

Smoky Mountain Reflections, July 2011

I received a letter recently that opened like this:

"Robert, please forgive us, but we have just taken a closer look at your profile. It turns out you are more special than any of us imagined! Did you know that you possess some very rare hidden traits?.....

First I thought, it is about time someone noticed just how special I am, but then reality struck and I knew I was being stroked by someone who was trying to sell me something. This was a pretty amazing letter. I could not even bear to read the whole 8 pages that told me how great, wonderful, special, and blessed I was. I have heard some empty political speeches in my day—you know the kind, where they talk and talk and never even say one committed thing of substance. This type of speaking and writing is easy to spot as it is full of adjectives, full of powerfully said nothing, full of filler, fluff and "pabulum" (*as defined by Wictionary: Anything overly bland or simplistic, especially speech or writing*). Although I was sure that anyone who had that much good to say about me could not be all bad, it was clear that no one could be as wonderful and special as they were making me out to be. So if anyone tries to send you a free 56 page booklet containing the greatest kept secrets of all time by telling you how great you are.....save yourself some time. Come off cloud nine, and donate this multi-worded empty letter to the landfill where it belongs.

This letter was really designed to appeal to the old Adam within us all. Telling someone how wonderful they are can be done in a genuine and heartfelt way, seeking to encourage and uplift others, but it can also be done in an empty way seeking to flatter with the ulterior motive of getting something from the one being flattered. Interestingly enough, they are usually pretty easy to tell apart. Words of encouragement usually ring true and affirm what most can see and understand, while words of flattery usually sound foreign, empty and hollow. This is because words of encouragement are substantive while words of flattery are vacuous.

The reason such speech is appealing to our self-centeredness is because it focuses on us and how we would like to think about ourselves. But we also know ourselves better than anyone else and know we are not really as good, great or wonderful as we would like others to believe. However we are truly blessed in a way more substantive than any sly marketing ploy could imply, and in even greater measure than any words of encouragement could proclaim. We are blessed by the Creator of the universe with the promise of an eternal existence in His presence, purchased for us by His only begotten Son. This blessed nature, this new creation, formed in us at our baptism by the Holy Spirit makes us more special than can be comprehended by the human mind. It also displays just how important each of us is to God who can only be believed in with the help of the Holy Spirit, because our finite minds can not do His love for us any justice.

While we focus on how great man's progress is, we are often blinded to the Author of all that is great and good. Advances in engineering, computers, electrical power, travel, and the list goes on, are all touted as amazing advances in human knowledge, while they pale in comparison to the Creator of all, and fail to acknowledge the source of all that human knowledge is the Creator. Advances in medicine and surgery, and all the wondrous new tools in hospitals are also all often sited as amazing advances in human knowledge, while they also fail to acknowledge the Creator of all and fall short in seeing that the bulk of healing in hospitals is not done on operating tables. Most of the time spent in hospitals is time in which these miraculous bodies God gave us do what He created them to do, which is to heal themselves—many times in ways modern medicine still does not understand.

So the next time you start to pat yourself on the back because of how special you are, remember how much more special is the One who created and redeemed you, making you really special because you are special to Him!

In Christ
Pastor Portier