The Problem of People

(by Doy Moyer)

While many turn away from God due to some perceived problem with God *(e.g., allowing evil to exist)*, I have found that just as prominent is a problem that they have with those who call themselves Christians. Because Christians have been hypocritical, unloving, divisive and abusive, some have walked away thinking that if this is what Christians are like, they want no part of them. We might respond, *“But our faith resides in God, not people, so turning from God because of people isn’t justified.”* While that is technically correct, we do need to factor in what the Lord said about His disciples and their relationship to how the world perceives Christians:

***“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*** (**John 13:34-35**, CSB)

***“I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me.”*** (**John 17:20-21**, CSB)

Jesus makes clear that the world sits in some form of judgment on whether disciples reflect their Lord. If they see a lack of love, they may conclude that we are not really disciples of Jesus. And let’s be honest: who really wants to be around those who lack love while calling themselves something they are not? Then, if we are divisive and fail to reflect the unity to which Jesus calls us, the world will conclude that Jesus Himself is a fraud (***“that the world may believe You sent Me”***). Do we think about that when we are fighting, fussing, and feuding with each other?

There is, then, a great responsibility we have as citizens of heaven to walk worthy of the gospel (**Philippians 1:27**). If we know that our actions demonstrate that we are not serious about our calling and that our divisions might turn people from Christ, then we need to think deeply about how we interact with both the world and one another. We might comfort ourselves with a technically correct concept, but can we escape the consequences of our actions that may contribute to disbelief?

While many have overcome the problem of people and stayed true and faithful to the Lord, that is not an excuse to misbehave, for the next person we influence might not overcome the problem so well. If our actions contribute to this issue, then we will be called to account. May God help us if we act so unbecomingly that we turn people off to the gospel! If people are going to be offended and put off, let it be by the gospel itself and not our own unrighteousness (cf. **1 Corinthians 1:18**ff).

There is more, though, and this is confession time. If ever there is something that makes me question what I know is right, it is the problem of people. It is not the veracity of Scripture, the identity of Jesus, or the character of God that makes me wonder. And here I am not just talking about the people of God. I am talking about people in general. Why are people so stubborn, so mean, so selfish, so oppressive, so…? You get the idea. **2 Timothy 3:1-5** is a catalog of the types of behaviors and attitudes I am talking about. Why are people this way? Why are we so set to continue in evil while we run roughshod over fellow human beings? The world would be great were it not for people. And, as we often hear, the church would be great were it not for people. *(That generally leads to very hesitant chuckles.)*

But here’s the rub: I am one of those people! It’s easy to point fingers and talk about why “others” are so terrible, but the truth is that I am the one. The words of Nathan often ring in my thinking: ***“You are the man!”*** And now the problem of people takes on another dimension, for the question I have is not why God allows people to behave so badly. It’s not why He allows me to be so bad.

The question I have is why God is so kind to bad people. Why does God provide such grace to people like me? Why does He act in mercy toward people who have been so stubborn, selfish, and wicked? Why would He send Jesus to die for us knowing how we would continue to behave in insolence and rebellion? Why does He have to be so good? Why can’t He just leave us alone in our badness?

It is precisely because of God’s actions toward us — His kindness and mercy — that brings me back around to Him. How can I reject the One who showed such mercy to me when I could in no way expect it from Him? The problem of people is real, but the bigger question is how God can continue to be gracious to any of us? That breaks me. I will serve Him!

If this doesn’t ultimately bring us back to God, we are indeed most miserable.