

Vicar's Pastoral Letter

Date : November 2008
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Subject : Your true identity.

Dear Friends,

"Dear Mr. Holtzapfel you have won £600,000!" read the e-mail that I received "but in order to verify your claim we need certain personal information including your passport number." The e-mail was so professional looking and technically accurate that I, like a fool, sent off my personal details! The e-mail was, of course, bogus and fraudulent and I've had to work fairly hard at making sure that we're secure because someone out there has some of my personal details. Fortunately I didn't give any bank or financial information but I did give them enough to start up a credit card in my name or even to take out a mortgage in my name. I was told by the fraud department that identity theft is greatly on the increase. This is indeed a salutary warning to us all that we must be vigilant in what we respond to and never to divulge any information about ourselves unless we're absolutely sure of who the person is.

It reminded me of the words of Jesus who said "I have called you by name and you are Mine." The thief needed to ask my name but God already knows it and He knows yours: in fact God knows all your personal information even things that perhaps you wish He didn't know! But whereas the thief might use that information to do you harm God wants to do you nothing but good because He loves you and He wants the very best for you. God loves you so much that you don't have to be frightened to be yourself. How many people would you really dare to be yourself in front of with absolutely nothing hidden? I guess that there wouldn't be many if any but that is not the case with God in front of whom you can stand absolutely naked in every respect.

My details may have been stolen in order that someone could forge my identity and pretend to be me but as far as God is concerned it's no use anyone pretend to be me or you because He knows us fully and cannot be fooled. One day we shall all have to give an account before God of the kind of person we were and the kind of life we lived and on that day it will be no good pretending to be someone else because God knows the truth, the whole truth, of just who and what we are.

In the e-mail I was assured that I had won a prize but that assurance turned out to be a lie but for those who put their trust in Jesus there is in fact a very sweet reward awaiting you in heaven and that is the gift of eternal life in the presence and love of God. This promise, the promise of God to all of us, is true and can be trusted. God does not lie or try to deceive and you do have a gift waiting for you which is far more precious than gold. But in order to claim it you have to be yourself and no counterfeits will do. So now, right now, is the time to start asking yourself "what do I believe and what do I stand for in my life?" because one day your very life might depend on the answer you give.

In the bogus e-mail I was told "please do not start celebrating your win yet and do not tell anyone about your prize until your identity has been verified and your cheque issued." No wonder they didn't want me to waste any money on celebrations because in their next e-mail they asked for £350 administrative costs before my cheque could be issued! They wanted to make sure that I still had enough money in the bank to pay them their fee before they "sent" me my non-existent cheque!! Well, as far as Jesus is concerned and the salvation He alone offers, you can certainly start celebrating and you can tell the whole world what God has done for you. Salvation does not require an "administration charge" because the price has already been paid when Jesus died on the Cross for you and rose again. The only thing that it costs us is to dare to believe that it's true and to put our faith in Him.

So, do you? Do you believe in Jesus and what He's done for you? I hope so because you really do have a wonderful prize waiting for you in heaven: the gift of eternal life and everlasting peace, joy and love. So, let's pray for the person who sent me that e-mail, whoever he or she is, that they too come to accept Jesus as their Saviour before it's too late and they themselves stand before God

and He says "Go away from Me! There are no counterfeits, forgeries or fakes in heaven and I know exactly who and what you are!"

Hold on to your true identity and true value: it's worth a great deal.

God Bless you all.

Peter

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