

Faith and Works LIII

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Why it Matters

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Introduction

One of the peculiar sins of the twentieth century which we've developed to a very high level is the sin of credulity. It has been said that when human beings stop believing in God they believe in nothing. The truth is much worse: they believe in anything.

Malcolm Muggeridge

In passing, we should note this curious mark of our own age: the only absolute allowed is the absolute insistence that there is no absolute.

Francis Schaeffer

The post modern age, as it is called today, does not so much preclude truth, as insist it is only relevant within the context of the one who experiences their own truth. If there is such a thing as objective truth, it does not matter, we can only know and experience what is personal. This presupposition was once taught only by philosophers but is now portrayed in the sitcoms and music, the novels and plays of our current culture.

The God of the Bible has through the law and the prophets, and in the lives and history of a specific people chosen for the example they would provide, given final knowledge in these last days, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, in Jesus Christ. But in the modern mindset, if there is a God, he will be engaged in an ongoing conversation, never coming to a final definitive truth. This is of course the thesis and antithesis of the Hegelian dialectic which progresses through truth and non truth until one finally comes to the pantheistic ideal of undifferentiated oneness hypothesized by the occult and some of the traditional religions of the east.

It is a comforting thought, perhaps, for some to imagine that what they perceive as truth need not be qualified by any objective truth. It opens the

possibility that if we cannot be as God in real world, that at least we can limit our awareness to that which we wish to see, and place ourselves in the center of that realm. As long as people have become content with the comforts of modern society such that their greatest preoccupation is how to keep themselves amused in their spare time, concerns about an eternal objective truth will find little relevance.

It is said that those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness will find Him and be satisfied with Him. But we are also told there are multitudes who simply seek the temporal comforts of this world, and who have itching ears for what they want to hear. And so there is an issue of supply and demand. In a culture of leisure where one is concerned with finding truth that coincides with their own goals and motivation for personal prosperity there will rise up those who fashion a God or theology in the image of what man seeks, and will create such significant followings that their popular shows and literature become the predominate witness within the culture. The crowds will be drawn by what the crowds seek. They will then often consider the significance of their numbers alone as justification for the validity of what draws them.

Therefore, what is the criteria for religious or spiritual truth? To be a heretic in our modern age is to insist that once for all God has revealed Himself, if not exhaustively, at least emphatically, and that what we are to know of what He would reveal to us is summed in Jesus Christ. His life and purpose were to be validated by being completely in accord and in fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Jesus Christ is the summation of God's communication of both the identify and character of God, and that of His creation, man. If we do not believe in this God, what sort of God do we believe in? Is it a matter of knowing what has been revealed by God in order to know Him, or is it just whatever we experience and choose to find relevant within the context of our own cares and concerns?

Unfortunately we have today reached a condition in society, due to the concentration of all information coming through popular media, where there are more tares than wheat, with the consequence that the big picture that is being

presented of religion in North America now stands out in complete contrast to the original witness of the Gospel as it was exhibited and expressed by those who gathered in the name of Jesus in the first century.

Instead of seeking assurance of eternal fellowship with God, people are seeking temporal contentment from materialism and pleasure. Instead of the kingdom of God being not of this earth, it is now synonymous with the things that Jesus said the non believers seek. Love and faith are now described as forces that one can possess in quantity if one knows how to summon them. And Jesus has become lowered to the status of where man used to be, and man has now been raised to the status or potential of God.

The question the true believer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ must ask, is does it matter? Are there not many interpretations and doctrines being taught, is it perhaps being judgmental or overly critical to point out the error of certain self professed ministers who come in the name of Jesus but present their own Gospel? After all, if they are popular and satisfying the expectations of their followers, why should we be concerned as if there was any point beyond each following their own preferences for truth and relevance?

To examine this issue we will need to start from the premise that the Bible does indeed contain a consistent and reliable testimony concerning the diagnosis and remedy for the relationship between God and His fallen creation.

We will thus need to determine the fundamental differences, if any, between the testimony of the Bible when it is allowed to speak in its own voice and context, and what the popular cultural religious and spiritual media and movements are presenting in the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We shall also look at the Biblical diagnosis of man's fallen condition and how his orientation and natural inclinations lead themselves to the kind of individual and collective behavior that provides supporting followers for the leaders of today's popular spiritual and religious trends.

When the Salt Loses its Flavor

Does it matter if the Gospel is today proclaimed in fidelity and in accord with the original teachings of Jesus and His apostles, and with the law and the prophets of the Bible?

The uniqueness of the Bible and the testimony of the Gospel stands in this, that rather than man continually seeking and reinventing his own standards and opinions of the nature of God and reality, instead, in history, God Himself has singled out a specific people, and through their lives and His influence on them, both in direct communication, and in the example of their lives as they were influenced by His purpose for them, we see a clear presentation not of what we are able to understand or fashion in the area of morals or theology based on our own understanding, but rather we see what God Himself intends mankind to know concerning who He is, who we are in His creation, and His eternal purpose for us.

When that is lost, and the Gospel becomes simply becomes whatever the current fashions and trends and what the self proclaimed prophets and teachers of the day define it according to their own purposes, and this influence becomes the predominant witness and testimony of the visible Christian church, the church is no longer a light to a world doomed to temporal and eternal darkness.

In the last days Jesus said many would come in His name, some even performing signs and wonders, and just as in Jesus days, many can be drawn by the signs and the wonders, the loaves and the fishes, as they continually seek only the food that perishes.

But in the New Testament, we see that those who were able to receive a miracle from Jesus did so as they came to Him not only with faith in miracles alone, but with faith in Jesus Himself to be have the authority and compassion to help in time of need.

