**The Impact of Religious Error**

I was fortunate this last week to be invited into a discussion with a group of Christians who had been trapped in the false system of Calvinism. I was allowed to share some of my beliefs about the Christian life. I made several observations: The following is not a criticism of any individual church.

1. There was an emphasis on being able to tell if a person’s confession of saving faith was genuine.
2. The focus was on seeing evidence that someone was saved, not just confessions of faith

* This is possibly a holdover from Calvinism where no one ever has assurance that they are one of the chosen, even if they are producing good works.

1. There was a hesitation, perhaps even an avoidance of drawing clear lines between being lost/saved, carnal/spiritual, lies/truth.

* When false teachers manipulate with false teaching (threaten church discipline, loss of fellowship, loss of salvation), claiming that God’s wrath might still be directed toward born again believers, they associate uncertainty with God and His will, damaging the sense of security in believer’s hearts.

**Eternal Security of the Believer -** Romans 8:32-39 Jn 10:28-29

1. Churches and denominations that emphasize a particular brand of doctrine, presenting God in a specific manner often seem to feel compelled to defend their views against those with differing ideas, while requiring their members to adhere to the church’s statement of faith.
2. A statement of faith is not a wrong or bad thing unless it is used to force believer’s to agree with it.
3. The goal appears to be to persuade everyone that their view is correct, allowing no other views, while seeking to bring everyone into conformity to the leadership’s view as the mission.
4. Once a majority of believer are persuaded to conform to the denominational view of the scriptures, they are enlisted to help bring all of the new attendees into the ideological fold and to police the existing people, looking for sinful life styles to correct.

Ex: A friend and fellow believer works with a man who is an elder in a Reformed Baptist (Calvinist) church. The Calvinist elder was sharing about a married couple who were having marital trouble. The wife had approached the pastor with a complaint against her husband and the elders had agreed to help. Their way of helping was to put the couple through training classes about marriage and then assign each of them to carry out a scripted role playing exercise in front of the elders. When this approach didn’t seem to help the man to improve his behavior toward his wife, she was instructed to make a list of his sins that the elders planned to read to the congregation with him present in front of the congregation – church discipline. The elder who was sharing this with my friend was shocked and disappointed when the man left the church and began attending another.

* The image of God’s character behind that type of ideology is an angry, vengeful God who enjoys punishing those who don’t line up with His views.
* The Calvinist view of grace is of a God who desires to punish everyone because of our sinfulness but relented with a few that He chose out of the crowd, never offering salvation to the rest.
* The leadership in these churches are bullies who insist that they are right about everything and insist that everyone agree with them and if you don’t then you were destined for hell anyway & are irrelevant.

1. This particular ideology appeals to those who lean toward self-righteousness and prefer to look down on others, using scripture as a works system that they can use to celebrate their own purity while also celebrating God’s judgment (and their own) of those who fail to attain to their moral superiority.
2. Another “Christian” ideology draws no lines in the sand, doesn’t believe in being lost/saved, carnal/spiritual, etc. believing in human goodness to fellow man – social gospel.
3. Another ideology has decided that some special people alone represent God who gives His grace to mankind through rituals that these special people perform. They are very liberal about sin if you confess to one of their special people who wear special suits of clothing, but apart from these “men in black” there is no grace, forgiveness or heaven.
4. Another “Christian” ideology believes that God’s presence produces a temporary Sunday emotionalism in the believer through singing, chanting and emotional community prayer. This inspired emotion is intended to last from Sunday to Sunday, keeping the believer emotionally charged to resist sin and the devil.
5. Another group believes that academic knowledge of the bible shared by super teachers with superior insights makes their listeners superior to other believers (Gnosticism) & that simply holding the knowledge makes one mature.
6. Baby believers who become entangled in these ideologies get their souls injured by attempting to implement something spiritually false, depending on useless beliefs to draw them closer to God and then by having their naïve trust betrayed by leaders who they expected to lead them to blessing, not betrayal.
7. Their efforts to implement their ideology reaps nothing but frustration and supplies then with no tools, power or wisdom to transform into the image of Christ and become a humble, loving soul.

