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RADICAL - Part 2

(Last month I quoted from the book, Radical, by David Platt, a book which I seriously recommend for your personal study or a study in your small group or church. More from his book:)

"Yes, God is a loving Father, but he is also a wrathful Judge. In some sense, God hates sinners. You might ask, "What happened to God who hates the sin but loves the sinner?" The Bible happened to it. Fourteen times in the first fifty Psalms we see descriptions of God's hatred toward sinners, his wrath toward liars, and so on. In the same chapter where we find John 3:16, one of the most famous verses concerning God's love, we also find one of the most neglected verses concerning God's wrath: *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.* (John 3:36)

The reality about humanity is that each of us is born with an evil, God-hating heart. Genesis 8:21 says that every inclination of man's heart is evil from childhood, and Jesus' words in Luke 11:13 assume that we know we are evil. Many people say, "Well, I have always loved God," but the reality is, no one has. We may have loved a god that we made up in our minds, but the God of the Bible, we hate. We rebel against God, disobey the laws of God, ignore God, purposely forget God, and over and over we say "No!" to God.

The Bible describes us as enemies of God and objects of his wrath. We are spiritually dead and eternally separated from God, and we can do nothing to change our status before Him. No man who is a slave can set himself free, no woman who is blind can give herself sight, no one who is dead can cause himself to come to life. We think we are not evil and certainly not spiritually dead. I can become a better me and experience my best life now. That's why God is there - - God loves me and has a plan to fix my life. We exalt self-sufficiency, self-esteem, and self-confidence. We already have a fairly high view of our morality, so when we add a little prayer, a little dose of church attendance, and obedience to some of the Bible, we feel sure that we will be all right in the end.

Note the contrast when you diagnose the problem biblically. The modern-day gospel says, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Just follow these steps, and you will be saved." The bible says, "You are an enemy of God, dead in your sin, and blind to your desperate condition. Therefore, you are radically dependent on God to do something in your life that you cannot do." The gospel is good news! Picture Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. As he kneels before his Father, drops of sweat and blood fall together from his head. Why is he in such agony and pain? The answer is not because he is afraid of crucifixion (as is implied in The Passion of the Christ). Jesus prayed, *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me."* The cup is not a reference to a wooden cross; it is a reference to divine judgment. It is the cup of God's wrath. All God's holy wrath and hatred toward sin and sinners, stored up since the beginning of the world, is about to be poured out on him, and he is sweating blood at the thought of it.

One preacher described it as if you and I were standing a few yards away from a dam of water ten thousand miles high and ten thousand miles wide. Suddenly that dam was breached and the torrent came crashing toward us. Just before it reached us, the ground in front of us opened up and swallowed it all. At the cross, Christ drank the full cup of the wrath of God and cried out, "It is finished!" This is the gospel. All who trust in him escape God's righteous judgment and will be reconciled to God forever. That is why none of our man-made catch phrases seem adequate. "Ask Jesus to come into your heart. Invite Jesus to come into your life. Pray this prayer, sign this card, walk down this aisle and accept Jesus as your personal Savior." You will not find any of these phrases in the Bible. You will not find a verse in Scripture where people are told to "Bow your heads, close your eyes, and repeat after me." You will not find a place where a superstitious sinner's prayer is even mentioned. You will not find an emphasis on accepting Jesus. *Accept him?* Do we think Jesus needs our acceptance?

Surely more than praying a prayer is involved. Surely more than religious attendance is warranted. Surely this gospel evokes unconditional surrender of all that we are and all that we have to all that he is. You and I desperately need to

consider whether we have ever truly trusted in Christ for our salvation. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned us in clear and terrifying words: *Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not (perform many good works) in your name," and I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"*

We have been told all that is required is a one-time decision, a mere intellectual ascent to Jesus, and after that we need not worry about his commands, his standards, or his glory. We have a ticket to heaven, and we can live however we want on earth. Our sin will be tolerated along the way. This "gospel" is a "different gospel" from what one finds in the words of the Son of God. His gospel demands and enables us to turn from our sin, take up our cross, die to ourselves, and follow Jesus. His salvation consists of a deep wrestling in our souls with the sinfulness of our hearts, the depth of our depravity, and the desperation of our need for his grace. Jesus is not to be merely accepted or invited in. We must yield to him our immediate and total surrender."

(In view of all this, next month we will consider Jesus "Great Commission" to the church: "Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe everything that I have taught you." David Platt says, "Jesus has created each of us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth - not to live the American Dream - and I propose that anything less than radical devotion to this purpose is unbiblical Christianity.)

HE IS INNOCENT!

