



The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 10

June 23, 2024

No. 25

The Problem of People

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While many turn from God due to some perceived problem with God (e.g., allowing evil to exist), I have found that just as prominent is a problem that they have with those who call themselves Christians. Because Christians have been hypocritical, unloving, divisive and abusive, some have walked away thinking that if this is what Christians are like, they want no part of them. We might respond, "But our faith resides in God, not people, so turning from God because of people isn't justified." While that is correct, we do need to factor in what the Lord said about His disciples and their relationship to how the world perceives Christians:

"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35, CSB)

"I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me." (John 17:20-21, CSB)

Jesus indicates that the world sits in some form of judgment on whether disciples reflect their Lord. If they see a lack of love, they may conclude that we are not really disciples of Jesus. And let's be honest: who really wants to be around those who lack love while calling themselves something they are not? Then, if we are divisive and fail to reflect the unity to which Jesus calls us, the world may conclude that Jesus is a fraud ("that the world may believe you sent me"). Do we think about that when we are fighting and fussing with each other?

We have a great responsibility as citizens of heaven to walk worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27). If we know that our actions demonstrate that we are not serious about our calling and that our divisions might turn people from Christ, then we need to think deeply about how we interact with both the world and one another. We might comfort ourselves with a technically correct concept, but can we escape the consequences of our actions that may contribute to disbelief?

While many have overcome the problem of people and stayed true and faithful to the Lord, that is not an excuse to misbehave, for the next person we influence might stumble. If our actions contribute to this issue, then we will be called to account (see Matt 18:6). May God help us if we act so unbecomingly that we turn people off to the gospel! If people are going to be offended and put off, let it be by the gospel itself and not our unrighteous behavior (cf. 1 Cor 1:18ff).

There is more, though, and this is confession time. If ever there is something that makes me question what I know is right, it is the "problem of people." It is not the veracity of Scripture, the identity of Jesus, or the character of God that makes me wonder. And here I am not just talking about the people of God. I am talking about people in general. Why are people so stubborn, so mean, so selfish, so oppressive, so...? You get the idea. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 is a catalog of the types of behaviors and attitudes I am talking about. Why are people this way? Why are we so set to continue in evil while we run roughshod over fellow human beings? The world would be great were it not for people. And, as we sometimes hear, the church would be great were it not for people. (That generally leads to very hesitant chuckles.)

I am one of those people, and there's the rub (as Hamlet would say). It's easy to point fingers and talk about why "others" are so terrible, but the truth is that I am the one. The words of Nathan ring in my ears: "You are the man!" And now the problem of people takes on another dimension, for the question I have is not why God allows people, or me, to behave so badly.

The question is, why God is so kind to bad people? Why does God provide such grace to people like me? Why does He act in mercy toward people who have been so stubborn, selfish, and wicked? Why would He send Jesus to die for us knowing that we would continue to behave in insolence and rebellion? Why does He have to be so good? Why can't He just leave us alone in our badness?

It is precisely because of God's actions toward us — His kindness and mercy — that brings me back around to Him. How can I reject the One who showed such mercy to me when I could in no way expect it from Him? The problem of people is real, but the bigger question is how God can continue to be gracious to any of us? That breaks me. I will serve Him!

If this doesn't ultimately bring us back to God, we are indeed most miserable.

11/20/22 – Vestavia Bulletin

Looking for Peace

Philip Mullins

Life is hard.	Life is frustrating.	Life is stressful.	Life is confusing.
Life is unfair.	Life is cruel.	Life hurts.	

We all know how difficult and painful life can be. Do you ever wonder if there is a way to escape it or at least a better way to cope? Is it possible to have inner peace while the world around you is mad and life deals you one disappointment after another? Is it possible to rise above it all?

There is. Philippians 4:6-7 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The Bible says that real peace, lasting peace, peace in spite of circumstances is possible. It is found in the right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is a relationship where you are free to pray to God anytime, over any anxiety, and ask for help. It is a relationship that gives you peace even though all your questions aren't answered. A relationship where the peace you find will guard your heart and mind and not allow life to break you and destroy you.

Understand that this relationship is not based upon some emotional high. It is not rooted in some mystical experience. It is built upon a life of submission to the will of God. The psalmist wrote of the peace of God when he said, "Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace" (Psalm 37:37). When a person is living right with God he can know peace. Until one does, peace is elusive. Psalm 119:165 states, "Great peace have those who love Your law....." Those who respect God's word and live their life by it are the ones who have the peace of God.

There is something about submitting your will totally to God in obedience of His word that releases so much anxiety from within us. Contrary of the thinking of most, to obey God is liberating. When we live totally under the sway of the Lord's will things that disturb and harm others will not touch us. When you put God first, everything else will fall in place. Even if it doesn't, it won't matter. All that will matter is that you are right with your Creator. Then, and only then, will you really own peace.

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