

Letters to American Church- Chapters 7-10

Chapter 7- Two Errors of Faith

Error #1- Works vs Faith- a lifelong debate....

During the period referred to as the High Medieval Church there was great corruption within the Church. It was also accompanied by a focus shift from faith to works.

After a long personal struggle with moral perfection related to the works/faith debate, Luther was relieved to conclude that Jesus' death on the Cross- not our efforts saved us. To be justified, we needed to simply believe in Him and what He did. Our job was just to believe. These were central to Luther's faith: "The righteous shall live by faith." Romans 1:17, ""Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God..." 5:1, and "...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but thought faith in Jesus Christ.." Galatians 7:16. Hence, the battle cry of the Reformation became "sola fide", "faith alone".

Some feel Luther was a bit over zealous and overcorrected a bit when he translated Romans 3:28 from Greek to German, and added "alone" - "For we hold that one is justified by faith (alone) apart from works of the law." (p. 58)

Initially he wanted to also leave out the Epistle of James... as he felt there were contradictions. James wrote "...so faith apart from works is dead". (2:26) "Be doers of the Word- and not hearers only." (1:22). James also reminded us that "...even the demons believe and tremble!" Our actions really illustrate what we truly believe.

According to Metaxas: "Luther had, in this zeal, made an idol of his idea of faith- so that genuine faith to which God calls us was crowded out." Regarding James he commented, "If you are under the impression that your 'faith' is all that you need to get into Heaven, that's fine because that is true. But you had better know **for sure** that you actually have faith.....faith that is illustrated by our actions." (p.60)

Error #2- Faith as a Fig Leaf- Doctrinal Statements

Adam and Even tried to fool God— they did not ask God what to do- but tried to cover their sin with fig leaves- almost like with works of righteousness....!

God made them garments of skin to cover them instead- blood had to be shed- a life taken- to cover their problem. God **Himself** had to do this- pointing to Jesus' eventual death on the Cross.

The word "religion" can have a pejorative sense- we can try to earn our way back to God- by our own behavior- while *minimizing* our disobedience as Adam and Eve did. Instead, we need to humbly confess and not compound matters...

"Statements of Faith" for Churches and organizations can be quite similar to fig leaves. Faith can be reduced to an "intellectual assent". Even the *Nicene Creed* can be downgraded to fig leaf status. God is not interested in what we claim- but what we actually believe- what is in our **heart and action**.

The inaction of the American churches results from them pointing to their creeds and confessions- but they remain silent and do not speak. Have we forgotten our First Love? Have we relegated faith to **mere intellectual assent**?

How do I show my faith to God? Do others look at me , in my hours of trial, and see that I do not fear death because I know Jesus already defeated it ??

Chapter 8- The Church Paralyzed

In the true Christian faith, it is less of an issue what we believe than the issue of WHOM we trust.

Demons believe in God- but despise Him. Do we trust God with our whole being?

Os Guinness, in *The Great Quest*, compares shooting a stag from a far distance with a rifle, as opposed to a more visceral lion pouncing upon the stag. The lions whole being is required. We need to engage with God and our faith *with everything within us*, like the lion.

Jesus said that the Greatest and First Commandment was to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.”(Matthew 22). A commandment is NOT a suggestion....we need a wholehearted, passionate devotion. Intellectual assent is NOT enough, and is offensive to God.

We need to go beyond belief and trust God fully- it can't just be “cheap grace”:

“I can go and sin as much as I want- and rely on grace to forgive me.the Christian life has become nothing more than living in the world and as the world- *prohibited from being different* than the world “for the sake of grace’.....My only duty is to leave the world for an hour or so to go to Church to be assured my sins are forgiven. I need to no longer follow Christ, for ‘cheap grace’, the **bitterest foe** of discipleship....has freed me from that.” (p. 72)

In Bonhoeffer's book, *Nachfolge*, which means **discipleship**, or “to follow after”- he stressed the necessity of obedience in the Christian life.

Believing that God's grace does everything and we do nothing is yet another, tragic misunderstanding of the Gospel.

