

# *Smoky Mountain Bible Institute*

## *Biblical Studies 113, Ladders III*

Last month we discussed the second ladder; the ladder of emotions, feelings and enthusiasm. You may be wondering “why ladders?” The answer is that these categorizations of the many incorrect ways in which we strive to reach God or “climb” to him. On to ladders 1 & 3.

Ladder #1: the mind, knowledge about God, we will convince no one about the gospel with our rhetorical skills. However good Rhetoricians (debaters) should use their knowledge to be ready to give an answer to those who ask about the hope you have within you. Trusting more in logic than God himself however makes our intellect god. Even Christians who are good logical debaters can fall into this trap, especially if they have degrees and credentials. Degrees and credentials are good things as long as you do not trust in them above God. If someone tells you that they can prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus is who He claims to be because they have irrefutable proof, proceed with caution. The Holy Spirit, not our mind is the purveyor and giver of saving faith.

Finally Ladder #3: works. “Look at what I am doing; look at all the great stuff Jesus gave me because I am a hard worker for the kingdom and He clearly rewards those who follow His laws and do His will.” This of course does not tell you about Jesus and what He did for you, it tells you how good this “believer” thinks he is. What if I am poor, or my car gets repossessed; what if I lose my job or my home? Does this mean Jesus does not love me and I just need to work harder to earn His blessing? This prosperity or works righteousness gospel falsely teaches that God loves and blesses you based on you and your good works. There are some real problems with this kind of false gospel. Some theological terms for this ladder are “works righteousness” & “preaching prosperity”.

If this were true, then all happy, healthy, wealthy people would be the clearest examples of good Christians, and vice-versa. While this may describe the membership found at some of the more popular self-help, have your best life now kind of “churches”, it is no way to describe a biblical Christian. We might like to think that a life of faith is one of flowers, pleasant smells, soft luxurious clothing, fine furniture, clean, pleasant surroundings, delicious food, fine wines, beer, brats, beautiful women, handsome men, and full bank accounts, but scripture and history paint a very different picture. A life of faith in Christ is one of pain, suffering and endurance. More Christians were martyred for the faith in the 20th century than in the previous 19 centuries combined. Christians today are getting their heads cut off all over the world. Some will say the end must be coming soon because it has never been this bad, but there is nothing new under the sun; suffering for the faith is a long-standing reality of a life of faith. Consider Noah, Job, the apostles, and the millions if not billions of others martyred for the faith. Paul brags of all the scars and wounds he has for preaching the faith; not about his fine tent or camel.

One of the church fathers, Tertullian, is quoted as saying “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”, and history bears this out. In times of great persecution, the church experiences great growth. The real Jesus came for, loves, and serves all sinners and tax collectors. It does not matter what side of the tracks you come from. You know you are living right not if you are blessed with material things but if your activities reflect a redeemed life of repentance that seeks to love God and neighbor as best you can with his help.

We all at some level look to these ladders as ways to get to God without Jesus. Ladder #1 is the one I often find myself climbing, because it sure would be nice to be able to prove God is who he claims to be. While there is solid evidence of God in all scientific disciplines, it is not knowledge and evidence that saves, but faith in Christ. You cannot prove God to anyone; only the Holy Spirit can create faith. And reason is but a maidservant to her mistress, faith. As long as the maidservant and the mistress sleep in their own beds they get along nicely. However if the maidservant tries to sleep in her mistresses bed, confusion, idolatry and anarchy are sure to follow. We walk by faith and not by sight, so if your pastor says he can prove to you that God exists, remind him that he cannot. Another recently published book that does a good job of discussing this topic is “Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? 12 False Christs” by Matthew Richard.

Till next month,  
In Christ, Pastor Portier