

Smoky Mountain Reflections, April & May 2010

As we all enjoy the pleasant changes in our weather patterns and the greening up and warmth after this long cold winter, it promotes among us an upbeat feeling and general all around happiness. We have survived the long cold nights of winter, the regeneration of spring is upon us, and pleasant days of summer are only weeks away. When one is enjoying this upbeat time and the generally beautiful days of spring, we are not drawn to pondering issues of theology and doctrine....unless of course, you are a pastor. Then you find yourself always searching for ways to communicate the truths of God, clearly to His church for the strengthening and edification of His people and to enlighten the lost.

This past month has been a busy one for our little mountain community with regard to church and state, providing topics brimming with opportunity for doctrinal and theological discussion. Our county mayor starts county meetings with the Lord's Prayer and our Christian community rallied behind him when his rights of free speech and free practice of faith came under fire. This made national news, and I do not think we have heard the last on this issue. And a brash attack on the Roman Catholic Church in the form of a Baptist pamphlet drew more attention on the Christian community here. This also made national news.

So things touching directly on faith, theology, and doctrine were out there providing us all with opportunities to talk with others about our faith when addressing current issues last month. And this is important because one half to three quarters of our neighbors do not go to church. Now some say you do not have to go to church to be a Christian, but just because someone says something **does not make it so**. God's word is clear. His people worship and fellowship once a week (at a minimum). If someone has not darkened the door of a church for months or years, then God's word, not me, says your fruits are a witness of your faith, and while going to church does not make you a Christian, not going certainly separates you from the body of Christ.

And in this public conversation, many lament the divisions in the church. One letter to the editor quoted Rodney King, "why can't we all just get along?" Well, that has a simple answer...sin. And while we may pray for heaven on earth, we should be realistic and acknowledge biblical truth. Eternal bliss and harmony are guaranteed by God after Christ's second coming and not before. And anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something, and it is not THE GOSPEL!! So, if someone asks, "What is the difference? Don't we all believe in the same God?" That is another question with a clean simple answer: NO! There are only two religions on earth—those who are the redeemed children of God through faith in Christ and those who are not. This is not arrogant or condescending; it is simply divine truth that many reject at their own peril.

So, if someone asks what is the difference, we should be ready with some clean, clear answers if we want to be ready to explain the joy we carry in our hearts. It is our responsibility as Christians to share THE GOSPEL with those who are not redeemed children of God. How can we share what we know little of? So, I thought I would provide some quick information to answer the question: What's the difference, or what is a Lutheran?

First let's define what Christians are. They are persons who, with the help of the Holy Spirit, acknowledge their sinful nature and need of a savior. They receive faith and forgiveness in the waters of baptism which connect them to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and through which, Christ takes upon Himself all their sin—past, present, and future. This reconciles them to God, making them heirs to the promise of eternity in heaven with God. This results in living a life of faith that reflects gratitude for this gift and a desire to share it with others.

As I said earlier, there are only two religions in the world. The body of Christ where God comes to you and all others where you are trying to get to or appease the god.

Some within Christianity do not hold to all that scripture teaches. They might say "**The Bible Contains the Truth**" which on the surface may seem to be a good statement. However, it undermines scriptural authority. One can agree with that statement and in the same breath, say something that contradicts the Bible because if the Bible just "contains" the truth, then it may also contain some mistakes or myths. You see those two statements can stand comfortably side by side. And once you open the door to man deciding what is or is not truth, you are now on a dangerous path that leads away from God. First you can dismiss a young earth and a six day creation; then the clear teaching that a pastor must be a man (1 Cor. 14:33-34,37, 1 Tim. 2:11-12, 1 Tim 3:1-3, and Titus 1:5-6); then you can dismiss the clear teaching that all life is valuable because it is created in God's image at conception; and not far behind that, you can disregard that sex is for one man and one woman in marriage (Lev.18:22,24,20:13, Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 1 Tim. 1:9-10). If these truths can be cast aside, how far away is dismissing Christ's death and resurrection as myth. Once you do that, you might call yourself a Christian, but if you reject Christ's death and resurrection, you are

rejecting salvation and are no longer a Christian as defined by God. You may be part of a club that has the cultural appearance of Christianity, but you stand in a dangerous place of darkness outside of Grace because you are rejecting its life-giving gift. The proper way to acknowledge what God's revealed word contains is to say that "**The Bible IS the Truth.**" This statement does not allow for any statement that contradicts God's word to stand next to it, making it a clear and sound doctrinal statement.

The two statements in the previous paragraph divide those who claim to be Christian in to two groups. Now we know that scripture says we are all one in Christ. While there may be good people on both sides of these disagreements, they are people, and therefore all sinful. These divisions are caused by sinful men who are departing from God's truth and sinful men who stand with His truth. We must all seek to share His truth in love. These two groups can be defined in the following way: A) those who feel human reason stands above God's word (they would say that "the Bible contains truth") and B) those who know by faith that God's word stands above human reason (their statement would be "the Bible is the truth"). Unfortunately, this is not a clean division like in an algebra problem. There may be more people in group B in this paragraph (that would also find themselves in group A—people who hold a proper position on scripture), but who can still hold some positions that lead them away from God and vice versa. Are you confused yet? Even trying to expose false doctrine can lead to confusion.

Till next time

In Christ Pastor Portier