

Series: STAPLES - November 1, 2009

WHO'S GOD...AND WHO'S NOT
Luke 6:46-49; 1 Peter 3:13-17

1. How many of you are **cat** persons? How many of you **dog** persons? Just out of curiosity—any **snake** persons? I heard a great comparison a couple of years ago between the perspective of a dog and the perspective of a cat.

-A dog thinks, “You love me, you feed me, you give me shelter, you come when I whine... **You must be god!**” A cat thinks, “You love me, you feed me, you give me shelter, you come when I whine... **I must be god!**” Snakes don't believe in God!

-I would like to offer you irrefutable proof this morning that **I** am not God—and neither are you. If you're a control freak, this may mess with your mind a bit—because I want to talk about what is out of our control!

*For example. I can't control what goes on in my own body! Really! My body is changing—and I can't control how many hairs I have on my head, how many wrinkles I get, or how many living cells I have left in my brain. Now, in our culture, people will **tell** you that you can change that—that you can Botox it, Rogaine it, liposucked it, aerobicize it, moisturize it, pasteurize it, cryogenically **freeze** it—but, the sad truth for me...and you...is—it's a one-way street!

*People tell you that you are the captain of your ship and the master of your destiny. I can't control my destiny!

*I can't control my height, my shape, my age or my eye color.

*I **know** about cancer prevention and heart disease prevention and vaccination—but I can't control my health.

*And I **do** my job, but I can't control it!

*I can love my kids and urge them to take good paths, but I can't control them—or their friends, health, schooling or future. Can't do it.

*I can drive slowly—but I can't control traffic.

*I can't control history, planets, stars, weather, population, viruses, injuries, water supply, wind, souls, eternity, angels or demons.

*Truth is, I struggle to control my own feelings, likes, thoughts and appetites! I'm frustrated by trying to lose a few pounds, for cryin' out loud!

-So, given all this, I've come to this **radical** conclusion. **I must not be God!** It's tough to say that, you know, when you're **so close!** So. Are you ready for a mass confession of lack of control...or **weakness?** Let's do it together: **Things are out of my control: I MUST NOT BE GOD!**

2. But some people **have** claimed to be god. Really. When Jesus showed up on this planet 2000 years ago, Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, had been proclaimed Lord. The Savior of the world. The Son of God. He had a lot of power—and he forced people to confess **Caesar is Lord!**...or die. But he wasn't in control—of his own body, of people's allegiances—or even his own family!

-The Roman authorities of that day tried to force the followers of Jesus to say, **Caesar is Lord**—to which they gave the infuriating reply, “No, with all due respect—**Jesus is**

Lord.” And then they died. They were nailed to crosses, dipped in wax and set on fire in Nero’s gardens, beheaded, fed to lions, stabbed, imprisoned, tortured—didn’t matter. **Jesus is Lord!**

-They actually had a very good reason for saying that. Jesus had claimed to be God—and then was executed on one of Caesar’s famous death machines. And He did something no Caesar—no person—had ever done. He defeated death. Every single one of the Caesar’s died: Augustus—dead. Tiberius—Dead. Caligula—dead. Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus? All dead. But Jesus? Alive—and the Kingdom He gave His life to proclaim? **Very** much alive!

3. You may be thinking, “Okay, Ken—**what’s your point?**” My point is simply this: **Jesus is Lord** is more than a great slogan. In Jesus’ day, a person could say, **Caesar is Lord**—and then just go on with their lives—even if they were faking it.

-But declaring that Jesus is Lord changes everything—because He **is** God. **Jesus is Lord** is not a religious slogan, a battle cry, or a secret password. It’s a way of life. It gets right into the nitty gritty of who is Lord for you; who leads and runs your life. Every day. In **everything**.

-**This** is an issue that raises the hair on the back of our necks—because our instinctive reaction is, **why shouldn’t I be in charge?**

- a. Maybe we react because we’ve had bad experiences with people in charge. Bosses. What are the things that have aggravated you about the bosses you’ve had?

-Well, it’s pretty clear that the resentment for bossy people—people who order you around, tell you what to do runs **very** deep in us! In fact, this resentment starts with the very first boss any of us have. Mom. One of the first words we learn—and probably our favorite word **ever** is---anyone know? No!

- b. The deal with us as adults is that we don’t want **anyone** putting any limits on us. We think, “I had that when I was a kid. I’m sure not going to put up with it now. We think—or say things like:

*I want to be my *own* boss

*I want to do what *I* want to do

*I want to run my own life

*I know what’s best for me

*I can, in fact, *do* what’s best for me

-Most people fantasize about **total** freedom—being able to do what we want to do, **how** we want to do it—and **when** we want to do.

