

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



Color your wilderness

The Order of Wilderness Stuff Trekkers International Come on in

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Fellow members of The Order of Wilderness Stuff Trekkers International, this week we are going to look at the color of some of our spiritual baggage. Specifically, we want to look at the church and the mostly invisible stuff that surrounds the entrance to the building which has a direct influence on what occurs inside. I realize this really isn't natural stuff, but it is a graying agent on all of society. Remember gray is just white with too much stuff to be translucent and let the light in.

Some years ago I was channel surfing when I came across a crusade being hosted by one of the most famous TV evangelists. Since nothing else was on of any value, I thought I would spend a few minutes watching the show. Soon everyone who came near this person were falling on their backs, slain in the spirit. Troubled by the excess I saw, I watched and tried to see if there was anything specific that I felt was wrong in this program. While, I do not find what we call the modern day slain in the spirit in the Bible, I have talked with numerous persons who have experienced this encounter and I have no doubt that it is some type of real happening. However, if these phenomena are not clearly discerned from Biblical exposition, by definition, they must not be of God.

Still troubled in my spirit, after I had been sorely entertained long enough, I continued my surfing expedition. My next stop was a talk show in which Steve Martin was the guest. He was on the program promoting his new movie, "Leap of Faith." "Very interesting," I thought to myself, "just one of those coincidences, a movie about a traveling evangelist, following my actual watching of the real thing."

As they played the clip from the movie, it got even more interesting. This segment showed the evangelist, played by Steve, waving his hand over the assembled crowd while using the incantation, "Catch the Anointing!" These people all fell down too, but what was the amazing part, these were the exact words used by the real evangelist just a few minutes earlier.

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Jerry Bannon

Wonder Springs

7950 Seward Park Avenue South

Seattle, Washington USA 98118

phone: 206.723.7433

eFax: 425.675.8022

email: bannon@createleaders.org or chronicles@createleaders.org

Please forward prayer requests to: prayer@createleaders.org

Washington State Charity Number: 7529

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I have no intention of debating this manifestation, but just to say that if it is of God, it must be verifiable by Biblical exegesis, if not, then the source must be either man or demonic power. My personal opinion is that most of the time it happens through the power of man, both in the evangelist and in the recipient. Only on rare occasions can it be attributed to demonic influences. But when you think of it even in those terms, it is still a manifestation of God's glory. Not in the actual act itself, but in that God would allow such a fleshly thing to happen, just because it had some well meaning intension. But back to the movie.

Not being a big box office hit, the show was soon released in video format. Renting as a new release, I was struck by the final scene. In that parting clip, a young man has been definitely touched by God within the theatrics of the crusade. While I don't remember this film evangelist parting words, the thought was something like. "In this world there are the real and the fake, just because so much of the world is fake, doesn't mean that the real does not exist, it means that the real is just harder to find. But if you do find the real thing, don't let it slip away."

Evangelism is a good thing, and that might include some type of traveling event. However, just because our efforts meet with resistance does not necessarily mean we are being persecuted for our faith. If done in the flesh true evangelism is a difficult, no impossible task. Opposition may just come from us being obnoxious instead of loving. With Christianity, justification is an external truth noun, not an internal temporal verb of merit.

"Brother Love's Traveling Salvation Show." Neil Diamond's hit song, probably brings back memories, good or bad, for many Americans and those exposed to western evangelism through out the world. It may not have been a humid August night, but millions have been introduced to Christianity through Brother Love's show, either in person or in the song. To be frank, whoever he is, the stereotype of Brother Love's show is what many find most obnoxious about the church and Christianity. "If this is the front door to the church, then I choose not to enter."

The problem is not really a manifestation of Brother Love, it is that this mentality (revivalism) permeates and becomes the essence of Evangelism. If you survey most pastors and leaders of evangeliscal Christian ministries their testimony goes something like, "My mama took me to church when I was a kid, even though I didn't want to go. Then one night at this specific hour and this specific place I got saved and I have been a saint ever since."

If the total context of this testimony doesn't look somewhat bizarre, perhaps it is time to try to get another opinion and briefly examine good Calvinist doctrine in contrast to: "My choice of my own free will was to change my rebellious life to follow God."

This of course opens the Calvinism - Arminianism debate. Just like with being slain in the spirit, this is another avenue I choose not to participate. To this I respond, "Well my doctrine is really neither Calvinist or Arminian it is basically Lutheran. Basic Lutheran doctrine on this subject is presented in the 'Book of Concord.' if you would like to understand their doctrine better, that would be a good place to begin."

Now, just between you a me, this is rather a verbose account that really is not too clear on what it really means, hence I am generally arguing not from ignorance, but to ignorance. And notice I said my doctrine is basically Lutheran, which lies well within the pale of Protestant Christian Orthodoxy, of both to Calvinists and Arminians, even if they admonish each other's anathema. Therefore, we do not now enter into the paradox of God's sovereign election, rather we enter into the mystery, wisdom says we would all be better off if we left it there.

Since, we have been talking about movies, the movie "Luther" opens an important door to our discussion. In Luther's day it wasn't Brother Love's Traveling Salvation Show, it was Brother Love's Traveling Indulgence Show. Actually, in this case it was a real Brother, whose real name isn't important to this discussion, but instead of money buying salvation, money buys freedom from purgatory for your relatives and friends. Variations on a theme of the price of a free gift from God, but in the medieval sense, not nearly so self centered as salvation. If money doesn't enter into the equation why did the evangelist Billy Sunday remark that he could save souls for \$2.00 a head.