It was faith in who Jesus is that gave Peter the faith to heal the crippled man in the Temple. Peter said that it was faith in His name, and the faith that comes through His name that enabled that man to be healed.

When the Gospel is hijacked Jesus is no longer defined as the savior of those who would be born again by faith in His death and resurrection and inclusion in that work. Instead Jesus is presented, if at all, as merely the savior of our bank account, the savior of a failed relationship, the savior of the new car we wanted, or the savior of the loaves and fishes we are continually seeking. But it is only those who are seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven, who enter into a relationship with God where they can trust Him as their Father to supply all their daily needs.

Many people attend seminars, meetings, and buy all sorts of teaching media from people who are essentially promising that these teachers know the secret techniques and methods needed to twist the arm of God to get miracles out of Him, either by buying Him off with tithes, or by making sure that God is obligated to work on their behalf because of how religiously they are living, or how nice they are behaving.

None of these activities involve coming before God clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and loving and forgiving others as we have been loved and forgiven by Him. The distinction between fruit and works is thus lost.

For if we are loving and forgiving people because we hope that one day God will also forgive us based on our works, then our love and forgiveness is just a matter of external actions, it is not coming from the heart or as a response to a loving relationship with God as our Father.

Recently a world famous women who had dedicated her life in helping diseased and dying people in the name of God passed away herself. But when her personal diary was read it was discovered that despite the years of sacrifice and good deeds, this women lived in torment, never reaching assurance of her

relationship with God. She was seeking to open the door to heaven herself, when in the simplicity of the Gospel, there is only one door, one way to the Father, Jesus Christ Himself.

It is those who from the heart believe the Gospel, and confess it with their mouth and in their rest and abiding in the complete work of Christ, who in their confidence and hope in the treasure reserved for them in heaven, it is these who are the ones who can freely share this worlds goods, no longer using them as a foundation for their own existence and self identity.

But those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, who know they are poor in spirit and are looking for the great physician, apparently do not constitute a large enough demographic for those seeking large followings in order to support their commercial empires.

One does not, if one wants to be successful, waist time marketing a message in which many are called, but few are chosen, instead one wants to present a product that will draw the largest crowds. And so in order to be successful and draw the largest crowds, the Gospel must be re-invented, repackaged, and tailored to fit the expectations and desires of the largest possible audience. A message must be presented that satisfies the itching ears of the largest possible audience.

The problem that the true church of Jesus Christ faces from the success of these sorts of commercial industries of popular religion and spirituality is that they choke out the opportunities and availability of the channels of communication, so that the true Gospel will not be proclaimed and understood. And so society will not receive the benefit of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church is no longer therefore the salt of the Earth, but instead is now a source and carrier of the same disease that afflicts the non-Christian world.

The end results are the unrestrained workings of the Adamic nature, whether in the cause of works based religion or spirituality, or in open defiance of God, for

in all cases the mind is set on the flesh, not on Jesus Christ. The mind set on the flesh both individually and corporately produces physical death as it is based on a foundation of eternal spiritual death.

Thus the nominal religious church, which is Christian in name only, denies itself the true eternal benefit of the Gospel, and withholds from society the necessary influence to turn it away from temporal self seeking to the recognition and influence of eternal morals and values.

When the consensus in the institution of the Christian church is the same as the non Christian world, in that the concern of those involved is for everyone for themselves, and those in the church practice religion or spirituality for exactly the same motivations as held by fallen man in general, then the church is no longer the salt of the Earth, it has become worthless.

Does it matter if we take time out from considering the eternal aspects of salvation in Christ and instead turn to religion for its utilitarian potential to answer our need to find our own personal prosperity and contentment in the things of this world?

It is the Christian church, those living individually and corporately by faith in Christ, identifying themselves as members of His body, who are appointed by Jesus to show and demonstrate in their lives that in temporal things man does not live, rather it is the spirit of life in Christ Jesus that gives life,

the flesh profits nothing. It is living on behalf of eternal values and purpose in the midst of our temporal existence that is the true walk of faith that the Bible speaks of.

It is interesting therefore to note the characteristics of the last church addressed by Jesus in the book of Revelation. The church was materialistic, self centered, and had come to identify and mistake its own temporal comforts with the true eternal values and riches of the Kingdom of God. The remedy, if chosen,

would not be easy, as it would require fire to refine the gold, the true faith in Christ for all that we are that God seeks in His chosen.

When the Gospel is repackaged as just another self-help or self-improvement product, it loses its distinctive and unique character, and simply becomes just another method to the same ends, that of improving our personal lives and reaching the goals that we have for ourselves. We do not then pray "Thy Kingdom come", we pray to increase our comfort and success in our own kingdom.

This is why, regardless of the thousands of people that can be drawn to modern religious and spiritual events, there is no body of Christ present, because each individual in attendance is simply there for what they can take away and add to themselves. They do not corporately represent the Kingdom of God, they are simply a crowd of people drawn in the interests of improving their own kingdoms.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about a time in the last days, shortly before the return of Christ, that the restraining influence on the spirit of anti-Christ would be taken out of the way. How ironic it would be if the church of Jesus Christ, which once had the key to release the captives, to open the doors of Hades, lost that key, and remained shut in, no longer way able to point to Jesus, the only way, truth and life for men's souls and spirits to be free, no longer able to illuminate those in darkness with the light of the Gospel, and thus all would remain in darkness not knowing over what they stumbled, following the voices of those who come in their own name, the blind leading the blind.

The problem with authoritarian societies is that all the decisions that are made for society, and the value given to the individuals in that society, is simply based on the purpose they serve in sustaining the authority that is in power. If they are of more use dead than alive, then so be it. Without the influence of the Gospel human society will have an inadequate foundation to provide for the altruism and sacrifice that is often necessary for mankind to coexist and live together in

harmony, and to form governments that are benevolent and which respect the rights and values of individuals.