Is his indictment true in the American Church today? We have the German Church's example and mistakes to learn from, we also have their Prophet to warn us.. **If we fail to act, whose sin is greater?**

Chapter 9- The Idol of Evangelism

Discipleship is not evangelism....

“Idolizing evangelism...may cause us to never say anything that might offend....on some infinitely less important issue than salvation...might we drive that person away ...from asserting to a saving faith in Jesus. This myopic view can paralyze us- we have simply reduced the gospel to someone's intellectual assent to God's view of salvation. We can dispense from fighting for justice or against slavery- and relegate those things to the “worldly list,” not as important as salvation. Won't all of that other stuff burn anyway ? Does “nonjudgmentalism” really bring people to Jesus and an obedient Christian lifestyle? This is a “hypertrophied” view of evangelism. (p.76)

Jesus asks us to speak Truth to power. John the Baptist corrected Herod regarding his immoral marriage. Jesus called the Pharisees “white washed tombs” and even “devils”. Today, Jesus would have been criticized for “toxic masculinity”- turning over the money changer tables. We know He was the example of perfect masculinity with holiness, love and justice.

God judges out of a Father's love, like a perfect parent. He warned Israel through the prophets, "If you do not do X, Y will happen- if you do X, Z will be the happy result."

In these examples, He may have appeared harsh, but He spoke the truth. Jesus trusted His Father with the eternal souls of those who could not bear to hear His hard teaching. Do we trust Him? Do some pastor fear loosing goodwill over expressing Biblical Truths?

We have the solemn obligation to speak up against grave injustices- The German Church had a false idea of evangelism- speak only the Gospel- and *keep the peace*....

Some pastors today are proud that have not be cancelled- to not lose their opportunity "to preach the Gospel". Being **muzzled** is a theologically *narrow* way to "preach the Gospel." (p.81)They help the enemies of freedom and of the Gospel- and make it more difficult for others in a free society to speak the Truth.

Bonhoeffer felt, "Only he who cries out for the Jews may sing Gregorian Chants." If we as Christians are unwilling to show agape love- and risk fighting for those suffering, we have no voice. We are not Christians, but frauds. If we are aware our government is looking the other way on certain injustices yet boldly making "a show" against others, we must speak out. (Two-tiered justice system...)

What issues are WE silent about today: abortion? selling body parts? school pornography and gender confusion "curriculum"?unproven "science"? forced mandates?, socialism and communistic CRT ideology that is pushed everywhere?

Speak boldly, fight for Truth. If we allow our enemies to tell us what we can and cannot say....we have taken our eyes off of God!!!

If we honor Him in all we say or do, He will honor us. Do we act as if we believe this?

Chapter 10- Speak Truth with Love

Pilate to Jesus-" What is truth?"

Caiaphas to Jesus- " Do you understand that is it better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish?"

Amazingly ironic questions from two very unaware speakers.....prophetically speaking Truth and used by God.....

Do we understand that Truth and facts are not the same thing? Truth stands outside of time and space. Jesus is the human image of Truth.

Doctrinal statements are NOT enough. Truth is far more than ideas. Jesus is alive, immortal and eternal. Truth and Love cannot be separated. We cannot reduce Truth to creeds or confessions, as this would be **reductionism**.

Truth is a Person- intertwined with Love. So not to speak an uncomfortable Truth to someone who needs to hear it, is *not loving but harmful*.

Two opposite ways to err:

- 1) *Insensitive* speaking so much “truth” - with little love or compassion- in order to justify ourselves— and prove we are uncompromising purveyors of truth.
- 2) To show so much “love” we misrepresent the real Love of God- by forsaking His Truth- to avoid controversy or disagreeing- the *progressive thought* today.

Pastors must speak fearlessly regarding male and female, sexuality, same sex attraction, transgender ,abortion , human rights violations etc. To be silent is to partake in this evil. Due to the **Spiral of Silence** it has become more difficult to speak out, This **must and can** be reversed!

In Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* he spoke Truth concerning abortion:

“Destruction of the embryo in the mother’s womb is a violation of the right to live which God bestowed upon this nascent life. To raise the question whether we are here concerned with the human being or not is merely to confuse the issue. The simple fact that God certainly intended to create a human being and that this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of life. And that is nothing but murder.”