

# THE PASTOR'S DESK

July 18, 2010 - There Are No Atheists in Foxholes



## Dear Parishioners,

Perhaps one of the most outstanding orthodox theologians in 19<sup>th</sup> century America was a man named Charles Hodge. He was a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey almost his entire career (Princeton was the first seminary in America).

Hodge was a man of towering intellect. At an early age, eleven or twelve, he decided to learn what the Bible had to say. It was an era, of course, when the Bible was still respected. But the young Hodge knew that in order to really understand the Bible, he had to learn Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. So he taught himself those languages and began reading God's Word.

Hodge never owned or read an English translation his whole life. He never let his students use them in class either.

An expert in Scripture, he also was world renowned for his knowledge of Semetic languages, systematic theology, philosophy and the works of Bach! So we have a very smart man on our hands here.

Many times men of great learning, especially those who teach religion, develop stony hearts. When the study of Christianity or the Bible becomes just an academic exercise and head knowledge replaces heart knowledge, even a theologian can grow cold and lose faith. The same happens to priests and ministers and anyone whose life is centered on religious things.

So it would be no surprise to imagine that by the end of his life, Hodge would have become a teacher rather than a follower of Christ. But he was a man of parts. His biographers write that everyone who knew him saw his faith grow more and more each year. In fact, it is reported, that his teaching became simpler and softer as he advanced in years, yet never losing his integrity.

One day, a student asked Dr. Hodge if he could sum up the entire message of Christianity in one sentence. What an amazing task! If he had said let me think about it for a while, no one would have blinked an eye. But the great man had an answer in a second.

Without hesitating, Hodge directed his students to their Greek New Testaments and pointed them to the First Letter of St. John. He read to them the middle sentence from chapter 4, verse 16.

With a profound simplicity, Hodge stunned his students. Waiting for an erudite, complicated answer, perhaps a quotation from a long gone theologian, Hodge instead went to one of the shortest sentences in the Bible, from one of the shortest books.

The sentence he read to them: "God is Love."

Our Christian faith is not complicated. We like to make it complicated, that's obvious. Yet simply put, theology is not faith, nor is religion. The faith once delivered unto the saints can be explained as Jesus proclaimed the Gospel. He used simple words and parables that people could understand. And look what happened!

The atheist in the foxhole. The atheist in the office. The atheist in the family. When they finally realize that they are very, very alone, they don't want an explanation of The Aquinian Division of Economic Predestination (as understood by Kant, of course). They want to know that Someone loves them. We need to tell them who that is.

To quote the great theologian who wrote the words to the song Some Enchanted Evening from the musical South Pacific: "Fools give you reasons, wise men never try."

Fr. William

### For Further Reading 1 John 4:1-4 (NASB)

1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world;
2. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;
3. And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.
4. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; BECAUSE GREATER IS HE WHO IS IN YOU THAN HE WHO IS IN THE WORLD.