These characteristics are essential if mankind is to pull back from the chaos and social disintegration that we see mankind collectively facing in the world today without resorting out of desperation to the kind of totalitarian evil and inhumanity to man that we have seen in the past. If man will not order his society based on the moral integrity of each individual, collectively they will be ruled by an immoral, or amoral central authority.

“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

John Adams

And so if the Gospel is now presented as just another way for individuals to focus on themselves and seek their own profit and benefit, than the church has become irrelevant in holding back those tendencies that will cause men collectively, out of fear and desperation, to allow the final centralized governmental control over life and death that we see outlined in the prophetic scriptures of the Bible as it describes the final conditions of mankind before the end of this age.

Mocking God

Can God be mocked, should we at all consider the emphatic statement of the apostle Paul when he writes of the inevitable effects of the mind not set on Christ, but on the flesh, the fallen nature inherited from the first fallen Adam on which the unregenerate focus their attention, sowing and building on a foundation of sand to which they are forever indebted?

Romans 8:5

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Galatians 6:6-8

Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Colossians 3:1-3

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

The Bible makes it clear that if Jesus is not the focus of the believer as the foundation and very identity of who they are, though they may know or acknowledge the name of Jesus and even do religious or spiritual works in His name, Jesus says that He does not know them, there is no personal relationship.

Can any religious or philosophy, no matter how well intended, ultimately produce as the fruit of what is sown anything more than what the scriptures teach?

We may preach holiness, abstain from foods, severely treat the body, yet all these have no value for the true spiritual development that is produced by faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Are there many paths to the same end? Or is Jesus truly the only way to the Father, that unless we believe and trust in Him as our Lord and life we will die in our sins?

We need to carefully consider the consequences. Many good works and acts of charity may be nothing more than attempts to place a religious or pious persona on an inward nature which has not been regenerated by the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, but which is instead just another attempt by the law to justify the flesh.

If the Bible is true in what it says, there are no alternate methods or paths from our fallen condition back to union with God but through faith in Christ, True saving faith is not just belief that Jesus existed, but personal trust and assurance for all that we are built on the foundation of Christ Himself, standing before God reconciled to Him only when we are completely clothed in the righteous robes of Christ.

Any other method attempts to continue building on a foundation that the Bible says we are to leave as dead crucified with Christ on His cross. To turn to it again proves us to be transgressors of a covenant that is indeed offered by the Grace of God, but without which, no man can come to the Father. Joy and peace are not behaviors we learn to imitate or perform in order to prove ourselves loving or spiritual.

True love and forgiveness come from a heart that truly has seen and accepted the fallen nature, and turned and placed faith in the way that the Father has provided based on the finished work of Christ. The bible makes it clear that God is looking for fruit from faith in the Gospel in the believers life, not works of the law, though outwardly both may seem to produce the same results.

To attempt to repackage or brand the Gospel to orient the believer to anything but faith in Christ is to present a false Gospel, to turn the mind from Christ back to the flesh. God, who looks on the heart, has declared that unless the first husband has died, we cannot be legally married to another as the bride of Christ. False doctrine is rightly then called spiritual adultery, and the fruits thereof are guaranteed as the result.

Is it any wonder in the last days many shall have a form of Godliness, but deny the power thereof, the power of the cross of Christ by which we are to be crucified to the world, seeing ourselves by faith risen in Christ? The church today is known for being proud, boasting it is rich and in need of nothing. It celebrates covetousness as a virtue, cares not for those lost to eternal separation from God or treasures in heaven as it continues to build on the sand that will all to soon, along with the rest of the unbelieving world, be swept away and shaken down. Only that built on true faith in Christ, the rock, will be able to finally stand before Him on that day.

Many today see pluralism and universalism as a virtues attitude, and seek to generalize or reinterpret the Gospel of Jesus Christ as just another expression of man's own personal spiritual experience. But the Bible says there is a way that seems right to the natural man, but the end thereof is death. If we are lifting anything but Jesus up, are we not drawing those who are seeking truth away from the only way that God out of Love has provided for His fallen creation?

John 3:13-17

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The Franchise of Faith

The problem that the Gospel faces today is that once all avenues of communication are dominated by a single message, if that message is false, the truth will not be heard. What is popular sells, what sells makes money, and money in turn buys market share. While there have always been teachers of questionable doctrines, only in our modern era have we faced a time when those teachings could consolidate into a massive media consensus that would essentially ruin the hearing of millions of listeners some of whom indeed may have been seeking for the truth of the Gospel.

It was Kenneth Copland who came along with no hesitation or confusion at all in his motives and in what he sought to accomplish having seen firsthand the wealth gained by Oral Roberts, who saw the opportunity to put together the bits and pieces of the teachings and doctrines that had been used up to that point, such as the sowing money teaching of Oral Roberts, to elicit support from their followers.

What Ken did was to synthesize it all into a self coherent system mixed with various out of context misinterpreted scriptures, in which all the pieces fit together in relation to each other, not of course, in the original context of any scriptures or teachings in the Bible, but at least consistent within its own structure of logic.

Copland took the integration of the mind science occult philosophies of the 1800s started by P. Quimby, the same source for sects such as Christian Science and Unity, that Kenyon had used to reinterpret the teachings of the Bible. Kenyon did this because he mistakenly believed that cults such as Unity and Christian Science were demonstrating true healings in those following their teachings and wanted those same results to begin to be produced in the modern church.

