

Keeping The Faith

Jude

Who Represents Christianity?

Pope Benedict XVI, Billy & Franklin Graham, David Yonggi Cho, Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I, Tim Keller, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mark Driscoll, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Joel Olsteen, Rob Bell.

One of the leading criticisms of Christianity is that it is filled with sects and schisms.

This is in fact difficult to deny.

There are different ways to worship, differences in points of theology, differences in authority, geography and culture.

So who has got it right?

History

The Early church also struggled because all they had were a loose collection of churches spread out all over the Roman Empire and beyond.

They started at a central point in Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem but after Pentecost and the persecution they began to spread out.

The Early church established a kind of leadership called the Jerusalem Council. This Council was led by James the Just, brother of Jesus.

Over time, with the spread of Christianity, the message of the Kingdom there were elements that presented themselves that were contradictory with the fundamental teachings of Jesus.

There were many who claimed to be Christian teachers and prophets who in fact taught something far off from Christian truth.

This caused the apostles and early church leaders to write their personal accounts of Jesus and his teachings.

Letters were also eventually written to encourage and teach the believers abroad.

Jude

One of these letters was written by a Christian leader named Jude. He happened to be the brother of James the Just and of Jesus.

He, like James did not begin as followers of their elder half-brother, but they eventually also became his disciples. Out of humility in neither of their letters did they use their relationship with Jesus as a badge of honor. Perhaps they noted that Jesus himself had said that those who did the will of God were his family.

The problem James addressed is the same one we began with.

"Who represents Christianity?"

More specifically, there were people who had entered into a specific church who began to teach that salvation and grace meant you could do whatever you wanted.

He uses example after example from both Scripture and legend to state clearly that the Kingdom and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross did not mean a life without morals or ethics.

Life in the Kingdom, he points out, means transformation of our values to be counter to our culture as well as our sinful impulses.

He urges the believers to fight against this heresy of antinomianism.

Discussion:

What are some of the ethical & moral issues we face today?

What does it mean to be a Christian?

So where do we draw the line theologically and practically?

First, theologically - or according to your beliefs:

The fundamentals are pretty much in the Apostle's Creed.

Christians believe in the Triune God.

The Salvation that come from accepting the atoning work of Jesus' death.

His resurrection, ascension and future return.

The work of the Holy Spirit.

The institution of the Church as the people of God.

Do you know what you believe?

We have a statement of Faith as a Church that outlines these things.

Secondly, Practically - a Christian is a person whose life is clearly committed to serving, glorifying and worshipping the Triune God in all they say and do.

There is a role of discipleship in the church for this reason.

Spiritual authority exists to provide practical guidance in the way we live.

Truth and grace must work together.

We call a sin a sin.

We call temptation and questionable behaviour into account.

We do so with grace and understanding, not with condemnation.

But we speak the truth in love.

These are the essentials.

Peter Meiderlin of the 16th century coined the phrase:

In things essential, Unity.

In things peripheral, Liberty.

In all things, Charity.

So Who Represents Christianity?

I know the story of a woman who really wanted her husband to be a Christian.

After a long while of being unsuccessfully asking him to go to church or

consider faith she was frustrated and asked him, "Why won't you believe?"

His answer?

"Because of You. Nothing in your life makes me think God is good or real. Your

so-called belief doesn't seem to make a difference in the way you live. We

are the same. You just happen to go to church on Sundays."

This is Jude's Concern.

Who represents the Church?

You do.

We come to know the Servant King, the Savior through the conviction of the

Holy Spirit through the visible faith of one who truly follows Jesus.

The world is changed one person, one soul at a time.