

Offensive kinds of Christianity

The need for acceptance and approval are so strong in our lives that we are like lap-dogs with anyone who gives us a pat. Pick me, pick me! The church becomes a place where many people relive a dysfunctional childhood, particularly if there are authoritarian leaders who dispense approval, disapproval, acceptance, honour, or punishment. Authoritarian churches are in insult to the grace of God, as Jesus pointed out some time back.

The Pharisees loaded people with guilt in order to manipulate and control them. If people feel inadequate, rejected, impostors in God's house, it's not hard to keep them in knots always striving to overcome the latest sin or sickness or trial. Religion itself become indispensable. Authority works well in churches because if people feel obliged to attend, tithe and work in order to keep God happy, it solves a lot of organisational problems.

Throughout history Christians have done appalling things to win the approbation of God and humanity: sitting on poles in the desert, licking the streets with bleeding tongues, carrying crosses, and a thousand 21st Century versions such as acts of self-sacrifice and generosity that leave the family bereft.

Justification is a legal or forensic term that speaks of pardon. You're off the hook. Righteousness is a moral and spiritual state in which one's thoughts and actions are consistent with God's idea of holiness of God. If you are trust Christ for forgiveness

you are justified, and righteous before God. Not because you're good, but because Christ bought out the bad lease.

In Romans 10:3 we read about a righteousness that comes from God. It means we are just, blameless, without guilt. Oddly, we have to submit to this righteousness, which is a humbling reality. There is nothing we can do to please God of our own volition. Nothing we do can buy this righteousness. No amount of tithing, attending, praying, or even bible reading, makes you any more righteous in God's sight. Moreover, to not accept this righteousness is to deny the work of Christ. (Galatians 2:21)

These Christian truths are very unpleasant for many people. There is a desire for a religion that not only makes individuals feel better, but appear to others to be better. There is popular appeal in the gentle, mystical, harmless spirituality of some religions, as well as the striving ascetic religions of phenomenal achievement in fasting, pilgrimage, suffering, sacrifice. It is very offensive to human pride to be told that there is nothing we can do – this guy has already fixed up the bill.

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