

Mark 10:17-31  
Hebrews 4:12-16  
October 13, 2024

FYI

I have spoken many times about certain aspects of Christian Doctrine that seem to be an affront to human self-esteem. The Doctrine of Original Sin is a case-in-point, and has been the target of sharp criticism, especially in the modern era, because of its inherently pessimistic view of human nature. It has deserved some of these criticisms; or should I say, the way it has been applied deserves to be criticized.

Some in the modern era, which is the era of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, which gave us democracy, and an emphasis on equality and freedom, and technology that won't stop giving, even gave up and discarded the doctrine all together. In our present culture, at least in the secular sense, it is fair to say that the idea of Sin is held in disrepute.

There are those among the faithful who continue to accept it, and may even take pride in their loyalty to it, although they may be surprised that they also have ways of discarding it. One day I will entitle a sermon, "De Facto," or, "As A Matter of Fact," and talk about the way people do not actually always live what they say they believe.

There are people, who accept the Doctrine of Sin in a de facto kind of way, who say they don't believe in it, when by their actions and attitudes reveal that actually they do; and there are others who say that they do

accept the doctrine, who in a de facto kind of way, do not.

There are de facto Calvinists among the Arminians, and vice versa, de facto Arminians among the Calvinists. I think this irony works for a number of things; there are de facto believers among the unbelievers and de facto unbelievers among the believers. In Isaiah we find, "the people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." I am sure you get the idea.

One of the common ways to believe in Sin and yet discard it is to compare oneself to others and see in them obvious evidence of sin, while struggling, when looking in the mirror, to see the same evidence. This calls for caution, and restraint of judgment. For . . . Sin . . . has been used as a way to judge and condemn, and control, and in that way it has been harmful, and deserves to be criticized.

We all know that the central feature of the doctrine is that *everyone is guilty*. That seems pretty pessimistic. It is noted that there is a companion doctrine called, "Imago Dei," which tells us that every person has been created in God's likeness and is precious in the sight of God; and that doctrine is much more optimistic. Striking the right balance between these two aspects of Christian belief is difficult.

If we agree that we are not going to use Sin as a blunt instrument to beat each other with, and if we are not

going to discard it even in a de facto sort of way, then how *are* we going to understand it?

Let me suggest that one way to understand the doctrines of our faith, rather than to see them only as absolutes that must be defended, or imposed upon those who do not believe them, is to see them as interpretations, and explanations of the *way things are*.

They explain for the entire human family the experiences of the life we all share. One might say they give us information that helps us to better understand ourselves and the world that God has made, and in the web of relationships that characterizes human life, *we* have made together.

As with everything else, there is an acronym, FYI, “For Your Information.” The Doctrines of the faith are for your information. As you go through life, there are some things you should just know. I am aware that that won’t be strong enough for some, but it might be helpful.

With that in mind, what can we learn from the texts for the day? Let us take first into consideration the account in Matthew’s gospel of the Rich Young Man. the key note to be made is that of rejecting Jesus.

This story is not about the divine rejection of a person; but the human rejection of the divine. There are many and various ways that people have invented of rejecting Jesus, but here we are encountered with one

of the most common, and most powerful reasons. It is an attachment to the things of *this* world.

The man is devoted to his duty. He is interested in salvation, but can not bear the message that he must be devoted at the cost of his own life. Only by fully submitting to Jesus can he be saved. It is the spirit of the age to be independent and self-sufficient. The great icon of the Lone Ranger, who makes his way through life without the help of anyone, except maybe one friend, stands for this independence.

The dialogue is some of the most well-known in the bible. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” is met by, “keep the commandments.” “Keeping the commandments” is met by, “I have, which ones?” It is an absurd question.

It would be like a baseball player being told that to be able to play, there are a few non-negotiable things that must be done; show up, be on time, bring the kit (kit is the modern word for equipment and uniform, for our purposes it means bring the bat and glove), and then asking which one could be left out, and still play?

In addition to all the usual lessons, that in his heart the man was committed to other things, and that the other attachments make salvation humanly impossible; that even the disciples, even we as disciples, marvel at the human impossibility. “Who then, can be saved?”

This story is meant to be taken as a warning that anything associated with earthly life, no matter how

immediate the concern may be, is not capable of meeting the deepest human need. Pursuing spiritual health by pursuing economic security is like trying to play a baseball game without showing up or trying to squeeze a camel through a needle's eye, which is not only absurd, but comical.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews addresses the same circumstance in a less storytelling sort of way, more propositional. He suggests that true health in the sense of fulfillment, the overcoming of anxiety, the achieving of a humanity in the best sense of the word, to which we are all called, runs deep. It can not be approached on the surface of life.

We read that God's Word is a sharp, double-edged sword that separates joint from marrow. We learn that nothing is hidden from God, especially not thoughts and attitudes of the heart, the kinds of things that we can sometimes hide from each other.

Both the story of the man too attached to his things and his money, and this rhetorical, idea-driven, letter about what it means to us that we have a great high priest, and as well, the Doctrine of Sin itself, which seems such a pessimistic beginning to this gospel message of what it means to be a human being, all come to us for our information so that we can better understand the way things are.

It tells us that before all is said and done we face the dreadful conclusion that the search for immortality and fulfillment, and for a better morality and a better

justice, and for a meaning that rises above the cycles of nature and history; the conclusion is forced upon us that not only do we fail to understand, but also to achieve any substantial transformation of ourselves and of our world, at least not in any way that matters.

All of this theology is meant to be, for the sake of information, just so we know. Perhaps the most difficult part of this FYI is that the understanding we seek and the situation in life for which we strive, are beyond us, impossible for us, just so you know.

But, FYI, there is one more thing, or one thing that can be said in many ways, and set to music, and displayed artistically; that all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, *all things are possible for God*, we do have a great high priest who has gone before us, and we can approach the throne of grace with confidence, and we can find the mercy and grace to help us in the hour of our deepest need.

Once we know these truths leading to the humble acceptance of God's love, God enables us also to accept this grace which heals us, which restores us in relation to God and gives us the chance of reconciliation with one another and with our neighbors and enemies alike. And it becomes the source of our self-esteem which can't be shaken in times of failure and disappointment and decay.

So come on in and let us approach . . .

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