

Where Are The Boundary Stones? Part 2

Last Sunday we talked about changes that have occurred in the church and in Christianity. We spoke of the boundary stones of our faith and that they have been either lost to us or at the least they have been moved. There is no longer a clear consensus as to Christian behavior or as to the authority of the Scripture. What happened to the boundary stones?

I won't try to review all that we covered last Sunday, you can go to our website to listen to the sermon or read the manuscript, but I do want to remind you of a quote I shared from Phyllis Tickle's book *The Great Emergence*. You will recall she spoke of a reconfiguration process that seems to occur within the church and the faith every 500 years or so. She wrote, **"Always, without fail, the thing that gets lost early in the process of reconfiguration is any clear and general understanding of who or what is to be used as the arbitrator of correct belief, action and control."** Phyllis Tickle In other words, the first thing we lose is who or what provides the authority to say, "this is what we believe. This is right, this is wrong, this is how we live." **Who or what says, "Here are the boundary stones of the faith."**

I told you last Sunday that five hundred years ago in the Reformation the question was settled as Scripture alone was said to be the authority for correct belief and behavior. The bible establishes the boundary stones for correct belief and behavior. As Protestants we also embraced the idea of the priesthood of the believer. We are all priests, able to talk to and hear from God on our own behalf. So far, so good. But let me introduce a couple of things into the mix.

We took that idea of the priesthood of the believer and married it to the American, independent, can-do spirit (God, guns and guts made us great) and birthed a lone ranger, make up your own mind brand of Christianity. That independent spirit is reflected in our version of the Christian faith. "Well, I believe! Well, my bible says!" We made a verse in 1 John 2 our guiding principle, **"As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you."** 1 John 2:27. "We hear from God so we don't need some Pope or some denomination to tell us what to believe." Take that solid, independent, American version of Protestantism and then for us, add to the mix our Pentecostal belief that the Holy Spirit is still speaking today and you've got the potential for people to believe all kinds of things, endorsing their beliefs with "My bible says" and "the Lord told me."

I certainly know the Holy Spirit speaks to his people, but we've all run into people along the way that said they had heard from God and it was something "wacky" and weird. The Holy

Spirit always speaks in agreement with the Scripture. I was still in High School when I was invited to preach in a little independent, holiness church. It was one of those “fire baptized first church of the living God revival center holiness church”. I got there early and discovered they didn’t really have a pastor at that time. I don’t remember who had invited me. They were praying in a back room before service and people were shouting and praying. They were praying for a young man and had gathered around him and I heard him saying “Lord, I know you told me to leave my wife and...” Folks were saying “amen” and encouraging him as he prayed and I started plotting my escape route. “Revelation” had supposedly come to this fellow I guess about divorcing his wife. Revelation came to me that I needed to get out of there. The Spirit of God isn’t going to tell you to do something that is contrary to the revelation of Scripture! He will not contradict himself! I actually told them it looked like they needed to just go on with their prayer time and I left without preaching.

Here is the problem. We have rising biblical illiteracy in the church. People don’t know what the bible says so how can they know where the boundary stones are? How can they know biblical doctrine if they haven’t been taught? We have had a growing emphasis in the American church on worship but people don’t know the God they are worshiping. They just like the music! (It’s easy to dance to!) We need to know the holy God who redeemed us and called us to himself. We’ve taught people our happy version of what they can expect from God, but we didn’t bother to teach them what God expects from us! Take up your cross and follow me! Without knowledge of God’s word, we establish boundary stones based upon our feelings, our opinions, or we accept the boundary stones established by those who have rejected the clear authority of God’s word.

One church says we read the bible and we believe it allows for safe and legal abortion and for physician assisted suicide while another church says the bible calls it murder. One church says they believe the bible allows for the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy and the performing of same sex marriages and another church says no, the bible condemns such practices. What’s the answer? Remember our essential question asked by Phyllis Tickle. **“Who or what is to be used as the arbitrator of correct belief, action and control?”**

What’s the answer? Some of you theologians are familiar with what is called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. John Wesley believed this is how we know God and how we establish those boundary stones of the faith: Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. I’m not trying to

improve on Wesley's theory, but for the sake of this message let me adapt it slightly. **To establish the boundary stones of our faith we must rely upon Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the tradition of the Church.** I affirm again what I told you last week: the answer is found in the Scripture. We have to know what this book says. We need to read it, hear it read to us, study it, apply it, live by it, be changed by it. Without knowledge and understanding of God's word, without hearing it and applying it, we cannot know where the boundary markers are and we will falter and lose our faith.

But again, whose version, whose interpretation do I trust? So we have to rely upon the Holy Spirit to enlighten, to teach us, to guide us. Jesus said, **"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."** John 14:26 Then in John 16 Jesus said, **"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."** John 16:13.

We can trust the Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth. But remember the fellow in the little church that believed God was telling him to divorce his wife, he seemed sincere enough and fervent in his prayer, but he was sincerely wrong in his understanding.

