the bowl and viola...mmm good!

So, what happens if I leave out the chili powder? Or if I neglect to put in the garlic or the onion? Chances are, it will not taste the same. It will not be as intended and therefore, anyone who tried it would not be able to enjoy what is intended by the recipe. Yet, by following it I am able to feed a lot of people. It often goes fast because PK has unintentionally given it so much advertising in his envy (Wink) that people go looking for it now.

God is good at recipes too. Look what He does with creation. Some daylight, millions of stars seasoning the skies, plants, animals, and of course, humanity. Imagine if He left something out. What kind of place would it be if he didn't create dogs for example, or cats? Or what if He left off the moon, how would the tides know how to behave?

The human being is a brilliant recipe of skin, bones, brains, cells, RNA, DNA helixes, complicated and amazing. Some of us don't have to image if God left out something like kidneys? But what if he left off something as simple as an ability to smile? Or smell or hear? Usually when such things are absent a person learns to adapt in amazing ways—something else a human being does well. As Psalm 139 says, we are beautifully and wonderfully made.

I would also argue that the Law of God is a recipe as well...a recipe of righteousness. Remember what Jesus says in yesterday's Gospel from Matthew 5? Let's remind ourselves real quick.

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

First, Jesus says the Law is meant as a whole without leaving out “the smallest letter or the least stroke of the pen” as if there is a least. As anyone would know with a recipe its often the little dashes of spices and things that make it all work. Keeping this in mind Loving the Lord with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength in the first commandment is just as important as not committing adultery, or murdering anyone, or bearing a false witness. The Law is meant as something like a recipe where all the ingredients matter if we want to get the intended final product, namely righteousness. It's not really up to us to leave out the 8th commandment or the tenth. If we do then we really do not have righteousness at all. The righteousness of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law was is “least” in the kingdom...by Jesus' estimation will certainly not enter the Kingdom of heaven.

But notice the other word that Jesus uses in keeping the Law. Verse says, “Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but *whoever practices* and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Poesis the word for “practices” is an interesting Greek word. Literally it means to bring something to be that wasn’t there before. The Law is not something we create but something that is followed. Like creating a chili it is something that is learned and taught. The first, time I made my veggie chili I had to lean on the recipe heavily, reading every detail. After years of practicing the making of the chili I can do just about all of it by heart. It’s like this with everything; golf, learning to back up a trailer, and even learning to tie one’s shoes—which Kaden will do soon enough. The Law of God is learned. We don’t perfect it, but practice the Law so that it becomes more and more familiar to us until more and more of it becomes natural to us. I’ve always said we get good at what we practice. A talent that wasn’t there before comes to be much in the same way we learn how to tell the truth. We can get pretty good at telling the truth in love and with tact for example or we can get good at yelling and losing our temper. One way or the other we get good at what we practice more.

The Lord’s recipe for the Law is spelled out throughout the chapters of Matt 5-7. And it concludes with the famous Parable of the Wise and Foolish builders in Matt 7:24-27 where Jesus emphasizes the practice of His teachings and the results of following those teachings.

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” So putting into practice the teachings of Jesus draws us closer to Jesus while not practicing His teachings leaves one far from Jesus, which Jesus calls ‘foolish’.

The most important recipe that Jesus follows is for our salvation. From Genesis 3 on we can trace a recipe that had been painstakingly developed through Israel, taught by the Prophets, and finally fulfilled in Jesus. He describes Himself as fulfilling the Law not destroying it. That’s right! The Virgin Birth. His Circumcision. His descendance from Abraham, Judah and David. Overcoming Temptation in the wilderness for 40 days. Raising Lazarus. Even His sermon on the Mount. The betrayer. The denier. The nails. The scourge. Breathing His last and giving up His spirit. And most importantly, rising from the Tomb. All to include us in His recipe of salvation. It all blends together perfectly for an eternal feast of the wedding of the Lamb with His bride, the church. From a believer’s point of view this is the true prize-winning recipe.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30