

Smoky Mountain Reflections, February 2012

Seasons greetings! I figured if that greeting works for Thanksgiving and Christmas, then it should work just as well for Presidents' Day and Saint Valentine's Day, but maybe it is just a lame greeting regardless of the time of year. As we find ourselves already past the first month of this year, I am pondering some of the empty promises of our society, and how the American right for the pursuit of happiness has been transformed into a god to be worshiped, an entitlement to be fought for. Those who "have" and have worked hard to get what they have, are increasingly seen as evil and greedy, while those who "have not" are portrayed as victims of an unfair system that favors the rich on the backs of the poor. This is in no way an accurate reflection of reality, but it is the narrative that keeps many from admitting that maybe they have some culpability in their downtrodden status and the capability to get out of it. Have many in our society been dealt a raw deal, an unfair share of sorrows? Yes, but the only way to fix many of these problems is usually prayer, hard work, and persistence. Blaming others and seeking to take from those who have just because they have, makes everybody poorer, while lining the pockets of litigators and legislators.

Sadly, many in our society would rather blame some unseen evil and lament the woes of this existence, than simply do what it takes to get back on their feet. Many of these notions come from misguided attempts to protect bruised egos which, instead of helping people, keep them in their beleaguered state. There are some in our society that make a living by keeping a segment of our population in a victim status and claiming to champion their cause while keeping them in it.

Here are some of the tools of these charlatans. They are purveyors of class warfare, claiming to fight for the little man while actually working to keep him little. This first flows from a complete denial of the fact that just punishment is a good thing for society. You would expect children to say if they get caught doing something wrong and are punished, that punishment is a bad thing. But there are many adults in our society that despise just authority. There is no such thing as just punishment in their eyes. If they are being punished, it is unjust regardless of what they may have done. Unless, of course, someone they do not like is punished, not for violating the law but because no one needs all that money. I do not like getting a speeding ticket but I can acknowledge that this form of punishment is a good thing. It positively affects the way I drive. It makes the roads safer. It makes me safer. It supplies needed funds to the local government. The lie is that you are entitled to something in this life because you breathe. The truth is that we are all blessed by God with the gift of breath and the opportunity to work hard, and make God-pleasing use of our God-given time, talents, and treasures. The only thing any of us deserve is eternal punishment, but Christ endured that so we do not have to.

Another lie is that within you are seeds of greatness. Each and every one of us has the opportunity to do God-pleasing things with whatever time we are blessed to be here. But before the Holy Spirit plants saving faith in our hearts, we carry only seeds of destruction, and after I am blessed with faith, I still struggle with those self-centered destructive seeds. I do not want to rain on anybody's parade here, but the way we define greatness and the way God defines it, are diametrically opposed. For us, greatness is self-centered, self-gratifying, full of fame, fortune and worship of self. Greatness, biblically defined, is selfless—the last being first and vice versa, the servant of all, divine perfection, the greatest of all flesh...bleeding and dying a disgraceful death for an ungrateful multitude.

Another lie is that you can look to your emotions for affirmation of God's will in your life. This is the height of modern day mysticism. If I look to my feelings for affirmation instead of to God's revealed truth in His word, then I am doing the same thing as any Buddhist, Hindu, or Freemason. If I look to my emotions for affirmation, then I make myself god, seeking a self-defined nirvana, karma, enlightenment, or other state of special consciousness that I determine is valid or invalid. God reveals Himself in His word. Any special revelation that contradicts that word in the smallest degree is a lie straight from the pit of Hell.

Another great lie is Pelagianism which denies original sin. It is the belief that original sin is not part of our human nature and that our will is still capable of choosing good or evil. The biggest problem with this is it leads to statements like, "They are basically good—it was just a mistake, so they do not deserve punishment. They deserve another chance." I am not a big fan of punishment. I have never enjoyed giving or receiving it, but it is a necessary part of a God-pleasing society in order to curb the harmful effects of our sin, helping us to

behave, keeping us safe from ourselves and others, and giving us ways to love our neighbors as ourselves.
Thank God that we are blessed to share His great Gospel through the fullness of our vocation as members of the
body of Christ.
In Christ,
Pastor Portier