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I really didn't want to write anything "heavy" this month. It's summer and Pastors and parishioners need a break. We need to kick back and take time savoring God's creation. That being said, I'll touch on an issue that impacts everyone, although I promise to do it "lightly" in keeping with the season....

Whenever I read the Gospels I'm amazed at how Christ can cut through excess verbiage and make a succinct point in just a few words. Then we Pastors take a whole sermon to expound on that little point! Humans like to hear themselves talk, usually the more the better. Whereas Jesus just says it, period. It's refreshing, isn't it?

I suppose this is why I enjoy Prof. Max Mueller's insight into religion so much. Dr. Mueller was a professor of Sanskrit at Oxford back in the late 1800's. He wasn't a Christian. In fact, he set out to discredit Christianity by studying and comparing it to all the other major religions of the world. (Take my word for it; at Oxford during that time period, they literally knew them all!) Anyway, at the end of his voluminous study of world religions, Dr. Mueller became a Christian! And, I'm paraphrasing his quote: "There are only two religions in the world: faith and works." By that he meant that 1. Either God does everything to save us and we simply believe it (Christianity); or 2. Humans have to do something (works) to please God and earn His favor. Max Mueller summed it up quite well. He's right.

From the ancient Aztecs who engaged in human sacrifice to make sure their sun god would rise each morning, to Buddhism which teaches humans have to labor at getting in touch with transcendent consciousness, to the average person who believes god will send them to a "good place" if they are more kind and respectful than their nasty neighbors—all religions or systems of human thought are about man and woman earning god's favor. They are all about: "What do I have to do to save myself?" Whereas Christianity is fundamentally different. In Christianity God does all the giving and we do all the receiving. Christianity says: "We humans are powerless to make ourselves right with God. He's perfect, we're not. He demands perfection from us and we cannot give it." Remember that passage: "Whoever keeps the whole Law and yet offends at just one point, he is guilty of breaking it all." That's the problem with perfection—it means without any spot or blemish and we're not it!

This is where the Gospel comes in. God knew all this and in pure and total love, He sent His Son Jesus to be perfect for us in everything He ever thought, said, or did. Moreover, Christ also died to pay the penalty demanded by God for our imperfection. And then He arose to a new life to pave a new pathway for our lives. Additionally, God gives us this pure holiness of Christ freely by grace, or pure love. But it doesn't stop there. This grace of God has almighty power to change and restore fallen creation. So, it works the gift of faith within us which in turn gives us the ability to grasp hold of God's grace. And as a

result, our lives become "living sacrifices" to Him because He is our Living Sacrifice. So, Max Mueller is right! The way of salvation, the road whereby humans seek to attain meaning and purpose to their lives, comes down to two things: works or faith (born of grace). In all other world religions humans do all the giving and hope for something, anything, in return. Whereas in Christianity, God Almighty does all the giving, and we thankfully do all the receiving of His "good and perfect gifts." There is no middle ground in all this, either. Works give glory to humans and thereby steal it away from God. Faith gives all glory to God because He's the only Source and Cause of such goodness.

I'm always amazed that most people cannot see the simplicity of Dr. Mueller's paradigm which is really God's paradigm. We always try to complicate the truth laid out by St. Paul to the jailer at Philippi when that man asked Paul: "Sir, what must I do to be saved?" and Paul responded: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!" Remember that when someone tries to tell you that: "All religions or roads lead to heaven." Remember the words of Christ Who said: "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except by Me." Pastor Thomas H. Fox