Copland then added a lot of ideas that are similar if not identical to what is found in Mormonism, and packaged that up to convince people that the reason the

world and their lives are in turmoil, and not looking like the blessing they say are rightfully and potentially ours, is because we have not operated to the full extent and stature of our inherent god-hood, and that God Himself is helpless and has no authority to aid us, because we and our world are now under our own authority and control.

Copland began then to establish a network made up of those who were successful at presenting this information and drawing followers, so that soon the prime time of most so called gospel centered or Christian broadcasting, was now dominated by this group of people who were the most successful at manipulating financial support from those they were able to convince of the truth of their man made teachings. The members of this network each sat on each other's boards, approving all the personal use of the wealth they were able by their false teachings to draw into their tax exempt "ministries".

The Witness the World Sees

And what is it we are not doing that they say they can teach us? Well, we are not operating the same principles that God himself works by. which would be, sowing and reaping. How should we operate this principle? By sending our money to the guy on TV that is telling us all this. Once we are maneuvered into a position where we adopt the mindset and the doctrinal structure that is being taught by these guys, it becomes a lot easier for us to fall into the patterns of behavior that they are deliberately trying to move their followers into, to their own benefit.

This is not what the Bible teaches concerning faith in Christ working through love, it is the desperation of trying yet another mystical practice, ritual, sacrifice, with money, to try and move the unseen, and try to change the natural by the supernatural. And by making money a supernatural principle, and the function of using that money a transaction that benefits them they have become multi millionaires and sometimes billionaires, just by fleecing the flock of God by teaching a false doctrine, and drawing people to themselves.

And the secular world sees this, because the true body of Christ has not stood up and said "we know the Word of God, we know therefore that you are teaching false doctrine and should not be supported at the expense of our resources going to true ministries that proclaim the true Gospel of Christ, your one of the covetous people the Bible warned us to have nothing to do with."

And because the body of Christ has not stood up and spoken with a clear consensus reflecting that fact that they do indeed hold a consistent and coherent body of truth in the scriptures and the revelation of God in Christ, instead it appears to the entire world that popular religion in North America is in a state of chaos, it looks like a bunch of mindless people who seem to have no idea what they are doing, who are gullible and easily persuaded by every slick "snake-oil", or rather, "holy-oil" salesman that puts a program on any prime time religious broadcasting network.

Those exploiting and manipulating the Gospel for their own gain bring the Way into disrepute, even as they did in the days of the first Apostles. And so the secular authorities are ready at any time to pull the plug on these religious "ponzy" schemes, on these illegal uses of 501C3 and the laws originally set up to benefit true non-profit charitable organizations. And it is the legitimate non-profit organizations, the missionary groups, the Christian organizations that are truly engaged in the work of the Gospel, that will ultimately suffer because of the unchecked iniquity of these wolves that have been ravaging the sheep. The victims of their actions will extend far beyond their own audience.

So there is virtually no light of the real pure Biblical Gospel of faith and life in Christ being presented through the contemporary religious media. And instead, many people are headed for shipwreck in their faith, because their eyes have been drawn to their circumstances and they are measuring themselves by themselves. And instead of coming to faith in Christ as a child, they are trying to achieve godhood through following the latest methods and methodologies and spiritual practices being promoted by these false teachers.

All in exchange of course, for increasing support for their so called ministries. And as their will never be an incentive to mature their followers with the simple knowledge of faith in Christ, they will always be leading them on promising them that the next big trend they start, or the next set of teachings they sell will get their followers closer to the imagined perfection they say there have achieved for themselves.

Gathering to Scatter

And so the people are ever learning, but never coming to a complete knowledge of the truth, because ultimate truth is in Jesus, and it is Jesus who is the one ingredient, the pure milk of the gospel, what cannot be added to the modern mix of teachings and doctrines that the false teachers of today now offer their captive audience. For the truth sets free, He who has the Son is free indeed.

The main crime in this, from the standpoint of the Gospel, is not the amount of money that these false teachers have amassed to themselves at the expense of resources that might otherwise have gone to fund legitimate Christ centered Gospel ministries, but rather the main casualty is the Gospel itself.

For by turning Godliness into a means of great temporal gain, they have presented a man made system whose main utilitarian purpose is to improve and provide man with his best life now. Whereas in the writings of the New Testament, the main focus we see of the accounts of the early church and in the writings of the first Apostles, was the glory to be revealed at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, when this mortal shall put on immortal, when we are clothed in His likeness.

Indeed, Paul wrote that it is better to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. While there is predicted a great falling away in the last days, there will be those who stand firm in the faith who of those the scriptures tell us that they overcome because of the word of their testimony, the true spirit of prophecy being the testimony of Jesus, and because they do not love their temporal lives even unto death. And these treasures that we have committed unto Him against that day are where our heart is to be.

Those who are seeking the loaves and the fishes and the common things the gentiles seek first, rather than the kingdom of God in Christ Jesus, are drawn to these false teachers and mistakenly think they are being presented with the Gospel. Many of them will never go beyond the teachings they are hearing from these false teachers, they will never, like the Bereans, search the scriptures to see

if what they are being taught is truly what is taught in the Bible, and therefore they will never encounter the cross of Christ and the life that is to be found when we are truly born again by faith in Him and He Himself becomes the foundation and chief corner stone for all that we are and all that we do.

These religious systems do not have Christ as their foundation. They may include Him somewhere in the mix, as perhaps a catalyst or aid, but Christ is not the foundation and the chief corner stone. People are not abiding in Christ when they follow these systems, they are still operating and dependant on the elementary principles of this world instead of dying to them, and instead seeking the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. They may be taught Christ as a helper or an example, but He Himself is not taught as the way, truth and the life.

