



“at home, thinking”

seeds for a
Biblical worldview

“As a man thinketh in
his heart, so is he.”
Proverbs 23:7 KJV

No. 18

Orthodoxy vs. Orthopraxy

I HAVE BEEN THINKING about the contrast between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In issue no. 10, I introduced the term “orthodoxy,” and attempted to explore its significance in the Christian world. But the word orthopraxy is used far less frequently in Christian circles. What does it mean and what are its implications?

Several weeks ago I wrote: “the word orthodoxy is built from two Greek words: *ortho*, which means right or correct, and *doxa*, which means thought or teaching.” I went on to explain that the word orthodoxy means “right thinking” or “correct teaching.”

In defining orthopraxy, the same Greek root *ortho* means right or correct, but “praxy” is drawn from the Greek *praxis*, which means doing. Our English word “practice” comes from the Greek word *praxis* which literally means doing or action. Thus orthopraxy means “right action” or “correct practice.”

It is interesting to look at these two words and how they contrast, when comparing Christianity and Judaism. The gulf becomes even clearer when comparing Christianity with Islam.

Among these three faiths, Christianity is the only one in which theology plays a major role. I examined theology in issue no. 12, explaining that theology is really a science. It is literally “the science (or study) of God.”

As a general rule, Jews and Muslims are not as concerned with theology or knowing God as they are with the rules and practices proscribed in their religious texts. But in Christianity, we explore the Scriptures not only to learn of how God wants us to act, but also to understand who God is. We are interested in His nature, His character, and

His ways. Thus, Judaism and Islam are primarily religions, Christianity is primarily relationship.

*He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:*

(Psalm 103:7 NIV)

Moses knew God. He knew God because He spent time in His presence. He spoke to God and listened to God speak. The prophets of Israel also knew God. They listened to Him and bore His burdens.

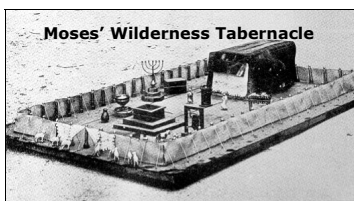
The books of the psalms and the prophets are laden with the prayers of men and women seeking for intimacy with God. The prophets particularly carry the weight of God’s sorrow for His wayward people. The prophets and the psalmists knew God.

Judaism, while certainly making room for a personal God, attempts to find that relationship primarily through ritual and practice. The Jewish calendar marks seven distinct feasts or celebrations, each having significant meaning in the life of the Jew.

The Five Pillars of Islam are the foundation of the Muslim faith. Only the first pillar—Faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad—deals with a theological theme. The other four pillars address only the practices of Islam: daily prayers, alms-giving, fasting, and pilgrimage.

Christianity also involves orthopraxy. The New Testament instructs us in how to behave. But unlike Judaism and Islam, our behavior is an out-working of our internal orthodoxy, the fruit of our changed lives.

Orthodoxy speaks of our ability to know and understand. Orthopraxy speaks only of what we must do.



“at home, thinking” is published periodically by Mark W. Weaver, co-author of *The Century War Chronicles* and co-founder of Reconciliation Press. Mark is married with three grown daughters, and has been employed in the real estate and land development industry for over thirty years. Mark and his wife, Sally, fellowship at a house church in their home town of Manassas, Virginia. Copyright © 2006 Mark W. Weaver

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