

Smoky Mountain Reflections, October 2012

Fall greetings! The leaves will turn this month as our Lord puts on beautiful bursts of color, the last big hurrah for all the burgeoning growth that took place this past year. The four-month break from mowing the lawn is just around the corner...even though I enjoy mowing the lawn, I also like the break. The two volunteer pumpkins that grew in my back yard this year will move to the front porch to join all the fall decorations I pulled down for Gerda just a few days ago. So as nature goes asleep and we get into a new winter rhythm, longer nights, sunnier cooler days and all the tradition that comes with this time of year, I can't help but feel upbeat. Of course being the optimist that I am, it is an easy thing to feel upbeat...all is well in my universe and I hope and pray the same for you.

Another significant thing that we celebrate along with Hallow'en (yes, the apostrophe belongs there as it is a word derived from Hallows Eve) the evening before All Saints Day or All Hallows Day. In our Lutheran circles and in much of Protestantism, we also celebrate the 495th anniversary of the Reformation—that fateful day in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses or topics for debate on the church door in Wittenberg. Luther was trying to get the church back to its biblical roots and to dispose of non-biblical practices. While this is a debate within Trinitarian Christianity, one thing all Christians who are members of the invisible church on earth can acknowledge and agree on, is the fact that there are really only two religions on earth—those who are members of the body of Christ and those who are not.

That may seem to be a bit over simplistic, but it is the truth. Christianity is the only religion in which the god comes to you, and gives His life for you in order for you to have the goal of the religion—faith in Him which leads to eternity in paradise with Him. From this faith, works of love for God and neighbor flow as a natural response of gratitude for this great undeserved gift from God. In all other religions you must go to the god seeking to appease, and garner favor through your good works. This applies even to non-religious belief systems, the goal of which is pleasing the ultimate authority or god in order to earn that authority's approval or kindness. Let's consider the following examples of other religions or belief systems that are all based on "works righteousness", that is you working to get right with your god, not Him making you righteous through Christ.

Atheism and Agnosticism: these are only concerned with pleasing one god—self. If I say it is ok, then I am good enough to please my god....me. I am the ultimate authority so if I meet my standard, then I reach the ultimate goal of my belief system...self satisfaction. **Mormonism & Islam:** I cover these together because they are so similar. Both have no concept of hell, just levels of heaven. Both teach that if you please God you will be rewarded either with your own planet to be god over and populate by having much sex, or a paradise with wine that does not inebriate and 70 virgins with swelling breast to have eternal sex with. See how similar they are—they must have the same author. **Modern Judaism:** It believes that by pleasing God you will be blessed by Him in this life and the next; however, because they reject the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ, they end up relying on their own works which are as worthless as ours. All forms of **Eastern Mysticism:** Buddhism, Gnosticism, Hinduism, Kabbalah, Sufism, Taoism—all believe in various ways that all reality is an illusion and by being good (which is hard to define) you will eventually be good enough to reunite with the pure enlightenment or consciousness. So as you can see, in all of these major belief systems you must be good to get to "god," however you define "god," be it yourself, a powerful yet fickle being, or a state of mind.

Another thing that sets Christianity apart is its existence in time. It is the only faith that functions fully in all of history and has a plan for the salvation of "ALL" from the beginning to the end of time. Those who lived before Christ are redeemed by Christ through their faith in God's promise and all afterward are saved through faith in fulfillment of that promise. If anyone does not have access to this redeeming truth, it is a result of human sin, not God's indifference. With the exception of Judaism all other faith systems do not concern themselves with anyone who preexisted their religion. Mormonism is less than 200 years old. There are at least a half dozen or more belief systems that are less than 500 years old. Islam is only about 1400 years old and a number of eastern systems are less than 1500 years old. Only paganism and Hinduism predate Christianity, but Hinduism, like all forms of Eastern Mysticism, does not concern itself with history. And what we know of ancient paganism is from the historical sciences, not any modern variations that have little or no root in any history that is not plagued with massive gaps.

So the two basic faith groups are this: 1) Work to get to your god and if (when) you fall shorttoo bad, or 2) God came to you; you will fall short, but He paid the price; work in response to this great gift.

Enjoy your fall season.

In Christ,

Pastor Portier