- c. Some bosses deserve a bad reputation. Some are power-hungry—or bullies. Some are anal-retentive control freaks. Jesus knew that. Listen to what He had to say about the leadership system on this planet:

“You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them.” (Mark 10:42 NLT)

-We want to say, “You’ve got **that** right, Jesus! What comes next, however, is very revealing.

“But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
(Mark 10:43-45 NLT)

-Interesting, isn’t it. Jesus leads as a **slave**. Mind you—**everything** has been placed under Him. He **is** in fact Lord of history, Lord of all the earth, Lord of creation, Lord of all the stars, planets, angels. In fact, He **is** Lord over our lives even if we choose to be God of our own lives! Unlike the Roman government—He won’t kill us for doing that. He has given us the freedom to **choose** Him because we love Him and trust Him. He’s the only leader you and I will ever have who became the slave of all—and gave His life for everyone.

-But even with the humility He’s chosen, we **still** struggle with letting Him be Lord. We think, “bosses are for people who don’t know what to do or where to go—not for smart, educated, sophisticated, self-motivated people like **ME!**”

4. And maybe that’s part of the problem. Our self-assessment. We **have** been made in the image of God. We are, in fact, capable, smart, and resourceful. But if you want to follow Jesus and engage in His Mission on this planet, He had some very thought-provoking things to say about just living your life the way **you** think is best.

-First, let’s talk about this word **Lord**—which is actually used a lot all through the Bible. If you aren’t familiar with the Bible or with church, it may sound kind of archaic. Anyone here have an older brother or sister? Did they *lord* it over you? Boss you around? Intimidate you into doing what they wanted? How many of you **were** that older brother or sister? How many of you are **still** lording it over them?

-Actually, it’s a title of respect and honor. Unless you were raised in England, there’s only one context where we usually use that word.

- a. Whenever you see the word *Lord* in the OT, it actually replaces the name “Yahweh” or “Jehovah.” It means absolute sovereign ruler of everything. The One started it all—and will bring it all to completion.

-**That’s** why it was unthinkable, in the Early Church, to give that title to a frail human—who ruled with brutality and force. That’s why early believers were clear: **Jesus Christ is LORD!** **Jesus** leads—I follow. **Jesus** gives the orders; I obey them. And obedience is what Jesus expected and **still** expects. Listen to what He told his followers:

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and

laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."
(Luke 6:46-49 NLT)

- b. And it makes complete sense that we should follow what Jesus says to do, right? Jesus is not just this nice personal helper who is mainly intent on shining up our lives and taking us to Heaven in the sweet bye and bye. He has a mission to accomplish—making *all* things new. He needs people from every sector of this planet to engage. But He can only use people who will love as He says to love and serve others on His behalf.

-We are Jesus' Body—His hands, feet, ears, eyes, legs—this mission is now ours. And it involves *everything*—from the lost souls of people who are far away to the injustice and oppression that takes place in the alleys of Bangkok. If a person's body doesn't obey what the head says to do—*that's a problem*, right? The body does more damage than good. Jesus is **Lord!** Jesus has the Master Plan—the blueprint for what He's doing. And He calls us to follow Him—wherever we are—whatever we're doing.

-The truth is, ultimately there are only two kingdoms; the Kingdom of Light and Life—and to the Kingdom of Darkness run by the prince of darkness—Satan. Bob Dylan sang, ***Everybody's gotta serve somebody!*** We have to choose ***who*** we'll serve.

- c. So, let's just get real specific about what it is that makes Jesus King in His Kingdom? Why is Jesus King/Lord—and not me, or you?

-Well, He created everything—including me and all I have. ***That's*** a good reason. He rules the universe—and everything else. I control very little. He controls everything. I know very little. He knows *everything*. I've only been here since 1972—okay, okay 1953—His name is, I AM! Cause He's ALWAYS been. My name, honestly, is ***I AM NOT!***

-He made me—then went to a cross to buy me back. He owns me twice over. When I received the sonship He died to bring me, I chose to belong to ***Him***; and I chose to be under ***His*** Lordship. That's the deal. I became a... ***follower*** of Jesus Christ.

-Anyone know what it means to be someone's ***follower***? It means they ***lead*** and you... ***follow!*** Period. Not on Holy Days and Sundays. Jesus Christ leads—I follow. Not only does He ***deserve*** to lead, I ***need*** to follow!

-That's the ***positive*** side; to ***refuse*** to do what He asks—is, to say it frankly, ***rebellion***. And that's exactly what sin is. It's me holding out as this tiny rebellious, insurgent universe where I'm Lord, I'm God—in the massive universe of reality where He's Lord of all.

-Let me use an illustration I've used before. A **bubble**. When I refuse His leadership—what I rule is this little fragile bubble that floats in the massive universe of reality where He's Lord of all. The problem with bubbles is—bubbles **pop!** That's eventually what happens to **all** bubbles!

