



SHIELD OF FAITH

"Take Up the Shield of Faith" - Paul

Wednesday, January 29, 2020

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" — Rich Young Man

Kobe Pierces the Fog of Mortality

<https://michaelheath.org/shield-of-faith-column/kobe-pierces-the-fog-of-mortality>

It came as a surprise, and without much, if any, warning. Eight souls passed into eternity a few days ago in an instant. Their helicopter was performing the mechanical miracle of flight one minute. The ordered machine suddenly became a random and disordered jumble of shredded aluminum the next. The helicopter mysteriously flew into the ground. Millions of people around the world want to know why. They are mourning the loss of life.

Kobe and his daughter went to church that morning. They were Christians. They were rich. Twirling and bouncing a basketball brought fame and fortune. Larry King swears that Kobe is a good guy. He met him a couple times. A rich young ruler met the God of the universe one day. The Bible records that he asked Jesus Christ, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

God's response is fascinating. Jesus first upbraids the man for calling Him good. Jesus answers, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." False human respect is a huge problem for the rich. God is a trinity. Christianity teaches that He is three persons in one. This is a mystery. A very important mystery. It is fundamental to understanding our human condition, and to living well.

Jesus Christ is never alone. He never acts without being in fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In their triune character they are good. Only God alone is good. And God alone is love between three persons. God is not singular. He does not aspire to receiving praise for any one of His three persons. He is always a unity of three persons. And this is very good indeed.

The fall of mankind broke something related to this fellowship that is essential to our personhood ... our humanity. That brokenness surfaces in this rich man's question. God gently offers a correction. Jesus instructs the rich man not to flatter Him. Honesty is always the best policy. Especially when you are selling something. America and the West have fallen away from this truth. Sigmund Freud's cousin, Edward Bernaise, led the way with his invention of "public relations" and advertising in the early part of the twentieth century.

We Americans are conditioned by sophisticated psychological techniques to always lead with false human respect, with flattery. We believe this will help us succeed in life. It has made us rich in material goods. It appears that the technique was just as potent two thousand years ago. Hence the gentle teaching of Jesus Christ.

Continued on the back

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Jesus Christ is not impressed by material goods. He is not impressed ... AT ALL. Jesus, in fact, says this to the young man, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” It’s not the riches that concern God. It is the young man’s relationship with them. It is his possession by them. The rich young man is possessed ... by the material world. His spiritual life is as disordered as the helicopter after it smashed into the ground. Doctor Jesus is providing the prescription that will heal him if he takes it. The rich young man decides not to fill it. The Bible reports that he walked away unable to dispossess himself of his “riches.”

Before Jesus offers the ultimate prescription for his ills He instructs the rich young man, “You know the commandments: Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.” The rich young man is very good indeed. He answers that he has kept all these commandments from his youth. The Bible gives us every reason to believe that this is true because it records that Jesus loved the man for this.

There is more, however, to earning eternal life with God than morality and law keeping. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, teaches in his letter to the Christians in Corinth, “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Love for God above all — especially riches — is crucial.

America is the richest, most materialistic, culture ever to emerge on planet earth. We are so rich that we’ve become proud thinking that all the peoples of the world want to live here because of our “success.” We’ve even spiritualized our materialism. We think it is justified because of our constitution, democracy and military might.

Nothing could be further from the truth. No amount of science, global position systeming and top flight tech can pierce the fog of our mortality. We will all die. All of us will stand before God and offer an accounting for what we did with His blessing of life. Riches are not a thing to God.

Love is what matters.

Amen.