

The Chaff and the True Bread

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Christmas reminds us that God is a God who has revealed and defined Himself through what He has done: God became man and gave Himself for us. He did not consider what was good or evil about the situation. He considered what we deserved only insofar as we deserved death, and He desired to save us from it. He did not consult His vast stores of wisdom and knowledge. Rather, God loved us, and because He loved us, He did something. The Word didn't remain with God, the "Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:1, 14).

This is the whole meaning of the physical world. God has not simply known something, or thought about something. He has, from the beginning, been concerned with concrete action that is not merely an abstraction of reality, but reality itself. This is why the Psalms tell us that God's creation testifies of His glory (Psalm 19). This being so, creation is still a dim reflection of God, and is not the action by which God fully defined Himself. God fully defined Himself in His Son, in His Son's death on the cross, in the bringing forth of the new creation through Christ's resurrection. At the cross, love came—not as a philosophy, not as knowledge, not as a religion—but as reality itself, as concrete, efficacious action in the world. It is this that saves us. Consequently, God desires that we not merely know about the cross, but that we daily surrender our bodies to it, and allow God to define Himself in us through concrete acts of love (1 John 3:16-18). God is not interested in what we know about the cross. He is not impressed by the multiplying that goes on in our theology, which is, at best, a counterfeit of His feeding of the 5,000. His feeding, after all, was something real He did, not an attempt to systematically explain something real. Therefore, what is important to God is not that we know and explain something about the cross, but that we take it up and die daily (Luke 9:23; 1 Cor. 15:31).

This is why the New Testament is replete with simple, behavioral commands. It is not an attempt to establish a new outward law, or a works-based righteousness, all of which had already failed. No, it is showing us that it is here—in real demonstrations of love—that Christ is known. In 1 Corinthians 13—the "love chapter"—Paul says we can speak in tongues or prophesy, we can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, we can have faith to move a mountain, we can give all we possess to the poor and even die as martyrs, but if we don't do these things in love, if we don't love in the most ordinary circumstances, then we haven't done anything that God cares about.

Despite this, we hear a lot about tongues and prophesy, we hear a lot about faith, we hear a lot about social programs. In short, we harvest, and preach, and store up in our barns the very things that God has called chaff, all the while starving ourselves and our brothers as we neglect the real wheat—the love of Christ. Can we make the bread of life out of chaff? Shall we ask Christ to bless it and multiply it so that we can feed the world with it? No, because of this type of "Christianity" the name of God is blasphemed among the nations (Rom. 2:24). Nevertheless, there is always immeasurably more chaff than wheat in a harvest, and among men there will always be more who are impressed with its large piles. Rather than bemoan this fact, let us leave judgment to Him who holds the winnowing fork (Matt. 3:12). Let us who have tasted the true bread heed his call, and, in His image, give our flesh for each other and for the life of the world (John 6:51).