By making money, and our actions and what we do to build ourselves up the focus of attention and the primary operative principle in the religious system the false teachers have concocted, they are unable to present a balanced Gospel with Jesus as the foundation, the church as His body, and Christ as the head of the church. For in the false system, our life is no longer found in Him, but is something we build ourselves by correctly operating the principles that these false teachers have proscribed as a means of temporal gain in this life. They place man's concern on what he shall eat, what he shall wear, how man can live without tribulation in this world, how man can become rich and in need of nothing.

It assumes that the fulfillment of our existence is to be found in how full we can stuff our barns with the treasures of this world. It causes man to measure himself by those around him in his search to become prosperous, and ultimately is motivated by the unmitigated fear of lack and death that motivates all those who live apart from the life to be found in Christ.

There is no possible contentment, the contentment that Paul spoke of, in the system of the false teachers. They are scattering the sheep, leading them away from

the door, Christ, where they might enter in and find true pasture, and the water of life that quenches mans thirst for eternity forever.

What Moves the Masses

To the extent that our modern culture, due in no small part to the erosion of traditional family and social structures, and replacing them with superficial technological social networks centered around nothing more than consumerism, has increasingly provided an environment conducive to alienation and that is lacking of non commercial means at self identity, the followings of charismatic media leaders and personalities continues to grow, sometimes for no other reason than that the commercial media has by merely focusing on an individual, nominated them for attention.

These conditions where predicted in a future time when many would rush to and fro, having no rooted identity, and knowledge would increase to the point where one would have great difficulty sorting for truth in the volume of information available.

So a generation left void of traditional values, history or culture, who is taught in secular institutions of education that the Bible is politically incorrect, are seeking for meaning through channels of information exchange that are increasing controlled and dominated by commercial and political concerns. To be concerned or committed is considered narrow minded, to be passionate about truth is to be ignorant of the post-modern consensus that truth is relative to the beholder.

Yet in contrast, it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said "If a man has nothing worth dying for, he has nothing to live for".

It is interesting to note in cultures where profession of simple faith in Jesus Christ ensures persecution, being ostracized from ones culture, and even death by those fundamentalist groups who would kill all those who do not accept their own religion, there is no such confusion on behalf of the believers. One must be certain of the truth of the Gospel in the perspective of eternity, regardless of the immediate cultural consensus. The cost is too high to be wrong or to believe in grey areas of subjective truth.

The modern criteria of the religious consumer is to ask, "What is in it for me?", how is it relevant to the modern individuals perceived needs, rather than be concerned with whether a doctrine or idea is eternally true regardless of the opinions of man. The modern religious trends offer books and events using words like "More", "Yours", the center is on the individual and their needs for greater success at acquiring the satisfaction the world currently seeks.

In this modern context where truth itself as a concept or objective reality has been shunned in favor of subjective experience, there is little incentive to present biblical truth without interpreting it within the context of the experience of those presenting themselves and their life experiences in attempts to draw a following.

Into this mix we see trends in modern religion, such as what is sometimes called the "seeker friendly" or "seeker sensitive" movement, which abandons traditional Biblical contexts and hopes to present programs and events that are compatible and relevant within the context of modern culture as to attract and not offend the same individuals who are adrift in a sea of meaningless information and hype for the sake of sensationalism.

The modern religious cultural trends are to identify and then present that which is most likely to satisfy the itching ears of the masses. The traditional Gospel of course is an offer by God for reconciliation and relationship with Him through His Son Jesus to those who have be sensitive enough to His Holiness to realize their innate fallen condition and need for salvation. But sin not being what the masses are seeking, rather empowerment and more materialism, those seeking to meet demand with supply will continue to shape their organizations to satisfy the masses.

The individual or commercial religious enterprise, those seeking profits while claiming tax-exempt religious status, who seek to be successful at drawing the largest numbers of followers, will unfailingly offer what the masses seek. If they are looking for self-esteem, to be told they do not need to worry about heaven

or hell, that God or Jesus is to be understood more as a life style coach than the almighty Creator of the Universe, they will not be presented with the God of the Bible. The agenda of the Bible to empower individuals into communities built on the foundation of Christ is antithetical to those organizations seeking to be sustained economically and to be the central focus of dependant followers.

The modern religious entrepreneurs will only see the bible as a collection of quotes and phrases they can use to build and market themselves and their organizations. Many have and will be drawn, but few if any will find the true healing of the Gospel because they will be convinced that their membership and inclusion as supporters of the given organization will assure them of equal success.

"The technique of a mass movement aims to infect people with a malady and then offer the movement as a cure."

Eric Hoffer

When the Product is the Producers

As in industry, when the initial concern is all about what each company can get for themselves, their focus and strategy may favor the short term gains of the producer, those who own the company or are major stockholders, rather than the long term development of the product and the companies participants. Unfortunately, in modern commercial and cultural religion, the product is all too often the producers themselves, the larger than life stage and screen personalities that now draw the crowds.

The larger the media build up of the superstar who is the center and focus of the ongoing events, the greater the interest. Marketing is the modern miracle behind the success of media superstars, even those in popular religion. Those in the potential audience who have not developed a foundation for themselves either through their role in the world system, or by their faith in Christ, will often seek to vicariously live through the fame and fortune of others who give the impression through their media persona that they have a connection with those who attend their events and support them. Simply by watching them or attending their events, one is encouraged to believe that one has a part in the greatness of what is taking place.

The messages thus will not be focused on building the product, which in Biblical terms would be the disciples that Jesus was seeking from the nations from those who were to sincerely build the true kingdom of God by preaching the Gospel. Instead, the messages will continually be about the greatness and success of the center of attention.

The issues at stake here concern far more than just an abuse of authority or power or a misuse of church funds.

