

11th Commandment

A while back, Bryan gave a sermon that mentioned Martin Luther and his act of defiance toward the Catholic Church when he nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenburg church.

Now Vera Hendricks, who was in attendance that day, took this episode to heart. Most of you know Vera and know that she is, for the time being, an atheist. Being the quiet and demure person that she is, she decided to re-work the 10 Commandments and nail them to the Morse Church door. Now I must say I didn't agree with what she had done to the first 10 but I absolutely loved her addition of an 11th Commandment: Thou Shall Think!

Far too long, modern Christians have given up the intellectual high ground to the secular community and hidden behind spiritualism. But this is not the history of the Church. For Centuries most scientists were men of faith. Most western scientist, men like Isaac Newton, Galileo, Kepler, Copernicus, and Pasteur, just to name a few, were Christians and many attributed their desire to seek knowledge to God and his Creation. They saw the order in nature and wanted to discover the intricacy of God's Creation. Newton is quoted as saying, "The most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion on an intelligent and powerful Being."

It wasn't until the 18th century came that this all began to change. Then, in the 1800's, we had the "perfect storm" of Existentialism, the Higher Critics and Darwin along with other humanistic philosophies. Existentialism is a philosophy that gained popular status among some intellectuals of the time and is the precursor to today's Postmodernism. Essentially, existentialism states that "we are what we can become" and "Our view of the world is enough to become Truth, because it is based on our facts." The Higher Critics were biblical scholars who began to question the veracity of the bible and pointed out supposed errors from an archeological standpoint, including several errors in Luke/Acts. (Just a little aside; archeology of the 20th century verified that Luke was correct and that the Higher Critics were wrong). And of course we all know who Darwin was.

These new events in the intellectual market place brought forth the Age of Enlightenment where intellectuals were freed from, as they felt, dogmatic teachings of the church and Christianity was now viewed as a myth as opposed to truth. And then in the early 1900's, the European and east coast seminaries (like Harvard, Yale and Princeton) accepted evolution but said the God did it, and theistic evolution was born and the fate of intellectualism within the church, for the time being, was sealed.

But today, we as Christians should not accept the status quo opinion of secular society but we should follow the words of Jesus and “worship in spirit and in truth!” For this reason, it is time that we put on our thinking caps (pull out cap) and THINK! (Like the cap? I had it made in honor of Vera and her 11th commandment.)

I truly believe we are living in a unique time as it relates to the evidence for God and his creation. We are now able to peer into the inner reaches of the cell and the outer reaches of the universe and it screams creation and not randomness!

Ok, its time to put on our thinking caps. Let's take the Big Bang (I mentioned this briefly in my last talk). Naturalists today try to use it against creation. But the dirty little secret that ill-informed naturalist don't know (or try to obfuscate) is that it took almost 40 years for the Big Bang to gain acceptance because of its *religious implications!* You see naturalist had always believed (not knew) that the universe was eternal because there are only two options. Either the universe is eternal or something outside the universe is eternal. And if the universe was eternal you had eternity for randomness to cause life or in other words “to get something from nothing” despite how illogical that is. But the Big Bang implied that there was a beginning. And worse yet it implied a big banger or, heaven forbid, a Creator because there had to be a cause - someone to light the fuse so to speak. But finally, the evidence and the explanatory value of the Big Bang theory overcame dogma and bigotry, and it has now become, among scientists, universally agreed as the most plausible explanation for how the universe began. And it also harmonizes very well with the Genesis account of creation. In fact, the ancient Hebrews

were the only religious peoples whose creation story had its cosmology correct.

(Take hat off)

Now let's look at something from a philosophical standpoint. If you've done any reading or had any discussions with people about religion, or if you're just listening to everyday conversation, you've undoubtedly heard someone say the following: "you shouldn't force you morality on other people". In this age of hyper-tolerance, this is a very common cliché. Ok, it's time to put on our thinking caps. Your next question should be, "why?" You'll probably get, "because it's just not right!" Then your response should be, "Is that your moral view". You see; their original statement is contradictory or self-defeating. They're telling us not to do what they are doing to us, forcing their morality on us. By saying "shouldn't" "not right" they are making a moral statement. So whose morality trumps whose? Is their morality superior to ours? (Take off hat)

