

Taking Too Much for Granted

by Jonathan Duttweiler

"And as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, and His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan..." Luke 2:43-44a

The passage quoted from Luke is concerning the incident when Mary and Joseph had taken Jesus to Jerusalem. They were returning and took for granted Jesus was traveling with them; in fact they went a whole day's journey before discovering the truth. Their fault was they assumed that what they wanted to believe was so in fact, they took too much for granted! A simple check at the beginning of the journey would have saved a lot of time and anxiety.

However, it is an understandable fault for it is one many Christians are in great danger of committing themselves. The whole church in our era is traveling along the road, purporting to be doing the ministry of Jesus Christ, while supposing things that are simply not true. A failure to check the facts, to support the assumptions, before going on has too often led to spiritual impotence and tragedy! The danger here is that the Church is taking Christ for granted and assuming, because it believes the New Testament, it is, in fact, full of New Testament Christians.

Five Faulty Assumptions

I believe there are five faulty assumptions, five things many people in the Church take for granted, that simply are not so. These five assumptions are not harmless errors, or nit-picking doctrines. They are fundamentally at the core of what it means to be in right relationship with God and they are assumed at the risk of the believer's salvation.

Salvation is Possible Without Repentance

First, too many assume that salvation is possible without repentance. "Just believe" are the watchwords for many. This sounds good, but is not true religion! Jesus said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.*" (Matthew 4:17) To be forgiven, sin must be forsaken, yet a whole generation of Christians, evangelical and liberal alike, have come up believing that it is possible to "accept" Christ, to "just believe," without also forsaking the world.

James declares in his epistle (Jas 4:4), "*Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God.*" It seems clear, then, that apart from true repentance, there can be no forgiveness!

Religion has value without Righteousness

Perhaps one of the most prevalent assumptions, especially in this era of New Age religion and Humanistic "Christianity," is that religion has value without righteousness. Many people believe religion is little more than a beautiful thing capable of bringing courage and peace of mind to a troubled world. Back in the fifties President Eisenhower gave a speech on TV in which he called Americans back faith, any kind of faith. Religion based on this assumption simply becomes an addition for a well rounded life or a healthy society. However, the purpose of Christ's redeeming work was to make it possible for bad men to become good, deeply, radically, and finally!

My problem with those who preach the Social Gospel is the same as it is with many in the Moral Majority or Christian Right, they have turned their faith into a vehicle to change the world. Yet, faith in Christ is not simply a solution to a moral problem, but rather a spiritual problem! What is wrong with our society is not simply that people do wrong, that we have the wrong political agenda, or that we are not spending our tax dollars in the right fashion, but that at their core, people ARE wrong!

Through their faith in Christ, God intends to translate people out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His Son. As Paul writes: "...put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." (Ephesians 4:24)

Faith without works has value

Another faulty assumption that many, particularly within the Church itself, make, is that faith without works has some value. However, scriptures clearly indicate just the opposite. James writes, "*Even so, faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself,*" (Jas. 2:26) and Paul says faith works by love. Where works are absent we can only conclude that faith is absent also!

Don't let faith in faith displace faith in God. Again, Paul writes, "*We are His workmanship, created for good works in Christ,*" (Ephesians 2:10)

We can experience justification without transformation

A fourth faulty assumption is that we can experience justification without transformation. In simple language, justification equals forgiveness. Essentially, when you are justified by faith, God treats you as though you had never sinned. Now, many believe this is conditioned solely upon "accepting" Jesus as Savior. They will say something like "you can believe in Jesus now as your personal savior. You don't have to worry about how you live. Sometime in future, when you're ready for a 'deeper spiritual life' you can turn your life over to Him and make Him Lord of your life."

The problem is this isn't scriptural, its a faulty assumption! When God declares someone righteous, i.e. forgives him as if his sins never were, it is on the basis that they have given Him "carte blanc" to actually make them righteous. Now, this is not salvation by works and neither is it having to live a "perfect" life. God doesn't ask of you the impossible, but

rather that you be willing to let Him work His will in your life. He will make you righteous, but you must be submitted to His will!

We can do spiritual work without spiritual Power

The last of the most common faulty assumptions many "Christians" are making is that they can do spiritual work without spiritual power. Many years ago there was an evangelistic push titled "I Found It." A public relations man was quoted as saying that the church now did with the media what early Church needed Holy Ghost for. This is a supreme example of this faulty assumption. For while we have many technological and programmatic advances, it is only the Holy Spirit Who can truly empower and enable our efforts!

David Brainerd once compared a man without the power of the Spirit trying to do spiritual work to a workman without fingers trying to do manual work. The Holy Spirit is not a luxury for "deluxe" Christians; He is an absolute necessity if we are to do God's work! Jesus said in Acts 1:8 *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

Conclusion

All of these assumptions rob the Church of vitality and life and effectiveness. They are made for many reasons: ignorance, delusion, deception, or spiritual blindness. But they are all ultimately rooted in same problem Mary and Joseph had: Supposing Jesus is with us when we have in fact left Him behind!

We join the Church and assume Christ is with us; we come to service and assume He is there; we live "good" lives and assume Christ walks with us. All the while He is in the house of His Father because we have failed to truly examine ourselves and do that which is necessary for Him to walk with us. Unless we forsake our sin, come to Christ in faith and yield control of our lives to God, Jesus is not traveling with us.

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