The leaders of these modern religious media organizations are people who claim that their worldly status or success is a direct result of their application of their teachings. These teachings will often indeed contain Christian words or

terminology, but they will be interpreted in the context of the given message rather than being the message themselves. They will misrepresent the Gospel and mislead those who hear and try to follow their teachings.

According to James chapter 2, true success in the spirit, according to God's definition of success, do not always result in the worldly success and fame that the carnal minded seek. Yet as the fame and success of religious media personalities is entirely a matter of presentation and the numbers drawn to follow and support them, so the goals they present for success become standards of materialism taken from the world system and to which the followers are directed seek as goals for their own eventual success.

Our daily needs may not consist of having the largest fleet of cars on the block, or the largest mansion on the hill. They do involve righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and contentment in all circumstances as we learn, aided by sound Biblical teaching and encouragement, to abide in and see ourselves complete in Christ.

In an environment where the worldly standards of fame and success are used to measure each member, pride, egotism, narcissism, enmity, condemnation and jealousy are the natural fruit of the mind set on the flesh.

In the Christian community, even if the name of Jesus is being included in the teachings, if the orientation is away from Christ and back on the individuals and their attempts to emulate the most successful among them according to the worlds standards of success, the gates of Hades will prevail against such for they are no longer founded on the rock, which is Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is being high jacked when it is made to seem like just another self help or motivational system of behavior modification. But Jesus taught that being born again, and faith and rest in Him, would change people on the inside, not teach them how to act changed on the outside. Our problem is not that we do not

have the right laws to follow, our problem is that we have the wrong heart to will and to do His good pleasure. We can get good advice anywhere. We can only get a changed heart through faith in Christ and regeneration of the Holy Spirit, and we will only turn to Him if Jesus is lifted up above all the hype and all the attempts to draw attention to other things and people.

The underlying dynamic and reason that will act as the magnet to keep the community and crowds centered around the given institution or personality (they are really one in the same) will be either that those attending thus can learn to be as great and successful as the personality on the stage, or if failing that, at least by association, by attendance and financial support, they can feel as if they are sharing in the success of the given personality or program.

This idol worship of personalities leads to denial when there is evidence that the media persona and the private life of the individual do not line up. Those who have developed a dependence for their own identity based on their association with the given media personality will often refuse or disregard evidence or facts that might suggest their idol is not sufficient to support their expectations.

Even the clear teaching of the Bible will be set aside when it does not agree with the teaching of the leader of the devoted and dependant followers. To allow their idol to fall would be to lose that in which they have trusted for their own identity, emotional and spiritual support. This is why scandal after scandal may rock a given leader, yet they will still continue to draw and be supported by thousands of devoted followers.

So it was when the ark of God was placed in the temple of Dagon. In the morning the Philistines found their idol had fallen face down in the presence of the ark of God, yet their first response was to simply pick it up and stand it upright again. It is the worshipers who support an idol. It is the true living God that through faith in Him who supports those whose confidence and trust is in Him.

The Moving Target of Religious Systems

If Jesus is not the answer, we are asking the wrong questions. And if Jesus is not what is being lifted up and presented, it is not the Gospel. If someone is giving us answers other than Jesus, they are not true ministers of the Gospel.

This does not mean that they will not succeed in drawing a large following or that they will not generate great interest, usually for a price, in the teachings they are offering. But unfortunately at the end of such transactions, few if any come away any richer in the true treasures of the Gospel, which is the true life of the spirit in Christ Jesus.

The end result of a truly effective ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are complete and mature Christians who are able to stand firm on the foundation of Christ, and achieve the full stature of what it means to be in Christ. It is not to continuously instill and inculcate a dependency in the followers on the goods, services and events that the ministry is producing to support itself.

Instead of building faith in Jesus Christ, and who the members are in Him, often times teachers will reinforce an ideal image fashioned and derived from the kingdom of men, the things the gentiles mistakenly seek thinking in them they will have life. When that level and ideal of success is not met in the lives of those following such teachings they will experience cultural, not spiritual or moral guilt. When they measure themselves by themselves and the false standards of material success, they are enslaved and debtors to the condition and limitations of their fallen nature, and captives to those who falsely claim that by following a man they will learn to perfect themselves and realize peace through materialism.

2 Corinthians 11:19-20

For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.

Those using and manipulating the message of the Gospel for their own purposes do so to create a need and dependency for the services they offer (in addition to, or in place of the actual complete message of the Gospel) . They will market themselves and their organizations professing that those who are customers of their products will be enabled to learn how to achieve for themselves that false standard of success. The products offered consist of methods, techniques and teachings necessary for one to learn how to reach that false ideal presented as the standard for success, usually the same standards and goals that Jesus said "the gentiles seek" rather than the true kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 6:31-33

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

When the pastor is no longer a shepherd leading the sheep to the door, but instead presents his or her self as a role model for those seeking to achieve success in life using religious or spiritual techniques, and the manifestations of that supposed success are material wealth such as earthly mansions or expensive cars, there will be idols set up in the meeting place where God was to be worshiped.

Colossians 3:5

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. He is to be the source of our confidence, not the goods we have received and stored in our barns based on our success at manipulating spiritual techniques or even God Himself.

Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

And so the carnal nominal Christian church is not rooted in the Gospel, not abiding in Christ nor are the members seeing themselves and each other clothed in Christ as children of God and members of His household. Instead they are those who are seeking on their own to achieve a "Christ like" stature based upon their own ability to operate spiritual techniques and achieve or earn their own righteousness by whatever laws or principles of spirituality are currently being presented as the truth.

This creates an environment where there is always a need to seek and hear the next great teaching, after the novelty and excitement over the previous wave of teachings or events have faded. For in truth, by the works of any kind of law, spiritual or religious, the flesh will never be able to justify itself, it is the spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing.

