

How We View Our Faith

- * Christian Theology at its essence is “the amazement of a Creator loving and fellowshiping with His creation!”
- * It is “the scandal of the Infinite bowing low to be with the finite!”
- * We have unfortunately made it “a self-help and improvement seminar!”
- * We have used as its curriculum a “success in life” philosophy!
- * It is neither of those two things!
- * Our faith and Christian story is one of ridiculous grace!
- * Its story is one from which all romance stories are written!
- * It is about a love so perfect it makes all other fantasies pale!
- * It is when The Perfect expresses His love and acceptance to the lowest of Imperfection!

I. Mark’s gospel, the first of the four gospels written, had a different ending in its original form!

A. In the 4th century it was thought that the ending of the Gospel of Mark was too abrupt. Too incomplete. Lacking explanation.

1. The original gospel ended with verse 8:

Mark 16:8 (NIV)

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Mark 16:8 (TPT)

8They staggered out of the tomb, awestruck, with their minds swirling. They ran to tell the disciples, but they were so afraid and deep in wonder, they said nothing to anyone.

2. You see, the problem we have is that we want “an explanation” of everything! We need to have things “all tidied up!”

3. We say, “There has to be an explanation, we simply can’t stop with bewilderment and trembling!”

4. Because of this attitude, we have lost the BEAUTY of our faith and have chosen to settle for the MECHANICS of our faith!
- B. The truth is “STUNNED ASTONISHMENT” should be the first response to the Gospel and our Lord!

Psalm 27:4 (NLV)

4 One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I will look for: that I may live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to look upon the beauty of the Lord, and to worship in His holy house.

1 Chronicles 16:29 (NLT)

29 Give to the Lord the glory he deserves! Bring your offering and come into his presence. Worship the Lord in all his holy splendor.

Isaiah 33:17 (NLV)

17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty. (Speaking of the Messiah!)

1. The 19th century Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, wrote in his novel, *The Idiot*: “Beauty will save the world!”
2. While not a perfect person, Dostoevsky’s deep Christian faith caused him to describe Jesus as “infinite beauty.”

C. Brian Zahnd, a minister and writer from St. Joseph Missouri writes:

“Instead of angry protesters shaking their fists at a secular culture, we could be joyful singers transforming the secular with the sacred! Instead of alienated separatists sequestered in Christian enclaves, we are to transform malls and food courts into cathedrals by our beautiful song. If the church of the twenty-first century will lay down its anger and frustration, and instead joyfully sing the melody of Christ in the malls of meaninglessness, we can perhaps once again astonish a weary world with the beauty of the gospel!”

D. He continues by saying:

“Our task is not to protest the world into conformity, but to attract the world to the beauty of Christ! We do this not by protest or political action, but by enacting a beautiful presence within the world!”

- II. In our “Christian society” and our “Sunday school driven lives” we have become so familiar with our faith that we have

LOST THE AWE!

A. We have created a gospel and message that is:

1. Reasonable
2. Practical
3. Relevant
4. Sensible

B. We have developed: “A plan of salvation” and “Four Spiritual Laws.”
We have relegated our relationship with The Creator as “Being obedient to the Gospel!”

1. In fact, our response to this scandalous grace should be like the first three women at the tomb, trembling, fear, amazement!
2. Without this response we reduce the gospel to principles, morals and good works!
3. In short, WE BECOME LEGALISTIC AND LIFELESS!

C. Parts of the Body of Christ have begun to “market the gospel” to support our “local church enterprises!”

1. Worship in some contexts has degenerated into entertainment!
2. We rate our worship experience by “what it does for us!”
3. We advertise our services as “practical” and our sermons as “relevant!”
4. If you remove the name of Christ from some sermons you could feel as though you were involved in any Fortune 500 corporate meeting!
5. Don’t you know that God is so thankful that FINALLY someone has made His eternal word relevant?

D. I do not mean to be abrasive and I do understand some people are simply trying to make the Gospel of Jesus acceptable! The question is: Why do we not rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and the infinite love of a Savior to reach people?

III. SEEKING, WORSHIPPING AND EXPRESSING to the world the awesomeness and amazement of God is the beginning and ending of true evangelism!

Colossians 1:9-12 (TPT)

9 Since we first heard about you, we've kept you always in our prayers that you would receive the perfect knowledge of God's pleasure over your lives, making you reservoirs of every kind of wisdom and spiritual understanding. 10 We pray that you would walk in the ways of true righteousness, pleasing God in every good thing you do. Then you'll become fruit-bearing branches, yielding to his life, and maturing in the rich experience of knowing God in his fullness! 11 And we pray that you would be energized with all his explosive power from the realm of his magnificent glory, filling you with great hope. 12 Your hearts can soar with joyful gratitude when you think of how God made you worthy to receive the glorious inheritance freely given to us by living in the light.

A. Let me be quick to say that there are "principles, guidelines and expectations and words of obedience" in our faith!

1. These are elements of our faith that guide us on the "path of righteousness."
2. When we make these THE FOCUS, we become like the Pharisees and forget the POINT OF OUR FAITH! Relationship with God!
3. The balance of this is found in:

2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV)

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

B. Christianity is a CONFESSION not an EXPLANATION!

1. We confess Christ as Lord!
2. We confess The Trinity!
3. We confess the Incarnation!
4. We confess the Resurrection!
5. We confess the Ascension!

C. Just how much of any of these can we explain?

Colossians 1:26-27 (NIV)

26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 (NIV)

7 No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

C. To evangelize is to invite someone to...come be astonished!

IV. The empty tomb is the epicenter of the Christian faith!

A. Don't try to explain it...rather marvel at it!!

Philippians 2:6-11 (NIV)

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

1. Not only did God become human, He became a slave!

2. This was part of the eternal plan from the beginning!

B. Jesus IS the “explanation of God!”

John 1:18 (NIV)

18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

1. Abraham saw God! - Genesis 18

2. Jacob saw God! - Genesis 28

3. Moses saw God! - Exodus 33

4. Isaiah saw God! - Isaiah 6