* The claim that I am a Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholic and hold to those doctrines to be part of that particular club ends up offering little when making real life work – marriage, family, health issues

1. The truth sets us free (Jn 8:32) from sin patterns, from false approaches to find happiness, from frustrations of our human agenda, from collaborations with the devil’s world, etc.
2. When the believer comes under strictly enforced ideologies that teach God as angry & vengeful, that believers should observe others as fruit inspectors looking for other bel’s failure to judge them, they are led to become self-righteous & judgmental rather than loving, rule keepers rather than free to love.
3. The negative impact of broken trust, sense of betrayal, sense of being foolish to fall for the lie all break down the believer’s confidence in God’s representatives, interpretations of God’s word and even their security in their relationship with God – believers end up suspicious and jaded.
4. This discussion is not a condemnation of denominational churches, for there are many good ones, but of petty tyrants who interpret the bible in a way that gives them power over others and then use their power to persuade people to accept ideologies that enslave them rather than free them in Christ.
5. Very few ideas that I teach as part of my “Belief System Theory” of the Christian life is set in stone as if I think that I have nailed down the absolute truth that hits the divine bullseye.
6. I continue to desire other believers to push back on all of my ideas if they see a more clear eyed view of what the scriptures are teaching so that I can clarify and refine what I believe.
7. God’s essence, His grace as the basis of His relating to man, His love for us in Christ as our Father, these are all non-negotiable, firmly set ideas in my soul – after that, I believe that I am close to the target on much or all of the Christian life, but I am open to be instructed and corrected on any of it.
8. I don’t have to be right: I gain no status in Christ (all the same), I gain no extra love from God (all the same) and I reject the idea of earthly fame for these ideas that come by the enlightenment of the Spirit

**Rachel’s Jealousy**

**Genesis 30:1** Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die."

1. Leah gave birth to 4 sons while Rachel was barren, giving birth to none.
2. Earthly success to a woman in the ancient world was related to being a wife who gave birth to sons.

* Sons were necessary to work the fields and tend the flocks of sheep or cattle – survival

1. Rachel had attached her faith to earthly success as a better wife than Leah and as a mother producing sons, showing herself worthy in the eyes of people.
2. She was jealous of God’s blessing of Leah, wanting her sister’s success as her own
3. Jacob, Leah & Rachel are all part of a family consisting of deeply flawed people - delusional

* Rebekah lies, schemes and deceives her husband Isaac to promote one of her sons over the other
* Laban, her brother along with his daughters all lie, scheme & scam Jacob the nephew/cousin
* The sister/wives compete within the family, creating a divide between their children that Jacob makes much worse by his trauma bond with Rachel’s sons, after she died.

1. God uses anyone – everyone to accomplish His will regardless of how flawed, uneducated, scarred by life or any other human handicap we might imagine.

**Jealousy:**

Heb ***qana***: to desire what another possesses; **Gen 26:14** Philistines envied Isaac’s wealth; **Gen 37:1** Joseph’s brothers were jealous of his father’s favor for him (they wanted what Joseph had); **Ex 20:5** Idolatry – God is jealous (wants the worship given to idols);**Prov 23:17** Do not let your heart envy sinners, But *live* in the fear of the LORD always.

Greek ***zeloo***: zeal in pursuit, emotional desire to obtain; to desire what another possesses – success, love

**Acts 5:16-17** And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed. **17** But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.

* The Jewish leaders wanted the love of the people being given to the church

Greek ***phthoros***: Jealous with hatred and a desire to harm; **Mark 15:10** For he (Pilate) was aware that the chief priests had delivered Him up because of envy – Jesus threw them out of the temple and won the hearts of the people, they not only wanted to take the people away from Him but also to harm Jesus.

1. Our earliest attachments to meet our need for love, acceptance and approval were to people and we based our self-image on what other people thought about us.
2. Without God, His grace and unconditional regard for us, all of our attempts to connect with people to gain their love & respect are conditional – we must offer something to others that they respect & desire, hoping that what we give will inspire them to return what we desire.
3. Rachel believed she had to be a successful wife to Jacob by providing him with sons to be of any worth or value as a woman, but she was barren while her rival sister was being blessed by the Lord.

* Rachel was deeply attached to what other people, especially other women thought of her based on her success as a wife and mother – so much so that she turned on Jacob and wanted to die.