Many of the greatest so called movements of our time have been nothing more than people indulging in their own worked-up emotional state, and mistakenly taking confidence in the amount of excitement being generated, as if the level of emotionalism is somehow evidence that they have become anything more than self centered carnal Christians engaged in entertaining themselves by themselves.

And unfortunately there are great opportunities for those who know how to precipitate and continue this kind of social event and process, to amass great personal fortunes, as all the attention of the followers is directed to those leading

and directing the events, because the leaders are the self proclaimed ones who are supposed to be able to advance those seeking to grow in the things of the spirit.

And yet neither what they teach nor in what they present as a goal will lead the followers through the door of Christ Himself. Instead they will be lead on the broad way that leads to destruction. For there is only one way, truth and life, which is Christ Himself. And if Jesus is not being lifted up, all men will instead be drawn by whatever teachings are able to satisfy the itching of their ears. They will always be learning, but never arriving at the final destination of truth, which is Christ.

Ephesians 4:21

if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:

How the members of the body of Christ identify themselves and each other, whether complete in Christ, or instead simply as participants in a religious association where each is engaged in seeking to learn ways to increase or advance or improve their own religious or spiritual capabilities, it is these factors that will determine the true maturity of the community of Christian believers, the body of Christ.

Works oriented religious systems which rely on methods will always present a moving target to the seeker of truth and God's righteousness. Whereas a ministry that lifts up Christ will be providing the alpha and omega of man's search for union with God, for He is the author, perfecter and finisher of the Christian's faith, of those who truly seek a city whose builder and foundation is God Himself.

When our assurance of our membership in the family and kingdom of God is based on the work that Christ has already accomplished rather than religious or spiritual works that we have yet to accomplish, it is then that we can truly rest and abide in the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. And to the extent that the believer rests

and abides in His completed work, the fruits of forgiveness and love, the fruits of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, will be naturally produced out of a heart on whose fleshy tables the law of God is written rather than on stone tablets.

The law, whether the Holy Law of God, or laws invented by men, say "do this, and you will achieve the ability to overcome your mortal fallen condition". But Jesus told His disciples that the true work of God was to believe on Him whom God had sent (John 6:39, John 3:16). While Martha was busy and getting more and more frustrated worrying about many things, it was Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to Him, whom Jesus said had chosen the good. And it is out of that first rest and abiding in Christ will ultimately come the strength, confidence and assurance needed to endure and see to the end that path of good works that God has determined before hand for His children to walk.

Those truly abiding in Christ start at the finish line, which is in Christ Himself. But those who are simply in a works oriented system of religion or spirituality, though it may indeed be adorned with terminology and phrases from the Bible will never finish their journey to self perfection, for they have turned around from following Jesus who is the door.

Instead of finding the truth in Jesus, they are following their own paths hoping one day to achieve through their acquired knowledge and diligence at religious or spiritual practices that which the Bible has declared from the first day of the fall of the first Adam, mankind would not be able to do.

For all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God, by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified, for through the law comes the knowledge of our sinful condition. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

It is only when we come to the end of our desire to travel this path, when we come to the end of our efforts, that we can turn around, repent from dead

works, and see the way that God Himself by His own arm has provided, a way in Himself, that through Christ, the living way, can unite God and His fallen creation.

The power of the Gospel allows the believer in Christ to do all things through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, no longer as a means of trying to secure God's favor, but as a means of resting in, abiding and relying on those treasures that God in heaven has been willing to freely give to those who confess with their mouth and believe in their heart, that Jesus Christ is Lord, that He is the way, the truth and the life. Old things are to be left behind, forgotten, all things are new for those born again and building on the foundation of Christ.

When Faith is in Faith

When peoples fortunes are such that they think they are succeeding at "operating" these so called principles of prosperity, they become conceited, increasingly self-centered leading to narcissism, as they continue to view the world around them as a reflection of their own inner thoughts, and growing in the conviction that everything revolves around them.

When they do not succeed, they become guilt ridden, convinced that they have not fulfilled their obligation to operate the principles and methods of prosperity properly, and so they become further and further distanced from a personal relationship with God, and fail to trust and rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

In the bible, and in particular the New Testament, having wealth was not an automatic factor in determining how spiritual one was, and in fact, all too often it is seen in the scriptures that becoming rich in the things of this world chokes the seed of the Gospel, hinders true growth in the spirit, and the response from being content with the true treasure found only in Jesus Christ.

It all becomes a matter of basing our eternal status on our temporal condition. Looking at the things that are seen, which are perishing, rather than the unseen, which are eternal.

True believers in Christ are able to let go of all that they possess in the service of the Gospel and to demonstrate the love of God to those in need, due to their being complete and content in what they have by faith in Christ.

But those pursuing godliness merely as a means of great gain are not first seeking the kingdom of Heaven, they are secondarily seeking the kingdom of God on behalf of the kingdom of man.

If we are only loving people because we are hoping God will see our actions and therefore love us, or at least favor us with His blessings, then in truth, we cannot truly trust God unless we know He has received payment from our works. And thus the first commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength will never be fulfilled by those following a method of exercising faith as works to bless what is still being built on the old foundation inherited from the first fallen Adam.

Many of today's famous and successful Bible teachers would fail basic English courses due to the improper way they misinterpret and parse sentences taken out of their context in the Bible, as they rearrange the words and try to find alternative meanings to try to justify the idolatry of their covetousness.

And yet these are the teachings that most satisfy the itching ears and do indeed draw the crowds. For after all, trusting God and having faith in His love and care for us, is at best an uncertain matter if one has not truly grasped the significance of God's offer for a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

Instead, if carnal and unregenerate men are simply told they can buy their way into heaven, indulgences will not only satisfy the carnal minded, it will also provide a good steady income to the institutional religious system and those who run it.

