

HOW REAL IS YOUR FAITH?
DOCTRINE MATTERS
2 TIMOTHY 3:15- 4:5
JUNE 3, 2012
TRINITY SUNDAY

After the 9-11 attacks there was a special worship service at the National Cathedral.

Present at and helping lead the service were
 a Catholic bishop, a Jewish rabbi,
 the president of the Islamic society of America, a Muslim musician,
 Hindu priest, and a Buddhist nun.

Interestingly, no Protestant clergy were invited to participate.

It was a mix of a little of this, a little of that.

There was plenty of pageantry in the televised service.

Many people said it was just wonderful to see the different religions all together.

Some suggested it should be so, because they all believe in the same God, after all.

Really?

Hindus believe in thousands or even millions of deities.

Many Buddhists do not believe in a personal god at all.

Muslims, Jews and Christians each believe in just one God.

But beyond that there are significant differences.

For instance, both Islam and Judaism explicitly reject the idea that

Jesus is the Son of God or God incarnate,

or that he paid for sins on the cross and rose from the dead.

They reject the doctrine of the Trinity,

that the one God is a divine community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But, some still ask, does it really matter?

I have heard it said, time and time again:

It doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you're sincere.

Really?

The 12th century Catholic hierarchy sincerely believed they were serving God
 when they launched the Inquisition and tortured those who did not believe as they did.

Slave owners in the deep south, and later Klansmen,
 truly believed in the racial superiority of whites over blacks.

Adolf Hitler truly believed in the racial superiority of the so-called Aryan race.

The 900 members of the People's Temple sincerely believed their teacher Jim Jones
 when they set up their compound in Guyana and drank poisoned Kool-Aid.

The Branch Davidians really believed the teaching of David Koresh
 when they withdrew to their compound outside of Waco and fought with the ATF.

Islamic jihadists sincerely believe they are serving Allah
 when they strap on a suicide vest and take innocent lives.

Do we really want to say it doesn't matter what you believe,
 so long as you sincerely believe it?

The Christian Church has long insisted that it does matter what you believe,
 that Jesus is God incarnate, the Word made flesh.

(Jn.1:14)

and that Christian doctrine focused on Him

is the most complete and accurate understanding of God.

Jesus himself said,

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.”

(Jn.14:6)

In the first generation of preaching the gospel, Peter said,

“Salvation is found in no one else,

for there is no other name under heaven given to men

by which we must be saved.”

(Ac.4:12)

They didn’t go around preaching that Jesus was one among many good ways to know God.

They didn’t give up their lives for that modern pluralistic proposition.

They insisted he is THE way.

But that seems sort of narrow-minded and intolerant to many people.

Today you can find preachers who will tell you all sorts of things.

Jesus was a good man in close touch with God.

He was a great moral example.

We ought not worry about specific moral teachings in the Bible,

but just focus on love.

Some will say it’s really not so much about God as it is

social justice for the poor and marginalized.

There are many ways to God,

and Jesus is the one I choose.

In this postmodern, scientific world,

it is foolish to read the Bible and take it at face value.

We need to get behind all the primitive mythology to discover its meaning.

And suddenly it all becomes very elastic,

so you can bend it and stretch it to fit whatever you want it to fit.

Interestingly, that kind of teaching is not as new as we might think.

In fact, there was some of that going on while the New Testament was still being written.

Toward the end of his career,

the apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy,

to encourage him in his ministry,

insisting that he teach sound doctrine to his congregation,

even if some would rather hear a message

they might consider to be more modern and up-to-date.

He reminded Timothy of his own upbringing,

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

Notice, it’s first a matter of the God-given origin of Scripture,

that it is “God-breathed,” or divinely inspired.

And then Paul points out that it is useful,

not just for intellectual study,

but for shaping lives through “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

This book is intended to make us righteous,

more Christ-like in character and behavior.

He reminded Timothy of that

because there were those in the church who thought the Bible was too narrow and restrictive.

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

The first thing I hear in these verses are those strong words about

those will not put up with sound doctrine.

Their itching ears want to hear other things.

But even the words I tend to read right past carry significance in this setting.

So let’s do some close study on this passage.

Notice in v.1: Jesus will judge us all one day.

He is, of course, the one who loves us more than any other.

He loves us so much that he died to pay the penalty for our sins.

But they day will come when he will judge the world.

He's not going to pretend everything is OK,
that things we did wrong didn't matter.

He's going to judge.

He is coming back, you know.

His return, judgment, kingdom is backdrop for what Paul tells Timothy to do.

Therefore, because Jesus will return and bring judgment...

v.2 Preach the Word.

Not a word, not my word, not your word, but THE Word, God's Word.

Paul has in mind a definite message.

Be prepared in or out of season,

ready to speak God's Word at any time.

Not just when it's time to be in pulpit or in front of the classroom,
but at drop of the hat in everyday life.

Because the Word of God is not just nice ideas to float,
but it has practical implications in real life.

Paul restates the purpose of Scripture:

to correct, rebuke, and encourage.

It's about life-change.

Preach it, he says, with great patience and careful instruction.

It's not like you can say it once, and you're done.

It has to be taught over and over and over.

Like when I was learning the multiplication tables.

My parents made me take my place at the kitchen table
with the multiplication tables in front of me,
memorizing a row at a time.

I do not memorize anything easily.

So it was a real challenge for me.