But again we miss the point if we just look at the money. The real point is the entrance to the church. What God was doing in the Reformation was changing the entrance to the church. It is no

coincidence that the doors of the church of Wittenberg were where important announcements were posted, it is no coincidence that is where Luther posted his 95 theses.

If God, in a mysterious way, can take a desire to debate the credenda of indulgences and relics and reform the whole church based on God's grace and love, why don't we too just eliminate the revivalist entry, that requires a worldly show and a timely persuasive decision, and replace that door, no just eliminate it all together, with an entry focusing on a family apologetic of God's grace and love exemplified by adoption through propitiation and justification.

One of the main problems with this approach is that it takes us out of the immediate now of myself, and forces us to join in communion, a historic body made up of saints by adoption, not by merit, a church of redeemed born again sinners. That born again part of the Reformation did not immediately surface, and would not have been so significant today, without the rise of revivalism. The Bible says we must be born again, but that does not mean that I must recall in detail my second birth, just because I have no recollection of my first.

However, whatever my outlook, it does not mean God requires us to maintain the traditions of either the Reformation or revivalism, to be accepted as part of God's church. This may mean as early Christians found out, that you can't just stay in the synagogue, or as Luther found out, that you cannot stay in the established church and be consistent with your personal beliefs, "Here I stand, I can do no other." However, the early church and Luther were extremely right in their belief that the elect must maintain their church affiliation.

Revivalism really grew out of a Methodist method to again open the church doors to all who would come. Its early success was based on just the premise we are discussing. Quickly however, the dominate personalities became the attraction and not the word of God. It is just human nature. Lip service was paid to strengthening the local church, but the local church was led, most of the time, by an ordinary local pastor doing difficult work, not a dynamic personality able to inspire thousands with a single message and leave town. In time these meetings became the church for the crowd and there they gave their support, thereby undermining the local church. This is still true today. But these crusades are not the church as God designed it.

Most of you who get this mailing are in some way associated or know of Calvary Chapel. It is now generally taught that the growth of Calvary Chapel is based upon teaching the Word of God, to quote Isaiah, precept upon precept, and the music. But that has to do with once you get inside the church. I submit God used Calvary Chapel uniquely because Chuck Smith did, just as Luther did, Chuck opened the church door. Anyone, no matter how they looked, or heaven forbid, what they currently believed, could come to church. And once inside, the Bible was again really given to the laity as the revelation of God's love and lives were changed. There have always been churches and some denominations that have systematically taught the Bible, but there were also published and unpublished restrictions on who could enter in.

As strange as it sounds, there are other similarities between an Augustinian monk and a Pentecostal preacher, but for our purposes, the changes rot within the church were designed around the construct of decency and order. The elimination of non Biblical practices as a means of grace were enforced, but only as required. Some desired more significant changes and went on and did them on their own. Most of the time these changes have not led to the same success. As a result Calvary Chapel is generally considered a charismatic church, but not Pentecostal. Similar but different, without excesses. Likewise a Lutheran church is very similar in appearance and liturgy to a Roman Catholic church, but with a very different doctrine.

The door, the door, the door. The Bible teaches that the door, or the gate is Jesus Christ, and He lets anyone who through faith desires to enter the church. Since Jesus controls the door, we must make sure that we have not constructed other doors to maintain our perceived security. In a strange way our self created entry is still revivalism and other unperceived forms of legalism as the apologetic of salvation.

So your homework for this week is to determine what other theses might be appended to the doors of your church, either by those trying to get in, or those from within trying to affect reformation while maintaining decency and order. For a reference, the stuff of trekking this week is found in the Bible. Those theses therein, that I found quite convicting are found in the Beatitudes, found not in Matthew this time, but in Luke Chapter 6:17-49.

Once through the door, changes can be affected by how we treat those who come in. Next week we will look at those two types of people who come to enter. But for now for context of your Beatitude study, they both seek grace and love, they are all children of the King.

It is the job of the church to preach the gospel of sin, repentance, and adoption through justification, not to save the righteous, but to save the sinner and to remind him or her of their new nature in Christ. The church is made up of justified sinners, only saints by adoption. In that regard the church really has a message of Good News to all of sinful man. George Whitefield's revivalism might get you there, but most in the church would say the Wesley's I know, along with Edwards and Finney, Whitefield, who is he. Alas, more homework.

Seeds for Prayer

I have determined as best I can, with God's help, to color my stuff and not let it control or color me. Considering the mountain of stuff I have to contend with, this is surely an impossible undertaking if it were not for God's grace. But today my landlord here in Seattle volunteered to help me sort and package the junk in Reardan. That is the most daunting of the problems over there. Once sorted then it can be sent for reuse, recycling, or disposal as appropriate. Then what remains is the stuff required to get the place fixed up.

I have determined that God doesn't want me to move over there, at least the way I would do it. I also believe that my time here in this house is virtually over. That opens a door to nowhere that I know. So please intercede for a place to color and dispose of my current stuff, so that I can begin to travel more lightly, maintaining only the stuff I can actively color with.

Speaking of being born again, the changes in my body because of my vascular surgery in February are now really beginning to be manifest. My doctor said I would notice I would have more stamina, but until this last month or so, I really didn't understand the extent of the changes. Actually I can't comprehend the difference, because I have always had excellent stamina, it was that it took a while to get there. Now it is more rapid and deeper. This coming at a time when I have the poorest cardiovascular conditioning in recent memory. It is a learning experience of what all this means, because it is like the former body has passed away, and all things have been made new. In that sense I really have no baseline understanding of my physical limitations that I had before, the old doesn't work any more. Please pray for time and inclination to get more exercise and more fully understand this gift of a new man