

Taking A Closer Look

Advertisement is big business in our country. It is funny how they advertise those pickup trucks at \$10,000 dollars off MSRP (Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price), and when you get to the dealership, all those trucks are gone for some reason. Or, when you see the picture of that double-decker hamburger with all the trimmings looking like it is six inches tall, then you open the carton and it is about an inch thick, at best. Like they say, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is not true."

The American Christian religious scene is a bit that way. The sound of Christianity for the last few years has been, "feel good about yourself, whatever the cost." This "touchy-feely," "I'm OK, You're OK" kind of gospel sounds great at first, but when you take a closer look, it has little solid foundation. Christianity is not about how you feel at any given moment, but where you are in life. Do you know the truth? And, are you able to defend it? Religion built on emotion not only lacks depth, but often leaves worshippers emptier than before they started.

Churches that claim modern day miracles are guilty of emotional tactics. Though no one can doubt their sincerity, an attempt to suggest that miracles continue today as in the days of Jesus and the apostles, is unfounded and unproved. Tele-evangelists have for a number of years thrived on satisfaction through an emotional appeal. Miracles ceased with the generation following the deaths of the apostles, Acts 8:18.

New Testament Christianity is an appeal to the rational mind. Though emotion plays a part, it is not its foundation. Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," John 8:31b,32. Christ's words spoken in the whole of the New Testament, commands response to its hearing through belief in Christ as Lord, John 8:24. Further, godly sorrow for sinfulness, with a determination to faithfully follow the teachings of Christ the rest of one's life is necessary, Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Luke 9:23. Confession of Christ before witnesses is a condition Christ himself placed before the willing partaker of His free gift of salvation, Matthew 10:32,33; Romans 10:10. And baptism for the forgiveness of sins is God's plan for forgiveness of a life of self-service. There you have it! The gospel! In all its simplicity, it takes people to mess it up.

Some years ago a sign on a butcher shop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin said, "T-Bones for 25¢ per pound." When you got a little closer it said, "With meat, \$4.00 per pound." Jesus, through John tells us, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world, 1 John 4:1." In other words, we must arm ourselves

with the words of Christ, Ephesians 6:17, and with an analytical eye, look closely at those who would sell a gospel that is different than the gospel of Christ through gimmickry and emotional appeal, cf. Galatians 1:6-12.

Moses told the Israelites that if some so-called prophet came along foretelling the future, they were to check him out. If the things he says comes to pass, then believe him. If it does not, then reject him as a prophet, cf. Deuteronomy 18:22. The same is true today. If, when you look a little closer at the teachings and practices of a church or the religious claim of an individual, and find those things inconsistent with the Word of God, or they make claims that are unable to be verified, then reject them.

Life is too short, and eternity is too long to not be sure! Recently I spoke with a man who was a member of a denomination. He said he grew up in that church with his parents, and that he was satisfied with its theology. So, he was not interested in looking further. Some are ready to be judged on what they have settled with religiously, but have foolishly ignored the plain and simple truths found in God's Word. Do yourself a favor. Take a close look at why you believe what you believe, and do what you do, in religious practices. Your place in eternity depends on it.

-Scott Harp