

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

In the 15th century Thomas A Kempis wrote “The Imitation of Christ.” In fairness, the point was to remind the reader that they were a Christian, and encourage them to model their life not after fallen men, but after the Lord. There is a lot of good in that. Rightly understood, it is in complete accord with Biblical teaching. It is the Third Use of the Law, and faith desires to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

It is not wrong to admonish one another to do the same – to live in a Christ-like manner. There are earthly benefits, and heavenly benefits, to striving to keep the Law. But we must admit at the same time that such admonition is Law. To urge men to imitate Christ does the same thing the waterpots of Cana did – it shows you to be unclean by seeing yourself in the mirror of perfect Purity.

Truth be told, sinners don’t want to be like Jesus. Like Seminex Pastors and theology of glory preachers and antinomian theologians, men happily speak of a nice christ, a lord who blesses and heals and forgives, a soft-spoken brotherly christ who loves and accepts and freely gives and never judges. That kind of christ the fallen world can tolerate. That kind of Christ the world wouldn’t have crucified.

But today we hear what the Lord actually did. Hear the Words of the True Christ: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in... therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”

Those who would imitate Christ ought simply use the Bible as their guide. For the Christ of the Scriptures does not match the christ the world peddles. The Prophets weren’t sent to bring peace and make friends. As did the Lord, they called sinful men to repentance. And that they did with jarring, strong language. And the men to whom they spoke frequently killed the Prophets for their message.

Consider John the Baptizer, who called those who came out to him a “brood of Vipers”. At God’s command, He was so honest that it cost him his head. Consider too our Lord’s Words to the Pharisees when He called them “whitewashed tombs” – beautifully outwardly yet inwardly dead.

It is the devil’s work to convince men that God is unlike the God of the Bible. Consider the discourse found in Genesis when the Serpent says “has God indeed indeed said...?” You see, the devil couldn’t come right out and say what he desired to say because it wasn’t true. So he cozied up to Eve. He was winsome, friendly, helping. He portrayed himself as soft-spoken, brotherly, accepting, not judging, a god the world could like. And the lie worked.

But the Gospel is not like that. The Gospel isn’t that God doesn’t judge. It is that God has saved you from the judgment by being judged in your place. The Gospel isn’t that all men are acceptable to God. The Gospel is that God Himself died and rose to make all men acceptable.

The Gospel is Truth, Truth to be plainly and faithfully and boldly proclaimed. The Word of God has the power to slay and make alive, for it is God’s Word. The Biblical example is clear – Jesus spoke the Truth, for He is Truth. Jesus’ Disciples

spoke the Truth, and those they Ordained spoke the Truth – daringly, to men who did not desire to hear, to men that covered their ears and stoned the preacher. And still, by the Spirit’s power, they preached all the more, and men were converted.

It is of the fallen flesh to try to redefine God and the miraculous operation of the Gospel into terms that fit well with man’s reason. In excusing or explaining away or attempting to justify your sins, you have done it too. Sinful men desire a powerful god that accepts them for who they are, meets them where they are, and makes them feel good about who they are. But to try to force God to be more like what fallen men desire is to break the First Commandment.

God will not be forced. He never changes. And the Scriptures are clear. Sinful Men cannot be cajoled or motivated or rehabilitated to be God pleasing. They must be slain and made alive. And that slaying and making alive is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. The Law shows men their sins. The Gospel is the unfathomable Truth that the Christ bore the sins of all men, even those who will not believe in Him, and took them to the cross.

In His great love for you, God did what was completely offensive to human reason. He took on Flesh. He told men that they were sinners. He told them that they could not be saved apart from Him. And then He took their sins and yours and died for them. In Christ, your sins are removed. Baptized into Him, you are slain and made alive, as His new life is made yours, and His miraculous resurrection brings you justification before God.

The same Christ that died and rose for you comes to you this day in an intimate, personal way, a way that incorporates you into Him, and places Him into you. He invites you to receive His Body, placed in your mouth. And by Him you are made His Body, His Holy Church on earth. The Blood He shed for your sins streams into you, and His forgiveness and His life are made yours. And the miracle of the Gospel is proven in you.

It is not wrong to desire to imitate Christ. Faith strives to do so. At the same time we confess that in this life we will never achieve it. Still, in Christ, God declares you to be holy. He declares you to be holy because of what Christ did for you - He rebuked sin, He promised a heavenly Kingdom, and He gave His life that you might have life.

In love He freely gives you the Fruits of His cross and empty tomb. For you who are declared holy in Christ, there is no woe, there is no condemnation, and the One who sits on the heavenly throne opens heaven to you.

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