There is nothing unique or radical about a man centered religion based on acquiring the latest teachings on what laws and practices man must operate to do the works of God. It has been going on since man's fall in the garden when the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was chosen over the tree of life.

For when God performs miracles, it is primarily a means of confirming the message of the Gospel. The Gospel is not at its essence concerned with the ability of fallen man to learn to perform miracles. We would see more of the work of the Holy Spirit at work in the church, if the work of the church was concerned with the

Gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, to operate in the authority of Christ, one must first learn to abide in Him, to be clothed with His likeness, identifying ourselves not by what the world defines as success, but by the measure of Christ.

A Sign of the Times?

Perhaps in an odd way, the predominance of false teachers on the religious networks may actually be allowed by God as a means of thinning out the herd, of separating the goats from the sheep. While those seeking loaves and fishes are naturally attracted to the false teachers, those who truly hunger and thirst for God's righteousness will look elsewhere, going outside the camp of the established popular religious consensus.

The true distinction between the body of Christ, those who by faith are truly abiding in Christ, and those who are simply seeking their own temporal profit, and the continuance of their dependence on their life on the bases of the foundation of the first Adam, that distinction between the two becomes more clear the farther the one group falls away from true Biblical faith in Christ.

Spiritual adultery is claiming to be abiding in Christ by faith and yet to be still married to the first husband. Those who are in Christ have crucified the old nature by leaving it on the cross with Christ, reckoned crucified with Him and dead, it is no longer a foundation that those who are truly by faith abiding in Christ seek to continue to build on. Rather, Christ Himself has become the chief corner stone.

And those who are truly born again in Him, begin to build anew on the foundation of who they are identified with Him, and being content with all the riches that by revelation in the word of God and through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, the believer seeks that contentment that comes from their faith in their being forgiven and accepted as a joint heir with Christ, complete in Christ, in union with God through Christ, and a member of the family of God.

This state of being is what results in the believer showing the fruits of the Spirit, forgiveness and love to others as a result of truly being accepted in Christ and becoming complete in Him. Works and service are done not to earn God's love, for He has already demonstrated that when He offered His own Son up for

those who were sinners and by nature children of wrath. Works and service are done as a true heartfelt gratitude and in recognition that giving all that we have in this temporal life only frees us to have our hands free to receive the free gift God has provided in His Son Jesus.

Jesus asked if in the last days He would find true faith in Him on Earth? For because of the increase in lawlessness, the love of many, He said, would grow cold. Without a conviction of the true extent of our fallen nature that we inherited from the first Adam, there will not be a true desire for repentance and seeking the salvation and new life that God offers in Christ.

Instead, the business of religion will primarily be to draw and entice those with itching ears who are seeking continuation and to be establishment in all that they are continuing to build on the first foundation of sand while still married to the first husband that Paul spoke of in Romans chapter 7. They may speak of good works, and a certain type of self denial, yet because the foundation continues to be the old foundation, there is no cross. They live on behalf of the contentment they can achieve based upon their temporal circumstances and comfort. In the last days, when the tribulation in this world continues to increase in intensity, many will fall away and be offended because the false gospel of peace, safety and prosperity they have been sold by the false teachers will not avail them.

The Bible admonishes us to stand firm in the faith and not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel. The Hope of the Gospel is to one day be clothed in Christ, this mortal to put on immortality, to be changed into His likeness at His coming at the consummation of the ages. We are not to rely on the outer man, but do all things based on our completeness in Christ, our treasure in Him where rust, moth and thieves cannot break in and steal. In this earthen vessel we are to do all things on behalf of the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Jesus is to be lifted up so that all men can be drawn to Him, our focus is to be on Christ and not on ourselves and each other. We are to see each other in the body of Christ as members of His body, and not measure ourselves by ourselves.

And unfortunately, the systems these false teachers have created and present which masquerades as the Gospel, are inherently designed to draw the attention of their followers to themselves, and place men back into a system where they are attempting to improve themselves through methods, methodologies and techniques that are all dependent upon their own works.

They are being told to measure their faith by their circumstances and the current worldly standards for success. They are being told to compare themselves with the rich and famous, and if they find themselves in a state of lack, that in order to get to a state of abundance and prosperity it is up to them to learn how to operate spiritual techniques, to fulfill supposedly spiritual contractual requirements with money and to place their dependence upon a system based upon the rudimentary principles of this world, and based on the doctrines of the teachings and traditions of men.

Our problem is not that we lack the things the gentiles all seek. Our problem is we have not sought the true Biblical kingdom of God first. The flesh profits nothing, it is the spirit that gives life. We are not to fear him who can kill the body but after that can do nothing, but instead fear him who after he has killed can cast into hell. The blessed hope that the Bible speaks of is like an anchor that is on the other side of the veil of this present temporal life. It is the unseen eternal revelation of God in Christ, and ourselves by faith in Christ, that we are to focus on first.

And when we are content with our treasure in heaven and our heart is there, and we start manifesting the fruit of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, love, joy, peace, contentment, longsuffering, forgiveness, it is then that god can add to us the temporal things that we need without our being distracted and turn again to the

weak and worthless elementary principles of this present temporal fallen world, and the old foundation. for our new foundation is Christ.

He is to be the chief cornerstone around which we begin to build with gold tested by fire, leaving all that was built on the old crucified with Christ. This is the high calling of the upward call of God in the face of Christ, and to hear and receive it we must move off of the foundation of ourselves and the works we have built upon it, and be born again in Him, building anew on the foundation of the rock, Jesus Christ.

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