



SAFE HARBOR
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The Final Edition

As the end of the year 2015 is rapidly approaching it is time to ask some questions that will propel us into the coming year. As is my habit I will not take a look at the helter-skelter world of politics but want to reflect on the world where we live. For politics is really a fantasy world where truth is abused, abased, ridiculed and distained. It is a world where words are accompanied by actions and hope lies in a dusty heap.

My first question of reflection is simply: "Have I(we) been striving to grow closer to God in a spiritually nourishing relationship?". In Genesis we read that God came into the Garden to talk with Adam. Adam hid for he had exchanged the half-truth lie of Satan for his relationship with his Creator.

We also are bombarded with lies and half-truths by the world we live in. If we reject them then we, as Christians, become mocked, ridiculed and rejected for our beliefs. If we follow then we might suffer the consequences of our faith. In Romans, Paul writes, "They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die- yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them". (Rom. 1:32)

The consequence of our answer extends into eternity.

The second question of reflection is: "Do I(we) feel the task of being witnesses to God's holiness is too daunting and fearful?". The culture we live in has the motto of "Why not have it all, no matter what the cost". Yet humankind was created to stewards of God's Creation not leeches.

I marvel at the techno-culture that insists upon having the very latest of "toys" in our lives. We look for the most expensive of cars and the auto industry has accommodated by offering "affordable" leases that when due might not be so affordable. Being from a

generation of Keds sneakers for two dollars is cannot understand the hype over the very expensive sneakers and their promises of performance. Yet we are bombarded in the media by defining the good life as what can be accumulated. The unfortunate truth is that too often church leadership has taken this very attitude with the gospel of prosperity that is preached.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes, "So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem;...Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it and again all is vanity and a chasing after the wind, and there is nothing to be gained under the sun." Even those who engage in acts of generosity and charity will find the futility of not being remembered.

So we must consider our witness to God's holiness with not only words but our life.

A third question of reflection is: "Have I (we) brought true comfort into our sphere of influence?" Every day we pass by people who are in need of some form of comfort. They may be experiencing grief or distress, their world might be falling apart, their despair overwhelming.

Job chided his three friends on the fact that they came to him with empty comfort. Inside them was the spirit which gloated over his misfortune, his grief and his despair. Their words did not comfort but only sought to accuse. Too often Christians come across the same way in their response to those needing comfort.

Jesus met people where they were. He did not invite them to the Temple or to a service. He met the needs of those he helped where they were, responded to their need and gave them a new life with God. A church does not need to be magnificent but its people need to be responsive to the needs of its community. No church should engage its parishioners in as slavery of lavishness at the expense of extending help to those in need. It is true that Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you". In context he was saying there will always be opportunity to extend God's love to those we might consider unlovely.

"So let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16)

Reflections

I want to reflect some on what it means to be a Christian. I do this because there are so many misunderstandings among western culture about what it means to be a Christian. This is by no means an all-inclusive list but contains the basic tenets of the Christian person.

The Christian person is first and foremost a son of God by right given by God Himself. (Jn. 1:12-13) This person is born or rather reborn by the Spirit of God. This spiritual birth restores the deadened spirit of a person to a living viable entity who can now be able to walk again with God. It is a birth or a new creation that is brought about by Jesus Christ. Old things are to pass away and one's life is then given to the obedience to the will of God. While symbolized in various sacraments and rituals, new birth comes through conscious action to return to God.

In doing so the problem of sin must be dealt with. Here the work of Christ becomes most relevant. For Christ entered into the holy places by the means of his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption. He offered himself without blemish to God to purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hb. 9: 11-28) In doing so Christ paid the penalty for sin. This releases the Christian from the power of sin, the weakness of the flesh and servitude to the Devil. To be released from the power of sin brings the right to live as God intended when in Eden he pronounced that all was good.

The redeemed Christian is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. As such the Living God is able to reside within us. And as we are this temple we no longer belong to ourselves but rather have been purchased by God through his son Jesus Christ. (1Cor. 6:19-20) So as God's temple we must continually glorify God by our thoughts, words and deeds. Thus we are to cleanse ourselves and bring holiness to completion for this is the will of God.

A Christian is person with a solid confidence brought about by faith. Faith produces hope and is the realization of faith. This gives the confidence to be able to face the challenges of life knowing that God cares and he will work his will for his glory. The Christian becomes strongest when faced with persecution and trials. This is because in the hour of trial that touches human frailty the power of God is made perfect. (2 Cor. 12:9)

Finally, at least for now, the Christian is marked as a minister of reconciliation. Since the Fall God has sought to reconcile humankind to himself. The Christian is reconciled to God through Christ. Having come, through faith, to this reconciliation we are to now show others the way to the Cross that leads others to the grace that God extends. It is not by dragging and pushing but rather being a child of God and living the life of love and hope that he gives to us. (2Cor. 5:16-20)

The old Creation passed away after the Fall. There is a new Creation that encompasses everyone who has faith to come to Christ. Let us live as part of this new Creation.

Words of Promise

*Behold God is my Salvation.
I will trust and not be afraid.
For the Lord God is my strength and my song,
And he has become my salvation.
Isa. 12:2*

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