Jesus said the Spirit would guide us into all truth and then in his prayer in John 17 for us, Jesus said to the Father, **"Sanctify them by the truth: your word is truth."** John 17:17. What's my point? The truth the Holy Spirit is guiding us into is the word of God! What the Holy Spirit says to us will bear witness to the truth of God's word. The guidance of the Holy Spirit to your heart and mind will align itself with the Scripture. If it doesn't, you need to re-examine again what you believe you heard.

What establishes the boundary stones for us and our faith? The Scripture, the Holy Spirit's wisdom and abiding presence that enables us to understand and apply God's word, but then we must include the tradition of the church.

In the last hundred years or so we began to view tradition as a negative thing, a bondage to be cast off. We prided ourselves on being free from the traditions of men. Jesus himself spoke in negative terms about honoring the traditions of men rather than honoring the word of God. We misunderstood what he was saying and threw out the baby with the bath water. We Protestants and Pentecostals made ourselves so independent of the traditions of the church, the historical life of the church, that in the process we lost sight of the boundary markers of the faith! Those boundary markers weren't just established in 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas by a group of

Pentecostals. Nor were they established five hundred years ago at the Reformation. There is a faith that has been handed down through the life and traditions of the church for 2,000 years. We are foolish and arrogant to think we alone have arrived at the ultimate truth and then ignore the knowledge and wisdom and lessons of 2,000 years of church history, teaching and doctrine.

How can we be foolish enough to believe the teaching of the church concerning marriage and sexual purity or any other issue should be thrown out because we think it is out of step with the culture? 2,000 years of history, wisdom, teaching, tradition is thrown out because we don't like it? What does the Scripture say? What does the early church say? What did the second and third and fourth generation after the apostles have to say about these issues?

One of those apostles said, **“See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.” 1 John 2:24.**

I'm not looking for a new revelation, a new doctrine, I'm looking to know and embrace the Scripture, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit and commended to us by the teaching and tradition of the church. If we are going to find the boundary stones, then we must commit to knowing the truth, the Scripture as taught by the church under the anointing of the Holy Spirit! When I say as taught by the church, I'm not just talking about our little corner of the church and the faith, I'm talking about the consensus of The Church, the body of truth imparted to us through the centuries. I know we won't agree on every part, but there is where wisdom and discernment from the Holy Spirit comes in. But at the same time, there is this core doctrine, the ancient truths of the church that we must hold to, we must believe, we must teach and preach, we must teach them to our children and the next generation – a truth based not upon our feelings, our opinions or the opinions of others but upon the truth we have heard from the beginning.

Jude wrote, **“I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men ...have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” Jude 3-4** In other words, certain ones have moved the boundary stones. We must contend for the faith that was entrusted to us, the faith handed down to us over the past 2,000 years by the church of the Lord Jesus Christ!

It was the church, led and guided by the Holy Spirit that affirmed the canon of Scripture. It was the church, guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit that affirmed the creeds, declaring the essence of right doctrine and belief concerning the nature of Christ and his redemption.

As we face an uncertain and changing future, we must hold to the truth of the Scripture as delivered to us by the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We call this week Heritage days, celebrating the heritage of our church. But it isn't just 80 years of Carbondale Assembly of God or 100 years of the Assemblies of God and the Pentecostal distinctives. It is the heritage of the church we celebrate. All of it! The good the bad and the ugly, it's all ours. 2,000 years of history and tradition and wisdom and knowledge that we draw upon and learn from. 2,000 years of defining those boundary stones. This is why we celebrate Advent in our church, and why we celebrate Lent. And why I've tried to preach messages consistent with the ancient church calendar, because we have a glorious history and heritage and we need to embrace and encounter the richness of that ancient heritage.

We are participating this morning in one of the boundary markers and one of the cornerstones of our faith. For 2,000 years the church has gathered to worship and to proclaim the efficacy of his broken body and his shed blood to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life. For 2,000 years the church has gathered to give thanks for the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Jesus should decide to tarry his return and give the church another 2,000 years of existence, I believe the only hope for the future is to reach back and continue to affirm these same ancient truths of the Scripture as taught by the church under the anointing and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For 2,000 years, beginning on the very night Jesus was betrayed, the people of God have worshiped at the table of the Lord as we are doing this morning. Here is the heart of our faith. Here is our heritage: In the bread and the cup we proclaim this truth, that Jesus died for us and for our sins, he was buried and then he rose victorious over death on the third day and by his grace he gives to us eternal life, hope and peace. Let us give thanks to the Lord today as we affirm our hope, our life, our everything is found in Him.

On the authority of God's word I declare to you that those sins you have named before the Lord, both privately and publicly, have been covered by the blood of Christ. You have been washed clean by his grace. Hear and believe the good news. In Christ you are forgiven. Your name is recorded by his grace and through his mercy in the book of life. Freely you have received his forgiveness, now freely go and forgive others.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.