

Sermon July 27, 2021 Spirituality of the Cross Part VII

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

In this seventh part of my summer sermon series we will delve into the deepest depths of the intersection of the human and the divine. There is no greater mystery in all the universe than Jesus Christ, the God man. What a wonderful and uplifting truth we have been given to know, hidden from the eyes of the world.

Worldly minds in our society have concocted their modern version of religion known as *moralistic therapeutic deism*. While that is a mouthful, after a brief description of it I think you will find it quite familiar and equally popular. Those who hold to this view of spirituality hold that their standing and the standing of others hinges on how good they are. Of course, they make up their own rules as to what constitutes “good.” One can volunteer at the local animal rescue on Saturday and on Tuesday abort their unborn child. Yet they might well still consider themselves good. You get the picture. In our understanding, there is only one person who is truly good – Jesus Christ. In our baptism we are covered and coated with his holiness which God considers to be ours. Therefore, our standing with God is as of that of Jesus Christ himself. That’s what the message of the gospel is trying to tell us.

This modern practice of spirituality – moralistic therapeutic deism – also concerns itself very much with how to get along as well as possible in life. People who follow this path submerge themselves in principles of successful living and follow the perceived road to health, wealth, and happiness. The focus might be on a healthy diet, proper exercise, meditation techniques, financial management, keys to relationship success, etc. As shown in the last few parts of this series, our focus is not as much on worldly gain as it is on the understanding of the meaning of suffering and how to endure it in an entirely different light than that which the world sheds on it. Rather than something to be avoided and delivered out of, we understand that suffering brings us closer to God than any other single experience we can have in this life.

The third part of this modern take on spirituality takes the position that God has somewhat distanced himself from the world after all his creative activity. Rather

than taking a nonchalant attitude towards us as people thought in the past, he does indeed care what happens. Overall, however, the idea is that what God really wants the most above everything else is that he just wants us to be happy. He works with a live-and-let-live approach, helping us as we want to better our lives and to be good people. People of this trip do not believe God would judge anyone and punish them, much less his own Son in their stead. Of course this view of God, rampant as it is, is pure nonsense. All we need to do is to take a look around and see that all is not well. If God really just wants us to be happy, he is doing a very poor job of it. So much so, it is more logical to hold there is no god than to believe in one that fits the Moralistic Therapeutic Deist mold.

Martin Luther taught that the only way to really begin to understand what can be understood about God is to look at Jesus. The ways of God are beyond our knowing, so it will lead us into trouble if we try to decode God without keeping Jesus at the center of the wheel. When I was doing some fishing on the East Coast, a nice retired gentleman named Dave came up to me and gave me some unsolicited fishing advice based on his many years of fishing the Atlantic coast. We got to talking about other things. It came up that I am a Lutheran pastor. He quickly asked me if I have ever read the book of Enoch. Some of you have read the book of Enoch. It is attributed to Noah's great grandfather mentioned in Genesis, who did not die but was taken directly into heaven. The book is about fallen angels, giants, the flood, and other interesting topics. I said I had indeed read the book. He said it was not included in the Bible, with a tone suggesting it should have been. I said it wasn't included in the Bible because it didn't add anything important to the main story, and that we didn't want it to confuse people. He immediately offered that he, for one, was not confused. Based on what he had seen and read, there are alien beings inhabiting the earth, especially under the earth. The government and the Smithsonian Institute are hiding all this from us. You see, this is exactly what I meant when I said we didn't want the book of Enoch to confuse people. The Bible is the story about the fall of humanity into a corrupted state, and Jesus Christ, the Son of God Most High, who came to save us back to God. What was Dave interested in? Flying saucers and alien species supposedly mentioned in Enoch. He missed the entire point of what the Bible is about, and also lost out on what we can really know about God and everything else. Books like Enoch are popular and can add some interesting twists to our faith. However, books like the Gospel of John are critical and through them God

actually creates faith that saves us from the coming judgement, flying saucers or not.

This is all the farther I can go this week. Next week I hope to delve much deeper into Gods riches in Christ, and how God took upon himself human nature, that we humans might be brought back into eternal fellowship with God.

The peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.