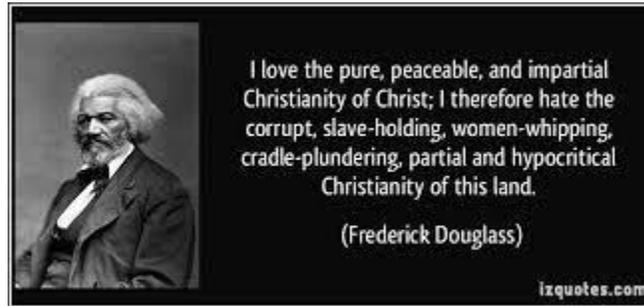


The Destruction of the Beauty of Christianity by socio/economic/politico forces



Jesus Christ is the most beautiful Person who has ever graced our planet. As eternal God, He so loved the human race of fallen and depraved mankind that He took on a human nature and bore all their sins on the Cross (John 1:14-18; 3:16; 1 John 2:1). God demonstrates His unconditional and matchless love toward every person by sacrificing Himself on the Cross (Rom. 5:8). His free gift of salvation is available to anyone who will believe in Him (Acts 16:31; Rev. 22:17). This marvelous grace that cannot be earned and is never deserved (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:6). No other religion even posits a God who loved man to the extent that He would become a man and take on man's curses (Gal. 3:13) so man can have an eternal relationship with Him in absolute blessedness.

By extension, Christians are to be people who are so overwhelmed with God's matchless grace and love that it pours out into all their relationships. The very love of God is to be instantiated in the lives of Christians. However, all too often, socio/economic/politico (SEP) forces neutralize God's love for all that the believer is to partake of and share.

In previous articles, I have noted how Christians have been hijacked throughout history by SEP forces: (e.g., by Rome/Constantine (313), by the crusades (1100-1300), by the inquisitions (1231-1834), by colonialism (1400-1800), by antebellum America (1650-1850), by Jim Crow South (1870-1960), by Nazi Germany (1930-1940), by consumer/prosperity Gospel (1950-2018), and by modern political Christianity (1950-2018).

A careful analysis of these hijackings reveals that in every case there was some type of prosperity gospel that corrupted the Christian's love. This prosperity takes on many forms: political power (Constantine), social status (antebellum South), and money (colonialism and race-based slavery). The bottom line in all prosperity movements is that God is elicited to come into the life of the believer to help the believer gain more things. However, the bottom line in authentic Christianity is that instead of God coming into our lives to make our lives more healthy, wealthy, and wise, we come into God's life and partake of His love and grace and share that with others—regardless of personal costs (i.e., daily denial of self for God, Luke 9:23).

The last thing that I want to do is to point fingers for the sake of the "grievous or reparation industry." I have absolutely no desire to condemn any race for previous atrocities. My goal is to do my part in restoring the beauty of Christianity by pointing out how SEP can spoil the beauty of Christianity. I do this in this article by recounting the testimony of an eye-witness in

antebellum South who understood the beauty of Christianity and the chilling ugliness of Christians who have been hijacked by values and comforts (SEP) of this world.

A view from an escaped slave, Frederick Douglas, in 1845:

“I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of the land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of frauds, and the grossest of all libels. Never was there a clearer case of ‘stealing the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in.’ I am filled with unutterable loathing when I contemplate the religious pomp and show, together with the horrible inconsistencies, which everywhere surround me. We have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunderers for church members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cowskin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday, and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus . . . The slave auctioneer’s bell and the church-going bell chime in with each other, and the bitter cries of the heart-broken slave are drowned in the religious shouts of his pious master. Revivals of religion and revivals in the slave-trade go hand in hand together. The slave prison and the church stand near each other. The clanking of fetters and the rattling of chains in the prison, and the pious psalm and solemn prayer in the church, may be heard at the same time. The dealers in the bodies and souls of men erect their stand in the presence of the pulpit, and they mutually help each other. The deal gives his blood-stained gold to support the pulpit, and the pulpit, in return, covers his infernal business with the garb of Christianity. Here we have religion and robbery the allies of each other—devils dressed in angels’ robes, and hell presenting the semblance of paradise.”

Douglass’s description of the coexistence of Southern white evangelical Christianity with the evil of slavery is chilling: revivals in Christianity led to revivals in domestic slave trade. Of course, this was all done in the name of what was perceived God-given American prosperity by the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians. While the accidents have changed (slavery), the form (essential reality) continues to plague us in many ways. There is more than one way to denigrate and demonize fellow human beings for SEP reasons.

In His Grace,

Pastor Don Hargrove