

The Wednesday Word, May 5, 2010: The Stupidity of Unbelief! Part 2

There is nothing quite so stupid as someone attempting to do good works in order to earn God's favor and acceptance (Matt 7:27, Job 9:20). Such behavior is unbelief in its worst form and also a severe form of 'spiritual lunacy' (Luke 24:25). Religious un-believers think God's standards are so low that He will accept any old decayed and fractured efforts as being equal to His own righteousness. If the poor man who is living like this knew himself as God does, he would no more try such nonsense than he would think of attempting to scale a sheer precipice using a piece of string.

But the religious, self-righteous unbeliever thinks that his good works can bring God into his debt. Take for example the case of the late lamented Edward Malloy of County Cork, Ireland. The inscription on his tombstone reads as follows,

"I. H. S.

Sacred to the memory of the benevolent Edward Molloy; a friend of humanity, the father of the poor; he employed the wealth of this world only to procure the riches of the next; and leaving a balance of merit in the book of life, he made heaven debtor to mercy. He died October 17th, 1818, aged 90."

Amusing, but tragic!

I've always found that the most difficult people to reach with the gospel are the self-righteous—the ones who reject their need of a righteousness entirely outside of themselves (Romans 10:3). They deny their guiltiness and hold the foolish hope that they shall enter into heaven by some work of their own. Nothing but the power of the Holy Spirit can undo their foolishness!

Others, however, who know they are bad, humanly speaking, are potentially closer to heaven than the self-righteous for at least they know their sin has separated them from God. Knowing this, they can sue for mercy at the foot of the cross (1 Peter 2:24). The self-righteous, on the other hand, are in imminent danger because they equate their righteousness as being equal to that of God's. In other words, they have an awfully low opinion of the Lord and understand neither His holiness nor the necessity of the cross. They may be good church people, but they are unbelievers. They are lost (Phil 3:18)!

Did you know that Hell is full of 'good' people? They were so 'good' that they saw no need of the Redeemer. Martin Luther said that although he scarcely ever preached a sermon without giving vent against self-righteousness he found "that still I cannot preach it down. Still men will boast in what they can do, and mistake the path to heaven to be a road paved by their own merits, and not a way besprinkled by the blood of the atonement of Jesus Christ."

Self-righteousness, however, must eventually wither and die in the light of the cross. The cross teaches loudly and clearly that everything required for our safe passage to Heaven has already been accomplished. The cross shows us that our substitute's finished work has entirely satisfied the Father. Our righteousness is now found in Christ alone (Phil 3:9).

Rejecting the righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone, the unbelieving self-righteous man projects a wretched misrepresentation of God's character and thus slanders His gracious name. The self-righteous believe a lie and reject the truth. Their unbelief is an attempt to obliterate the cross and to destroy the gracious name of Christ. Unbelief worships another god, an unknown god, no indeed a non-existent god from whom comes no peace for the sinner and no rest for the weary.

May we be given grace to accept and trust entirely in the character of God as demonstrated in Christ crucified. May we yet learn to rest entirely on the One who saves to the uttermost (Heb 7:25)!

“Lay your deadly doing down
Down at Jesus' feet
Stand in Him and Him alone,
Gloriously complete.”

And That's the Gospel Truth!