- d. Some people think, "Well, why can't Jesus be lord of all the religious stuff, the **God**-stuff—and I run the non-religious stuff—like, my money and time and stuff—the way I think best? Anyone know why not? Because **everything is spiritual!** Any separation between the two is fake. It's all or nothing. In this passage we read, Jesus is pretty clear. "If you try to separate your life from my teaching and leadership—one day all you've been building will come crashing down around you. It's **just a matter of time!**"

-Friends, there are only two ways to build a life. Frank Sinatra sang about one. **My Way**. "I did it **my** way!" And then there's Jesus' way. Ultimately you have to decide whether you believe Jesus—or Frank.

5. There's another reason why Jesus needs to be Lord of my life and your's. It's not just the fact that He deserves that place because of who He is and what He's done. It's not just because I **don't** deserve that place because of who I am and what **I've** done. I need Jesus to be Lord—because it makes perfect **sense**. See if you can relate: Doing my own thing is precisely what has created every single mess I've ever been in. I once heard someone say, "If I could kick the person's butt who's been responsible for most of my heartache, I wouldn't be able to sit for **weeks!**"

-So, if this is such a brilliant, logical decision, what's the big deal? Why do we struggle? Are we all just a bunch of control freaks?

- a. I can tell you exactly why I struggled with this issue before I went to the mat with God in it. I'm ashamed to admit that **main** objection was, "What if God screws up my life? What if He asks me to do something unreasonable? What if He wrings all the good stuff out of my life like a sponge and leaves me with nothing? What if I do this and he turns me into some kind of weirdo? (It never occurred to me that I might **already** be a weirdo—and He would make me normal!)

-I came to the point where I realized how totally absurd that was. Why would someone who loves me way more than anyone ever has **do** that? Why would someone who gave His life for me—mismanage **my** life. And why would I be so arrogant as to think that I could do a better job than Him?

- b. There may be a second reason why it's so tough to let God lead. The short word is—**PRIDE!** It's my thought that I ought to be smart enough, advanced enough to do this. I mean, how bad could it be if I just use my brain and my intuition to make all my decisions?

-Well, the big problem is **sin**. Sin ha twisted my judgment—and how I treat others. Sin affects my moods, my sense of what counts and what doesn't. That's why Proverbs says,

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. (Proverbs 14:12 NIV)

Truth is, I don't have the **power** to do what I know is right and smart. And I'm not alone. That gets proved every single day as smart, educated, successful people flush their health, their relationships, their credibility, their money—and everything that matters down the toilet doing things that don't even make sense. Paul identifies:

What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise...I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. It happens so regularly that it's predictable...Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge. I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? (Romans 7:15,18b, 23-24 MSG)

-It was desperation that **finally** brought me to my knees and forced me to stop trying to run my life and let Jesus be in charge. I got so tired of screwing up, so tired of my powerlessness, totally weary of disappointing myself and others. I came to the end of my rope, exactly as it says here. And **then** I found help. If you've never been to the end of your rope, what's it gonna take? How far down some stupid detour will you have to get before you say, "**I get it! The smart thing for me to do is let someone drive who knows how to drive!**"

6. Of course, there's the inevitable question? What will this mean for me? Specifically. Like, I want to see the price tag before I sign on!

-I've done a few weddings in my lifetime—did one a few weeks ago, and have several more coming up. When couples come to me and show me the ring and tell me of their dreams for the future and how much they love each other—I have **yet** to have a couple say, "So. Like, **what is the price tag on this? I'm signing away my future here, making promises that are almost impossible to keep—without really even knowing what the future holds, what kind of diseases, losses, moves, or temptations I'll face. And I have NO idea what this guy is going to look like if he keeps porking out the way he does now!**

-I figure that it's **my** job to help couples have a reality check before they walk down an aisle—looking better than they will **ever** look again in their lives! I say, "You're signing away your life! You are embarking on the most intensive attack on self-centeredness you'll **ever** face! You will have to make more compromises than you'd **ever** dreamed you'd have to make. Oh, and did I tell you—you are signing on to love and give and sacrifice unconditionally—even when you feel like you have done **way** more than your share of loving, giving, compromising and sacrificing. And that's **before** kids! And all the stuff you've accumulated? **Faggaddabadit!** You're signing half of it away."

-But...if you will keep at it, you will come out of this on the other end a **way** better person. A little scarred. You may stutter and twitch some. But if you stay at it, it is **so**,

SO worth it all!” And people *still* walk down the aisle in droves—even with a 50% divorce rate. Amazing!

- a. What does it cost for Jesus to take His rightful place in your heart and your life? Well, it cost Him everything—and it will cost you **everything!** Paul the Apostle said it like this:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NLT)

-Friends, this mode of living—where Jesus is Lord of all—is not some strange, abnormal lifestyle for Jesus Freaks. This is what following Jesus is about. Anything less than this is subnormal.

