

A walk with Mr O (13)

Christians accused of being atheists!

Mr O, last week I met up with a group of friends, all Christians, and before long we had a strong disagreement about the importance of doctrine. It got a bit out of hand.

Tell me more.

It all began when Nick, one of the group, told us that he was reading a book on systematic theology, that it was as dry as sawdust, that it bored him, and that he just couldn't see that doctrine mattered that much. Three or four agreed with him, while the rest of us certainly didn't. Things got quite heated.

Well, I suppose you are asking what line I would have taken, if I had been there. And that is easy to answer.

Go on then, Mr O, tell me.

If I could have got a hearing, I would have reminded everyone that this western world thinks that doctrine is very important indeed! It churns out its own doctrine every day – on the radio and television, on the social media, all over the internet, in the classroom, in factories and offices, in ordinary conversation, and everywhere else. We can't get away from it.

Yes, Mr O, but we weren't discussing the world's doctrine.

No, but that's the point. It is because the world is so doctrinal that we have got to be! I'll give you an example. The unconverted people around us believe that the universe just 'happened', that this planet just 'happened', and that the human race just 'happened'. They believe that it all exists without rhyme or reason, that it is meaningless, and that it is up to you and me to give it meaning. Do you believe that?

No, of course not!

So, from the world's point of view, you are an unbeliever! Western people have a particular belief-system which you don't accept. When it comes to their 'theology', you are an atheist! And by the way, that's exactly what many unconverted people called Christians in the early centuries of the Christian church.

I didn't know that. So what you are saying is that unbelievers are actually believers – except that they believe the wrong thing. And we believers are, from the world's point of view, unbelievers. Is that why the world is so hostile to us?

Yes. We just don't fit. But let me ask you a further question: if you don't believe what the world believes about origins, what do you believe? Tell me.

Mr O, you are the man who told me to learn the Shorter Catechism! I believe in creation, and that 'The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good.'

And that is a doctrinal statement! The world believes its invented doctrine, and we believe God's revealed doctrine. It is impossible to live a truly Christian life in this world without recognising the importance of doctrine. The clearer we are, the better Christians we will be.

Can you give me another example of what you are saying, so that I can get it all straight in my head?

Yes. Let's consider our Lord Jesus Christ. The world's doctrine is that He may or may not have existed; He may or may not have done the things which are recorded of Him in the Gospels – the likelihood is that He didn't; He may or may not have been crucified; He probably didn't rise from the dead; and, apart from some aspects of His supposed teaching, He's not very relevant to us today.

Whereas we 'believe in Jesus Christ, his (God's) only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell (the place of the dead); he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick (living) and the dead.'

I get it, Mr O, I get it. The purpose of the Apostles' Creed and the other great doctrinal statements of history is to define the key points in which our doctrine is different from the world's doctrine, so that we don't get swept away by error. Thanks!

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