You've also probably heard the following: "All religions are equally true and valid". This is commonly referred to in theological terms as "plurality". Sounds very high minded, doesn't it? Well, let's put on our thinking caps and examine this. Let's see; Buddhists are pantheist and say all is god, Hindus are polytheistic and have millions of gods, Islam says there is one god and Mohammed is its profit, Christianity says Jesus is the Messiah and Judaism says the Messiah has not come yet. So who's right? There in lies the problem.... they can all be *wrong* but they all can't be right. Even though there are some similarities, they all make mutually exclusive claims and can not possibly all be correct. So either one is right or their all wrong. Those are the only two options. It's like a 5 part math question, even if you 4 of the 5 parts correct, your answer is still wrong. (Take off the hat)

Now let's look at another common remark: "You shouldn't try to change other people's religious views". Again, it sounds very high minded and tolerant. So again, let's put on our thinking caps. Your next questions should be, "Then why are you trying to change my religious views?" Again, the original statement is contradictory or self-defeating. They are doing to you exactly what they are telling you not to do. They either don't

know or don't care, that the bible says we are to go forth and make disciple of all nations. So by telling us we shouldn't try to change people's religious views they are trying to change our religious views. (Take cap off)

Ok, let's look at a corollary argument. If you've heard the previous one, you've probably heard this one, "All paths lead to god". Ok, let's think about this. (Put on hat) "All paths lead to god". This is one that you can actually agree. Let me explain; the bible says that we will all stand before God and be judged. So, in affect, all paths do lead to God but (here is your chance to evangelize) you need to ask them, do you want to go to God as your judge with the baseline being perfection or do you want to go the God as your father with the baseline being grace? That's an easy one for me! (Take cap off)

Most of the remarks and clichés like this that you hear people say that sound intelligent simple don't hold up under scrutiny. And most people who say them have never been challenged and don't know how to respond. Most Christians I know are afraid to confront this type of thinking because 1) they don't recognize it, 2) they don't think their faith needs defending or 3) they don't feel equip intellectually to respond. But let's face it, most people who say these kinds of this aren't Christians because *they don't believe it's true* and therefore, it's not relevant to them. And most half-hearted Christians are only half-convinced that it is true and it shows. So how are you going to reach those people...the friends, relatives, or neighbors who at best are hedging their bets in case it is true or at worse think religion is irrational. These folks think you believe that "1 plus 1 = 3"? How are you going to show them that what you believe is $1+1=2$ and that what they believe is $1+1=3$?

Well I can tell from my experience it's through truth or another name for it is apologetics. It is a myth that religion is all about faith. Sure there is faith involved in Christianity, but the underlying foundation is truth. And the Judeo/Christian religion is the only religion based on verifiable historical facts. All other religions expect you to blindly follow the teachings of their sages or prophets. That's called an "irrational belief". And if the Creation and the Resurrection are not true, your faith would also be irrational and

therefore useless. Paul summed it up very well when he said in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15:

13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

Now in case you think this truth stuff is just me speaking, let's look at 1 Peter 3:15:

...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,...

Now let's take a look at this passage in its cultural and historical context. Peter was an eyewitness to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Do you think he went up to people and said, "you just need to believe!" (as a well meaning Christian once told me). No, of course not. He filled them in on what he saw and how the scriptures were fulfilled. Now, let's look at the people who he was addressing. Based on his location in "Babylon" which most scholars suggest as code for Rome, he is writing to Jewish and gentile Roman believers. Now Peter and his fellow Christians had to convince a very skeptical audience that the resurrection was true. Can you image an observant Jew believing in the messiah just because some gentile believer said he had warm fuzzies about a man name Jesus! No. Or could you image a Roman citizen "just believing" in Jesus because a Christian told him he should, believing in someone who was an enemy of Caesar and whose association with that person could get them thrown in jail or in with the lions or your body used as a street light. He or she had to "be prepared" by providing the reasons for their hope in Jesus or they had to be prepared to send them or lead to someone or something that could help them with their skepticism. And let's take Paul. What did he do when he first hit town? He would reason with the Jews in the synagogue, and then he would reason with the local gentiles as he did with the Greeks at Mars Hill.

You see modern Christianity has become a "feel good" religion where people are told

they just need to believe because of some esoteric truth that they'll understand once they believe. Well, I'm sorry but that is mysticism or at worst Gnosticism something the early church recognized and banished from the church 1900 years ago. It's only in the 1900's and today that it has reared its ugly head again.

