

Smoky Mountain Reflections

March 2014

So as we enter this Lenten season what should we reflect upon? I suggest we reflect on what Christ did for us and why He had to do it. As I ponder lent as solemn, melancholy, struggling, and suffering, lets tackle one of those difficult "in the world but not of it" questions that we all as Christians struggle with. We struggle to maintain a good conscience before God and do His will when it seems there are no good options.

Specifically I would like to discuss boycotting or associating ourselves with organizations or businesses that either aggressively support positions that encourage people to live in a state of unrepentant sin or take no position at all on behavior which God's word clearly condemns as sinful and harmful. Our society has in essence normalized sinful behaviors such as; murder through assisted suicide, starving the infirmed to death, abortion, adultery through cohabitation, and same gender and polyamorous relationships.

Even more specifically I would like to address three organizations that have always been purveyors of good moral character but have in recent years succumbed to the pressures of seeking to keep everyone happy. In a 'customer is always right' driven society, that is a normal turn of events. However the customer is not always right because all customers are sinners, which means that sometimes we want what is either not good or not good for us. Just as any parent who has said no to a child can tell you, the results are often unpleasant. The three organizations I am addressing are "The Boy Scouts of America," (BSA), "The Girl Scouts USA," (GSUSA) and "Thrivent Financial for Lutherans" (which recently voted to change its name to "Thrivent Financial for Christians".)

Let me first say that it is virtually impossible to do business today without directly or indirectly supporting some sinful behavior because we are sinners doing business with sinners. The hard part of being 'in but not of the world' is that we must sometimes do business with companies that we know have policies that scripture condemns. While you may be indirectly supporting a sinful policy or behavior when you buy a nail, a sandwich or a shirt, this act of business is not seen as approval of something which scripture clearly condemns. That, however, does not relieve us from doing our best to defund and condemn with our words and our wallets that which is evil, while supporting and being good customers to those businesses that are proactive in their support of sound biblical morality.

While both BSA and the GSUSA proclaim neutrality on the sanctity of human life, every person that the national office of the GSUSA holds up as role models for girls to follow is vocally pro-choice. The BSA and the GSUSA both have nondiscriminatory policies with regard to sexual orientation. Consider that over 90 Girl Scouts and their leaders marched in the Gay pride parade last year in San Francisco. So while their policies are neutral their actions are not. So what about those tasty cookies they sell each spring, Should we buy them? First, I would like to point out that our local Girl Scout council is not connected to many of the issues the national office of the organization is responsible for. If you buy cookies, the latest figures they provide say 70% stays in the local council with local troops and 30% goes to the bakeries. What they do not tell you is that the bakeries must pay millions to the national organization every year for the privilege of providing the cookies. So what I have chosen to do is tell the nice little girl I have been getting my annual supply of cookies from that this is the last year we will be purchasing any cookies. The same can be said for BSA popcorn. That does not mean you cannot still support your local troop in either organization. Just make your donation directly to the troop as long as they do not support or agree with the policies that violate God's word. This way you can be an influence for positive change without becoming an isolationist.

I expect secular organizations such as the BSA and the GSUSA to take neutral positions on these issues. However I feel that it is inexcusable for a Christian organization to claim neutrality on issues of biblical morality. That is what Thrivent has done. They issued a statement in January that says they are neutral on issues such as abortion and sexual orientation. The result of this decision is that Pro-life organizations (like the Woman's Care Center here in Sevierville) will no longer receive the over \$878,000 dollars that were given out annually to support pregnancy resource centers across the nation. I encourage everyone to read the new policy @ service.thrivent.com/forms/thriventchoice/neutrality. It saddens me that the life insurance company I chose because all of its profits were to be used to support the Gospel, could be said to be indirectly responsible for over 30 abortions in the past 7 years. I am not saying to divest yourself of Thrivent, however as we are 'in but not of the world' we must speak the truth in love. Sign the online petition to get Thrivent to refund those Pro-life organizations, and make it clear that if they do not make some changes for the good you may be doing business elsewhere.

How we as individuals can be a positive influence and how we as a church body are a positive influence will look a little different. The church must not be seen to associate itself with public organizations that hold positions that are in clear violation of God's word. Because a public association is in affect an endorsement of that organization. That is why we did not re-charter the Boy Scout troop that used to meet here. It is however possible for individuals to be involved in local troops that hold to biblical morality and stand for that truth in their organization. The same can be said for any organization as long as it does not require oaths that conflict with or imply support for sinful activity.

I know this month's reflection is a little long however I wanted to give you some solid advice on how to be 'in but not of the world' in these difficult times. Our suffering for the Gospel is relatively light compared with those of the early church or even those who today live in lands where they are terribly persecuted for faith in Christ. However it is still suffering and at the end of every day we all have to live with our consciences guided by His will. So as you carry your cross this Lenten season remember, Matthew 11:30 "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Blessed Lententide

In Christ

Pastor Portier