1. Rachel saw her sister’s success (4 sons) and wanted Jacob & the other women to value her the same.

* We live within a few miles of one of the richest neighborhoods in the world – Mountain Brook
* When passing through there we often see beautiful people, beautifully dressed and driving the finest cars, living in huge, uniquely designed homes – many people long to be wealthy enough to live there
* I have heard many people criticize those who live there, claiming that they must be crooks to make so much money or what the strikingly beautiful women must have done to marry into wealth – all the criticism is a defense mechanism born of a desire to have that wealth and jealousy of those who do.

1. The Christian answer for Rachel was to detach her faith from the earthly & the approval of people, looking to the Lord for her approval, even in spite of Jacob’s love for her, she concluded that she was a failure.

* Imagine her feelings: fear, despair, anger, jealousy
* Imagine her inner dialogue: “I must give birth to sons or I am worth nothing” “I must not be worth anything because God is not allowing me to become pregnant” “I hate that my sister has done much better than I have, she has 4 sons, while I have none” “I am such a loser”
* Imagine her visualizing: What images & scenarios was she visualizing?

Every **action, word or emotion** is caused by our **inner communication with self** - verbal & visual

**Inner Dialogue**: what we are saying to self

**Inner images**: what we are seeing in our mind

**Rachel becomes angry & abusive**

**30:1** she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." As if Jacob is in control of her becoming pregnant

1. Here we see Rachel’s personal strategy for dealing with the adversities in her life – anger & blaming others

* God favored Leah in spite of how she tricked Jacob & He made her very fertile – 4 sons including Judah

1. Clearly she knows the biological facts of life & that it is not Jacob’s fault that she was not having kids

* He is having success with Leah – he will have success with the maids and finally with Rachel

1. Rachel’s anger and blaming behavior is an indication of her delusional behavior that life revolved around her ( I’m so pretty & everyone loves me) and that it was always someone else’s fault.

* We will see that her father Laban was a liar, a cheat & caught in his own fantasy image of the world
* God & life owes me success & circumstances that will fulfill my earthly agenda – focused on the flesh

1. Notice that Jacob has a better grip on spiritual reality but not his temper

**Gen 30:2** Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

**Application:**

1. Practicing habitual self-awareness is one of the most important skills that anyone can develop. You are responsible for what goes on in your mind, what you say and what you see that controls your behavior.
2. Observing your behavior: **what you do** regarding others; **what you say** – the words, phrasing, tone; **what you are feeling** – the emotion being evoked; **what you are saying & seeing** **in your mind –** the thoughts you are choosing to use for the person or situation; what you are believing/expecting – **what you have decided that constitutes reality** & what you expect in your future
3. Rachel’s **belief** about the importance of people’s opinion of her:
4. **Thoughts**: visualize others criticizing her, told herself that she was worthless, told herself that she wanted what Leah possessed (jealousy)
5. **Emotion:** felt angry at Jacob because he was giving Leah sons but not her, felt deprived that Leah had so much, she had nothing, felt desire to have what Leah had, wanted to die rather than live in shame
6. **Words/Actions**: yelled in anger at Jacob, blaming him for her situation as if he were God.
7. **Christian Solution**: Backtrack from your word/actions 🡪 emotions 🡪 visual & verbal thoughts 🡪 beliefs
8. Throughout our lives we have been programming our habits of thinking by the choices we have made to think according to our human agenda – attached to people, conditional love – give to get, success – attain & obtain, etc.
9. In the first half of life we focus on our human agenda, believing that making human life successful is the proper goal to produce +H, asking God to bless our plan & efforts.
10. As we consistently challenge our belief in our human agenda, taking off our focus on individual human goals/plans, replacing them with a focus on God’s plans & goals for our life, we renew our beliefs and habits of thoughts, responding by surrendering to the Spirit instead of reacting from the flesh.
11. Rachel, remained trapped in her human agenda, having attached her hunger to earthly success, she died trying to outdo her sister and ended up in Abraham’s Bosom where she gained the first peace on her short life – let us not pass through this life still holding to the things of this life, arriving in heaven having glorified the Lord in no rewardable way.