Also, mainstream Christianity has become "hands off" as it relates to evangelism. If you act Christianly enough, people will be drawn towards you and by your actions, you will lead them to Christ. You don't want to tell people about Jesus because you might offend them. Well as Jesus said, and Paul reiterated, the gospel is offensive to non-believers, so we need to get over ourselves and quit worrying about offending people (that's personally a hard one for me). Now I'm not saying you need to get a flashing neon cross and carrying up and down Main Street telling people they need to repent (I actually saw this in New Orleans), what I'm saying is that just because there is a possibility that you might offend someone if you bring up religion, that should keep you from bringing it up.

Now I know that both of these systems of conversion do work on occasion, that people do have spiritual awakenings, and that we as Christians must live lives that are pleasing to God and thereby will draw some people to the Church. And that to gain creditability with people, most often you need to have some sort of relationship with them.

BUT, biblically and practically, they are insufficient to reach most non-believers. Only when these methods are combined with Truth will we truly be able to reach the lost among us. Here again, this is not me speaking. All you have to do is look at Jesus' own words when He said "Believe me when I say, I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on the *evidence* of the miracles themselves." Now, did Jesus ask people to "just believe"? Yep. And did they "just believe"? Nope. Some did but most didn't. It wasn't until he *proved* who he said was with miracles and His resurrection that people actually believed and they believed in droves! All throughout history, the Church flourishes when truth and spiritualism mesh as in Acts or the reformation or the great awakening.

I can tell you unequivocally, that I would not be a Christian today if it weren't for the Truth of Creation, The Truth of the Bible and the Truth of the Resurrection. It just wouldn't have happened unless Jesus himself had appeared to me. Even after I knew that it was true, I still didn't act on it for about a year because I wasn't real sure I wanted to be identified as a "true believer" and all the implications that brings with it. It wasn't until I was around Christians for a while, that I realized that some were actually normal and not some wild eyed, mind-numbed zealots. So relationships do matter but only up to a point, then Truth with the nudging of the Holy Spirit must take over.

You know, now that I think about it, Jesus did appear to me. He appeared to me in the words of the Bible once I knew they were true!

I'm going to fill you in on a little secret; in my 5 years as a Christian, I have come to realize that I am unique within the church, somewhere on the level of Dave and Vera. I've also found that most lifelong Christian don't get where I'm coming from. But that's all right because, outside the Church, I am (or was) the norm. People aren't staying away from the Church because the Pastors gave a bad sermon or because "churches just want your money", or because "the church causes evil in the world". No, they don't come because it's not relevant to them because they don't believe it's true. In most churches, only about 20% or so regularly attend church. And if Bryan's demographic studies are correct, that means that only 10% are committed Christians. The rest are either hedging their bet in case it's true or they just think its nonsense.

So what do we do about that?

I know for me, I feel like the church let me down. It could have taught me the things that I had to learn on my own, but they didn't because of some of the reasons I mentioned earlier. But here at Morse Church, I hope we don't let that happen. I think Bryan does a good job of incorporating the historical aspects of the Church in his talks. And he's not afraid to let a yahoo like me get up here and get on my soapbox. Those of you who are around me enough, know that I'm a one trick pony when it comes to this topic. It's my

passion. How could it not be? The Spirit of Truth, as John calls it in his gospel, has taken over my life and for that I'm eternally grateful.

So, here's what we're going to do at the Morse Church. In addition to Alpha, we are going to start an apologetics class that will allow us to put on our thinking caps by studying the 12 most common questions that non-believers have and will equip you with the ability to answer these questions. Many of you probably struggle with some of these questions yourself; so this class will hopefully answer your questions as well... questions like:

Is there really a God?

Why do you believe in miracles?

Isn't Christianity just a psychological crutch?

Is the Bible reliable?

Why do the innocent suffer?

Is Christ the only way to God?

Will God judge those who have never heard about Christ?

Why are so many Christians hypocrites?

Will my good works get me to heaven?

Isn't salvation by faith too easy?

What does the Bible mean by "believe"?

Can anyone be sure of their salvation?

This class will begin on the week after Labor Day at 7 o'clock here at the church. Sign up will be at the back of the church.

I encourage all of you to do this. Do it for your own faith and the faith of others. And besides, it's very interesting and should be fun!