

McCabe United Methodist Church

When Christians Get it Wrong (Part 2):

“Christians, Science, and Politics”

April 22, 2012

A little girl asked her mother: 'Where did humans come from?'

The mother answered, 'God made Adam and Eve; they had children; and so on, and so on.'

Two days later the girl asked her father the same question.

The father answered, 'The human race evolved from monkeys over many, many years.'

The confused girl returned to her mother and said, Mom, how is it possible that you told me humans were created by God, and dad said they evolved from monkeys?'

The mother answered, 'Well, Dear, it is very simple. I told you about my side of the family, and your father told you about his.'

In 2007, the Barna Group surveyed young people who live outside the Church doors and asked them about their perceptions of people like you and me. We learned young people are staying away from the Church in record numbers, because they have experienced us to be like the Pharisees' of old: judgmental, hypocritical, political, and insensitive.

Unfortunately, I agree with them. I am a recovering Pharisee.

The people in the survey saw themselves the same way: judgmental, hypocritical, political, and insensitive. The difference is we profess to follow a God of Love and Grace, but all they hear is legalism and judgment.

Please don't misunderstand. We don't need to justify our beliefs, or lower our standards in order to welcome young people, but we need to learn how to communicate like Jesus. He did not chastise the common person; instead, he welcomed them and encouraged them in a way which changed their lives.

However, Jesus did chastise people, he raised his voice, and he turned over tables. By studying the scripture we will quickly learn Jesus spoke more harshly to the people inside the Synagogue, the Church of his day, than to the person on the streets.

Allow me to share two quotes to start today's conversation:

"The chief major battle between [conservative] Christianity and modern science is not about a large number of individual facts, but about the principles that control science in its work. The battle today is largely that of the philosophy of science." H.R. Van Til.

"In a recent Gallup poll it was found that half the adults in America believe that the earth is 6,000 years old. The reason they give for believing this is 'the Bible says so.' Meanwhile, according to Christian astronomer Dr. Hugh Ross, 99% of all scientists believe this idea is more farfetched than believing the world is flat. Their reason? The scientific record says so." Kevin Sluder
http://www.religioustolerance.org/sci_cchris.htm

People age 16-29 are receiving a different education than you and I. They are learning about reading, writing, and arithmetic. But they are also getting their education in a world influenced by supercomputers, super conductors, supercolliders, and the Human Genome Project. Our children are learning things in school that make my head spin.

For example, they know about carbon dating. Science has proven carbon breaks down at a very predictable rate. Young people know "Carbon Dating" has proven (beyond a scientific doubt) the age of rocks, fossils, and dinosaur bones.

When someone age 16-29 is asked the age of the earth they are more likely to say its 4.5 Billion years old, than to say it's 6,000 years old. Do they give this answer because they are "un-Christian?" NO. They simply believe it's a matter of science, not a matter of faith?

When I was a teenager I worked in the shop, at my dad's farm equipment dealership. I helped assemble and deliver equipment throughout the area. That was a great time in my life.

I loved working with the guys in the shop. Some of them were real characters. I can remember dad getting after a couple of guys because they thought any problem could be solved by using a cutting torch and a hammer. Dad would catch them in the act and point to the tool boxes and say: "We have a shop full of tools. Use the right tool for the job."

Adam Hamilton writes the following comment, in his book: "When Christians Get it Wrong" (page 27)...

"Science and faith are two different ways of understanding our existence. Science helps us understand the physical process—how the universe works. This is hugely important and...no threat to genuine faith. Theology and faith, on the other hand, aim to teach us what our existence means. While science asks the questions *what* and *how*, theology seeks to answer the questions *why* and for *what* purpose. Both sets of questions are important."

When we ask how old the earth is we should use the tool known as science to find and answer. Science teaches us "What" and "How." When we ask "Why" and "For what purpose God created the earth we should turn to the Bible.

- The poetry of Genesis 1 tells of a God who is all powerful...able to create by speaking. God spoke... and humanity, men and women, came into being.
- The poetry of Genesis 2 tells of a God, who gets on his hands and knees to create man out of the mud and later created woman from man's rib. This is a God who is intimately involved in creation.

- Psalm 19 is a poem which tells us about the glory of God and the wonders of God's creation. "The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork."
- The whole of scripture helps us understand: "Why" and "For what purpose" God created the heavens and the earth.

Another issue raised by the Barna Group's survey is the young people in our country believe Christians are too political. When Adam Hamilton asked young people about politics he received this answer from a young woman in his church:

"Your question caused a rush of memories of our most recent national political campaign. We have a number of very close friends who are passionate about their politics. They regularly profess their strong Christian commitments, but somehow have a blind spot when it comes to how they react to views and opinions of those with whom they differ....When we get close to that political arena, I have trouble sensing any Christian love or tolerance of any perspective but their own." (When Christians Get it Wrong, page 33)

During the past 30 years both parties have tried to lay claim to the title of: The Christian Party. This has been an ongoing conversation and it has caused a division in the Church. The result is we sometimes pay closer attention to our politics than our theology.

As people outside the Church listen to the political jargon they recognize when Christians are being un-Christian. They can hear the mean-spirited attacks and slanderous statements. They take note of comments made by both young and old Christians.

For example, a Christian woman in her late 20's was chastised for placing the following comment on Face Book, about President Obama. After she vehemently disagreed with his policies she went on to say:

“He (President Obama) is a waste of skin.”

As we draw closer to this fall’s elections I encourage you to listen to the rhetoric of the candidates and the talking heads to learn which comments are turning people away from the Church. We should listen closely so we don’t make the same mistakes.

In this age of editorializing and political punditry, it’s important to remember Jesus did not take the sides in the political debate of his day. He did not side with the Pharisee’s or the Sadducees, with Pilot or Cesar. This helps us understand that he would not side with the Republican Party, or the Democratic Party, or the Tea Party.

Instead, Jesus offers us something new. The book of Acts calls it “The Way.” It’s the path of Christ. Adam Hamilton helps us understand Christ’s teachings and how they should inform our political agenda:

“Christians get it right when they work for justice, and when grace, truth, and love mark their political activities.” (When Christians Get it Wrong, page 35)