Seven times in Scripture those who were unbelievers or enemies of Christ declared that He was an innocent man:

- Pilate's wife. Matt. 27:19
- Pilate. Mark 15:14, Matt. 27:24, Luke 23:4
- The Centurion. Matt. 27:54, Luke 23:47, Mark 15:39
- And others. Matt. 27:54
- One of the thieves on the cross. Luke 23:42
- Judas. Matt. 27:4
- Caiphas, the high priest. John 11:49

LOVE NOT THE THINGS IN THE WORLD

Following is a story I heard on Christian car-radio (is that a category?) the other day by a Christian businessman named David (and I never heard his last name):

"I dropped in on an upper-scale pen shop with the intention of buying a nice fountain pen for a friend. The salesman took me to an inner room that was furnished sumptuously. He brought me a cappuccino and sat me down in a leather chair that began to massage my back. The salesman said, "You are a lucky man. We have a fine pen that for the first time since I have worked for this establishment has been marked down to half-price. Wait just a moment."

In a few moments he returned with a beautiful teakwood box that was inlaid with gold. He said, "This is the pen's home." I said, "It has a house?" The light in the room seemed to change and focus on the teakwood box. Dramatically the salesman opened the box to reveal a beautiful pen, encrusted with jewels, resting on black velvet. The man said, "These pens are hand made by craftsmen, and they take four months to create."

I was feeling overwhelmed and asked, "How much does it cost?" He said, "Today it is only half-price." I asked, "Half of what?" He said, "Today it is only nineteen." I said, "Nineteen what?" He said, "Nineteen thousand dollars." I exhaled and made a facial expression that communicated to the salesman that my friend was certainly not that good a friend.

I asked him, "You mean that the regular price of this pen is \$38,000?" He said yes. I said, "Let me ask you a question. Have you sold any of these pens for that price?" He said, "Oh, yes." "May I ask how many you have sold for that amount?" He said, "Almost forty." I had one more question: "How in the world do you get people to pay that much money for a fountain pen?" He said, "It's easy. Get them to love it."

HATRED OF GOD?

It is very clear from many statements in both the Old and New Testaments (and as mentioned in the first article of this Newsletter) that people are not just ignorant of God or neutral toward God but that they actually hate Him. They have animosity toward God, toward Christ, and toward those who represent Him. This is specifically what Jesus told the disciples in the upper room in John 15 and 16. I have been reflecting about why this is so, and following are some of the reasons that occurred to me:

- We want to control and rule our own lives. Remember Jesus' parable about the men in a certain kingdom who said about the King: *"We don't want this man to rule over us!"*
- Deception. Jesus said to His disciples: *"There will be men who will kill you and think they are serving God."*
- Love of money. When Jesus taught about loving God instead of loving Mammon, *"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, sneered at Jesus."*
- Love of power and position. The crowd, instigated by the Pharisees, cried out, *"We have no god but Caesar."* In Acts 19, remember when Demetrius complained about the preaching of the disciples, and said, "These guys are threatening the worship of the great goddess Diana, and it is also threatening our business!"
- Sexual sin or some other addiction that has become a person's god.
- Comfort and security.
- Rejection by our family or culture.
- Fear that we cannot measure up to God's requirements. Which of course we can't except by His enabling.
- The primary reason is that we are born sinners. Adam's blood is in our veins, and we inherit the curse.

MINISTRY

It probably sounds wrong to say that you enjoyed going to someone's funeral, but that is honestly how I felt about going to my friend Burt Swardstrom's funeral in Los Angeles. Burt and I were pastors in Loveland, Colorado, about thirty years ago and maintained our friendship over the years. He ended up working for Mastermedia International, a ministry to film people, news people, and all who are the influencers of culture. I was greatly surprised that in his last days he told his kids to ask me to be a part of his service. I found what I have found time and again in the final services for believers, that although there was sadness at the parting, it was truly a celebration.

His children (three sons and a daughter, just like with Doris and me) are wonderful, godly people, and there were great stories and laughter galore.

Let us truly pray that it will be so at our end. Amen?

"I ALMOST DIDN'T LET HIM IN!"

There is an old story about King Edward VII of England and his queen. One day they were walking through the woods, got lost in conversation, and ended up at a great distance from the palace. Then the queen turned her ankle very badly. They managed to struggle to the home of a poor man who had already gone to bed. The king knocked on the door, and the man called out, "Who's there?"

The king answered, "It is Edward, the king. Let me in!"

The man thought someone was playing a game on him, so he told the king to go away and went back to bed. But the king, needing help badly, knocked again. Again the man inside called out, "What do you want?"

"I tell you it is your king. It is Edward, the king. Let me in!"

The man, thoroughly aroused by now, shouted, "I'll teach you to bother me when I'm trying to sleep!" He threw open the door, ready to throw the pest from the porch, to discover, with astonishment, that it really was the king. He quickly invited the king and queen into his home and went for help.

As the years came and went the poor man told over and over the story of that special night, years before, when the king

and queen actually came to his house. He always ended the story the same way: "And to think, I almost didn't let him in!"

Reflection: Perhaps someone who reads this simple story will be touched by it, as I was years ago. I reflected on what a mess my life was Before Christ, and what would have happened to me and my family except for Him. On the darkest of nights, when I was thoroughly asleep, He knocked on my door. Not just once, but again and again. Very reluctantly, with much complaining, with much resistance and stubbornness, I arose from my bed, opened the door, and discovered the King! And to think, I almost didn't let Him in!

God Bless,

Glenn

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