

DO NOT LOOK WITHIN YOURSELF

We live in a time where teachers, parents, coaches, counsellors, culture, and even advertising slogans try to convince us that we are awesome and have power within. Consider some of the phrases that are out there: “You can do it!” “You can do anything you set your mind to.”

These kinds of slogans have one thing in common. They seem to point us inward to our own resources and skills. Indeed, these phrases tend to point a person’s eyes inward - toward their abilities and power within.

While it may be true that some jobs in life require some good old grit and sweat from within a person or a certain set of skills, it should be clearly noted that this is not how Christianity works. If any think Christianity is about looking inward for greatness, they could not be further from the truth about Christianity. Christianity is the exact opposite.

When we focus too much on the Christian and not enough on the Christ, we begin to look at ourselves as the centre of the Christian faith. And when we look at ourselves, well... we end up fixating on our own so-called spiritual abilities and powers. Looking at our spiritual abilities and powers, though, we begin to collapse inward on ourselves, which results in the destruction of the Christian faith. You and I can never be the centre of the Christian faith, for there is no greatness in our hearts but only sin and darkness.

Tragically, there are thousands of people sitting in pews this morning knowing that they do not have greatness within. They know because they are failing at life. They have failing marriages, struggling jobs, unruly kids, low finances, and poor health - to name a few. Life has beaten them up, and they know it. However, they do not talk about their problems because everyone else around them seems to be doing great. But nonetheless, they drag themselves into the church every single week.

Once in the church, the pastor gets into the pulpit and rightly points out all of their problems. He boldly preaches that families are falling apart; husbands are not listening to their wives enough, wives are spending too much money, kids are not obeying authority, and so forth. Basically, the pastor tells the people in the pew that God’s people are not obedient enough. And the people in the pew will agree. But here is the main problem. The pastor may have correctly pointed out the problem of the sinful heart in his parishioners, but once he has done this, he then points the people not away from their sinful hearts but *back* to their sinful hearts. The pastor points them back to themselves to fix their problems by resorting to one of the many terrible slogans that we hear in our culture. Obviously, the pastor will not use secular slogans but will Christianise the pagan slogan to sound spiritual. “With faith, you can do it!” “You can do anything you set your faith upon.”

Now, in case you don’t know, this is insanity! This is spiritual abuse! This is wretched theology. This is complete heresy; however, people keep coming back week after week after week to these pathetic and Christless churches!

Our relationship with God - no matter how good or bad you think you have it - cannot be based on you. If it is based on you and not on Jesus, then your salvation is only as good as you can be. And frankly, the Scriptures do not paint a pretty picture of your corrupt hearts. And faith?

Faith without Jesus is not real saving faith. Faith must always have an object; faith must always connect to, cling to, and rest upon Jesus. Faith clings outward to Jesus, not inward upon yourself.

So, what this means is that we must confess that our Christian faith is not based on looking inward towards our internal abilities, but rather, we look outward to Jesus - our Mediator.

When you look inward to yourself, what you see are lives full of sin. In other words, looking inward at yourself does not lead to forgiveness, life, and salvation but leads to sin and everlasting darkness. Bluntly stated, “I” am not the solution to “my” problems and sin. Jesus is.

Listen to Martin Luther on this, “*The Gospel commands us to look, not at our own good deeds or perfection but at God Himself as He promises, and at Christ Himself, the Mediator*” (Luther’s Works, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4).

The nature of the Christian faith is that God has snatched us not only out of the darkness but has snatched us away from ourselves and has placed us outside of ourselves so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, or works.

We are not anchored to ourselves and our abilities in this Christian faith, but we are anchored outside of ourselves to Christ and His Gifts. We are anchored to the promises of God, which cannot deceive. Hope is not found in the Christian but is found in and delivered by the Christ. Christianity is not about you, but it is about Christ who is for you. “*Christ was handed over because of our offences and was raised for the sake of our justification*” (Romans 4:25).