-Doesn’t it seem a bit weird to you that we want to take advantage of Jesus giving **everything** up for us—laying aside His rights as God—ending up on a cross; and then thinking we can have all He died to give at a bargain basement price?

- b. Second, it means that I **submit to God**. Totally. He’s Sovereign in the Universe, anyway—and when I allow Him to be Lord in my little Kingdom—my little bubble, it means that I stop my rebellion, and simply see Him for Who He is. My kingdom becomes his.

-And that means that I stop giving God the leftovers—and **He** comes first in every decision. The very first commandment in the Big Ten is, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Meaning. God comes **first**. Jesus put it like this:

“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37 NLT)

How much of your heart do you use to love God with? Your soul? Your mind?
All!

-Let’s go back to marriage. How many of you are thinking that **one** day—you might do that? Would you marry someone who said, in their vows, “I will love you and be faithful to you about...oh, 60% of the time. Maybe up to **75%**. You don’t like that? Well—Maybe I could bump that up to 90%--but that’s as **high** as I’m a-goin’! No one wants that! See, the flip side to this is--if God doesn’t come first in your life—then who or what does?

- c. Third, declaring Jesus as Lord means that I make myself accountable and responsible to Him. I am accountable for how I treat all the people in my life; accountable for my time, my resources—all He has given me. I am

accountable and responsible to use those resources as He would want me to. He owns; I manage—because He’s God—and I’m not.

- d. Asking Jesus to be Lord of all means that I do exactly what He tells me to do—whether or not I initially agree. Remember Jesus words at the beginning of the passage we looked at earlier? “Why would you call me *Lord* this and *Lord* that—and refuse to do what I tell you to do? Why would you refer to me with a title that has **no** reality in your life?”

-Trusting Jesus, as I’ve said before, doesn’t just mean that you trust Him to get you to Heaven when you die; it means that you believe Jesus is right about **everything!** And that’s why you make it your goal in life to obey what He says about love, about forgiveness, about money, about compassion—about **everything!** Why? Well, because **He’s God—and I’m not!** He can see what I can’t. His ways are **not** my ways—they’re **HIGHER**. And, particularly, my ways and my thoughts are not His thoughts—as much as I’d like them to be. They’re lower. **Barely visible** lower!

7. From my perspective—from what I’ve seen in people’s lives over the past 30 years or so, I’d have to honestly say that if you want to live a meaningful life, make a difference, and find more joy and peace than you could ever earn on your own—giving Jesus His rightful place is the way to go.

- a. The scariest part is the price tag. But there’s a price tag on doing **anything** worthwhile, isn’t there—from getting a university education to raising children to saving for the future. You pay up front.
- b. But there’s something that makes me want to pay up front. Know what it is? I’ve done enough funerals to know that the cost of **not** living for something that’s worthwhile is even more expensive. And you pay on the **back** end of life—at the finish line--when it’s too late to change anything. And this debt is paid in **regret** currency.
- c. Now, I can totally understand if you think I’m exaggerating this because I teach the Bible and I’m **supposed** to tell people this stuff. If you do—I just want to tell you—**go for it!** Be god! Run your life. Do it all your way. See how things turn out. And if at the end of time you wind up with this magnificent, so-worth-living-life and you can sing the song, **My Way—I did it MY way!** to Jesus. I’ll be **happy** to concede.

-But I don’t think that will happen—because the Bible tells us that at the end of all things that **every** knee will bow and **every** tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. I believe that the half-hearted, half-committed way of following Jesus that I have sometimes done—and you perhaps done--is the bastardized form of the life Jesus has always wanted for us.

- d. I don’t want to live that way. **Ever again!** I don’t want to do religion. I don’t want to do church. I don’t want to love and put myself or anything else first—and pretend that Jesus is Lord—ever again. Because, see, there’s no peace or

hope in living like that. And people like that will **never** change a world who says, “Yeah, I’ve met these people who follow Jesus—and they’re all talk and no action!” I want to do **more** than talk!

Q&A

8. Sometimes a fear people have in taking this step is, “What if I’m the only one who does this?” So. Why don’t we agree that at The Olive Branch, we will not settle for the watered down, cosmetic form of following Jesus—that religion offers. Instead, **Jesus** will be first; **Jesus** will be Lord. And we will link our arms and pursue and live out our faith wherever we find ourselves in any given week. So much so that people can say, “They may all be crazy; in fact, they’re flawed people. But they’re **real! This isn’t an act!** Jesus is out to transform this world; to make everything new; to use His people as Good News—wherever they are. But for that to happen, we will have to look in the mirror every morning and say to that scruffy person staring back, **You, my friend, are not God! God is God! Remember that!**”