

**December 6, 2016**

The Issue of Discernment (Part 1)

Titus 2:1, **“But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.”**

Most people have a fundamental misunderstanding of what faith really is. Most assume that it is some sort of nebulous feeling that comes and goes like the wind. The prevalent saying in our culture today is “it doesn’t matter what you believe, just as long as you believe something.” This is one of the worst lies perpetuated in our culture today.

You see, it matters what we believe because faith can be very destructive. Some faiths lead away from the one true God, in fact all faiths do except Biblical Christianity. These faiths substitute superstition, falsehood, or a false gospel itself in the place of truth. This inevitably leads to spiritual disaster.

The wrong kind of faith can go to two extremes. The first extreme is when “faith” relies on feelings, inner voices, fantasy, or subjective sensations. The non-Christian example of this is that of New Age Mysticism. The other extreme is where faith fixes its hope on a human authority. This would include the teachings of some sort of supreme leader, or religious tradition, magisterial dogma, or some other random authority. An example of this extreme would be Islam. The problem here is that even among groups that profess Christianity, both extremes of can be seen. The charismatic movement, for example, tends toward the first extreme and Roman Catholicism tends towards the second.

What is interesting is that in the past several decades there has been a bit of a convergence between the charismatic movement and the Roman Catholicism. This strange unity reminds us that the vast spectrum of doctrinal and theological errors all flow from one origin...Satan.

At both extremes of faith you have people looking for truth apart from Scripture, which is what makes this so dangerous. Both also have this in common: they are irrational and anti-intellectual. Being “anti-intellectual” doesn’t refer to one being opposed to intellectual snobbery. It means they spurn the intellect and encourage blind trust. Anti-intellectualism sets faith against reason, as if the two cannot possibly exist side by side. Biblical faith is never irrational.

An authentic faith on the other hand never bypasses the mind. Faith, is after all dealing with the truth. Truth, unlike feelings, is objective and it can be known, studied, contemplated, and understood. All those are intellectual activities; activities which engage one’s mind.

The Christian life is a life of the intellect. The body of revealed truth on which our faith is grounded has depths that are mysterious and unfathomable to our limited human minds, but truth is never irrational. That difference is very important. Titus 1:2 says, **“in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.”** This means that what God says is absolutely true and anything that is in contrast to what God says is false. Truth cannot be self-contradictory. Truth always makes sense.

What this means then is that the doctrine on which we base our faith must be sound, which means that it must be Biblical. 1 Timothy 4:6 says, **“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.”** 1 Timothy 6:3-4 says, **“If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.”** Sound Biblical doctrine is the foundation of all true wisdom and knowledge and of an authentic faith. The person that has a disregard or a scorn for sound doctrine while at the same time elevating feelings or blind trust in a leader cannot legitimately have authentic faith even if they claim Christ.

What often gets lost today in our rush to be relevant is that God holds us accountable for what we believe as well as how we think about the truth which He has graciously revealed to us in His Word. All of Scripture, the Old Testament, the New Testament, testifies to the fact that God wants us to know and understand the truth. He desires for us to be wise and His will is for us to use our minds.

Proverbs 2:2-6 says, **“making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”**