Reading it, writing it, saying it, over and over and over.

I thought I'd die of old age chained to the kitchen table.

Teach and preach the Word of God with great patience.

And with careful instruction.

Be careful that you get it right and present it accurately.

What you teach and preach influences

the doctrine, the theology, the spirituality,
the lives and eternities of those who hear you.

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel was told by God that
he was responsible for delivering the message God gave him.

If people did not receive it,
that was not Ezekiel's problem.

They'd be responsible for their own responses.

But if Ezekiel did not deliver the message,
if he held back because he knew it would be unpopular,
he would be responsible for

anything bad that happened to them
because of their ignorance of the truth. (Ez.35)

As important as it is that every individual gets it right,
 it's even more important that those who teach and preach get it right.
 James wrote, "We who teach will be judged more strictly." (Jas.3:1)

In v.3 Paul gets to the situation Timothy is probably already facing in his church.

Some won't put up with sound doctrine.

Biblical truth can sometimes be disturbing.

When the Bible pinpoints a sin pattern I'm dealing with,

I'd like to just turn the page.

When I'm stewing on how someone hurt my feelings or did something thoughtless,

I really don't want to hear Jesus tell me,

"Do not judge," or "Forgive seventy times seven times."

Someone who is divorced may be very uncomfortable with

the things Jesus says about divorce.

When the Bible suggests some people will end up in hell,

eternally separated from God,

because they chose to live this life separated from God,

that may be very painful,

because I know and love someone who is not a Christian.

So I'll find a someone who will teach universalism,

the idea that everyone ends up in heaven, no matter what.

Biblical teaching on sexual behavior is a sure way to get resistance.

And we hear about how that's old fashioned,

and the writer of that passage really didn't

understand human sexuality the way we do.

And those passages that talk about tithing,

giving 10% of your income to God's work,

can't be realized in today's world.

And certainly not Jesus' challenge to

"sell all you have and give it to the poor."

So, to suit their own desires,

they will gather around a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

Today there are plenty of preachers who will tell you:

God wants you to be wealthy,

and if you just name it and claim it, it's yours.

God wants you to be always happy and everything to go your way.

It's just a matter of turning the Beatitudes into the Be Happy Attitudes.

God will always heal every infirmity, if you just pray properly....

And mail in your seed faith gift to this TV ministry.

People flock to those ministries.

Today there are preachers who will tell you:

You need not be disturbed by an all-powerful God

who is beyond your control and might do something unexpected.

They reduce God to a benevolent smiling grandfather who always makes you feel better,

or an impersonal force you can tap into and make use of.

You don't have to worry about a righteous judge

who defines right and wrong

and holds us accountable for our thoughts, words and actions.

We can reduce it all to a fuzzy, indefinite attitude of "love."

And at the bottom of all that deconstruction of the biblical picture of God

is the deconstruction of the Bible itself.
 It's not really God-breathed, not really authoritative.
 It's got some good stories, some helpful spiritual insights.
 But it's a purely human document,
 written in particular historical times and cultural settings,
 and so much of it is not really applicable to our time and place.
 In fact, some of it is just wrong.

When it comes to teaching some of the more controversial things in the Bible,
 when you know there will be some folks who won't like it,
 there's a real temptation to back away,
 to avoid certain issues,
 to interpret a passage to death until it says nothing that will upset anyone.

Paul honestly says in v.4, "They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."

He's not pretending everyone will agree and fall in line.
 He's being honest with this young pastor Timothy.
 If you preach and teach the truth,
 sometimes some folks will not like it,
 and they'll likely go elsewhere to hear what they do like.

But, Paul says in v.5,

Keep your head.
 Endure hardship,
 the hardship of people not liking what you say,
 the hardship of being opposed and rejected.
 Just do the work God has given you.
 Because it really does matter what we believe.
 It shapes our view of God, of humanity, of relationships, of salvation.
 It shapes how we live every moment of every day.
 It shapes our eternity.

For centuries people believed that Aristotle was right when he said that
 the heavier an object, the faster it would fall to earth.

Aristotle was regarded as the greatest thinker of all time,
 and surely he would not be wrong.
 Anyone could have taken two objects, one heavy and one light,
 and dropped them from a great height
 to see whether or not the heavier object landed first.
 But no one did until nearly 2,000 years after Aristotle's death.

Legend has it that in 1589 Galileo summoned professors to the base of the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Then he went to the top and pushed off a ten-pound weight and a one-pound weight.
 They hit the ground at the same instant.
 The power of belief was so strong, however,
 that the professors denied their eyesight.
 They continued to say Aristotle was right.

That is a picture of what is going on in the world today.

People want to believe what they want to believe,
 and some refuse to be dissuaded by the truth.
 You could show the terrible ravaging effects of AIDS and the human papilloma virus,
 and people will have promiscuous sex anyway.
 You can show someone a diseased liver and cancerous lungs,
 and people are going to abuse alcohol and smoke regardless of the facts.

You can tell someone about the emptiness of life without Christ
the darkness of eternity without him,
and the joy and hope you have with Christ,
and some will refuse to believe.

But some will believe.

Some will believe.

How about you?

Do you believe God's Word to take a risk and share your faith?

Some will not believe.

But some will. Some will.

Scriptures cited: Jn.1:14; 14:6; Ac.4:12; Ez.35; Jas.3:1