

Accept No Substitutes

Ponder: Is your way better than God's?

Scripture: "And they did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day and have become forced laborers" (Joshua 16:10, NKJV).

Eons ago, Proctor and Gamble advertised Ivory soap with this exhortation: "Accept no substitutes!" I doubt that the Lord cares what brand of soap you buy, but there is no substitute for obedience to His word.

Ephraim allowed the Canaanites to remain in Gezer. Since Gezer was a fortress, driving them out might have been especially difficult. Significantly, however, the inspired historian doesn't say they "couldn't" drive them out, but simply that they didn't. Commentator Robert Jamieson thinks their failure was due to "mistaken humanity." Having shed so much blood, perhaps the Israelites did, indeed, look upon the remaining Canaanites with undue sympathy. Did they really have to kill them or drive them out? Wouldn't it be enough just to put them to forced labor? Human wisdom might find such a substitute reasonable or even advantageous; but it fell far short of obedience. No amount of sugar-coating can justify their refusal to obey God.

I'm thankful God hasn't commanded us to slaughter our religious neighbors or drive them away! Rather, we are to evangelize them in hope of bringing them to salvation in Christ. However, the same "mistaken humanity" that hindered Israel from driving out the Canaanites may move us to simply accept our religious neighbors as brethren in Christ. Treating them as lost souls in need of salvation seems judgmental, arrogant, self-righteous, intolerant, and exclusive – or so we are told.

Be not deceived! Israel eventually became like the pagans she accepted. Those within the Lord's church who view the religious world around us as brethren in Christ cannot keep from becoming like the religious world.

Rather than substituting our own wisdom for God's counsel, let us abide by His word. We must be every bit as inclusive as He is, while at the same time being just as narrow as He is! God has revealed His will; accept no substitutes!

Song: "Trust And Obey"

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your will is perfect. We can never improve on it. Help us to humble ourselves and simply accept your word and obey it. Please forgive us where we have failed to do that. In Jesus' name, Amen.