

Faith and Works LXI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

Spiritual Social Media

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Introduction

Knowledge is indeed, as Daniel predicted, increasing, but we now can receive it as channels, and we only hear those channels we choose to plug into. The itching ears are caused by the ear buds we have stuffed into our ears at all hours of the day.

The public square could be filled with a million people, but none of them would interact on a personal level if they are oblivious to each other focused and stimulated by their own cocoon of information and experience that they have chosen to fill their senses at the exclusion of all else.

We are habitually plugging into specific channels of information that only concern us, and we are thus not likely to run into any unexpected ideas or thoughts or concepts following our own chosen paths of personally compatible information.

This is one reason there has been such an acceleration of illiteracy and lack of comprehension in our public school systems. The students are avid learners, but the loud voice of culture is telling them that to adapt and learn to fit in requires being a student of the popular social media, not the academics of the classroom.

The stream of information they are being fed is tainted with additives to make them forever slaves of those who set the current trends and fashions and have the goods ready at a price to realize the current standards to be accepted into that lifestyle.

The information highway has many paths, and given the choice we are following it where we want to go. It is not a place of exploration or learning anything new that would compromise the positions we have decided to take on our own behalf.

What Do We Wish to Know?

Many of those who claim to be legitimate agnostics or atheists are waiting for God to make Himself known and relevant within the context of their own understanding and experience of the world around us.

We are often socially and personally looking for what is relevant for the needs and purposes of keeping our present mode of being intact. We are looking for that which can add to walls we have built to provide darkness within which to hide our nakedness.

We want to know what the majority of our fellow citizens feel is popular or important. Trends and fashions concern us, as do the current opinions, attitudes and assumptions held by the majority. When we choose to identify and define ourselves socially by allegiance to a given trend of fashion or thought, we often do so because it is likely to ensure our acceptance within the majority consensus.

Often social structures, groups, clubs, associates, religious and political parties legitimize the integrity of our walls. By convincing ourselves that we are included in the one group that is superior or vindicated before all the others, we seek justification for ourselves simply by our association with the winning team.

Sports enthusiast can be often observed do this on a superficial scale, associating their own self worth and achievements with those of the team to which they demonstrate their allegiance by attending games, knowing the stats of the players, cheering their team on during the game season.

Our focus and decision to join and identify with a given group includes our patterning our opinions after the ideas that define that given group. But often, our true allegiance is proven not by our adherence to the truth of a given doctrine or belief system, but rather on how we defend and attack those beliefs or doctrines that do not agree with our own.

When this tendency for the herd to seek to group together under a defined set of rules that can justify their feeling secure and confident behind the walls it creates, there are those who will deliberately provide the means for achieving community by defining the parameters within which such a community can feel secure and accept one another.

Charismatic leaders will draw followers both by their own dynamic personalities, which in themselves seem to demonstrate that the leader has found and is secure on a firm foundation. The more bold, boastful and brash a leader is in defining the truth of his/her cause against those that do not agree, the more the mere act and appearance of certitude and confidence will appeal to those looking for a place in which to feel secure.

It has been the case in the past where these kinds of systems, once defined and the behavior reinforced and disciplined to the point where it can be transferred from one generation to the next, would create movements, both religious and political, that would last far beyond the life and influence of the original founder(s). It is the success in a given program for social cohesion in the area of the certainty and strength it provides those who abide by its codes of conduct and doctrines of thought, not the actual objective validity of those truths that system claims to represent, that provide the true staying power of a given focal point for community experience.

And so generation after generation have been raised within such structures of doctrine and practice, finding a means of allowing their inclusion within a structure that by their own group consensus is deemed secure, and by which all other forms of social cohesion have been judged inferior.

Once in such a group consensus, the mind will rebel at any rational process that would threaten to undermine or challenge the integrity of the walls of community consensus that the individual relies on to define and legitimize who they are and what they stand for and against. Mental processes are then engaged

not in discovery of new truth or validating and testing previous assumptions, but instead are merely used polemically in winning debates to retain the integrity of the walls behind which the participants find their security.

And so those who find themselves in such systems are rarely presented with the opportunity to question the group consensus. All legitimate information comes sanctified from the leaders who provide the focal point of what defines and identifies the legitimate members of the group. True objective and independent thinking often will thus not take place until a cataclysmic event threatens the integrity that the group is trusting in, such as a scandal or breach of promise on behalf of those representing the personification by which the group identifies itself.

In certain instances, there are those who do not find rest and security in the group consensus. They battle deep insecurities and doubts, such that they cannot rely on second hand affirmations of truth, they must find and be certain of truth personally before they can rest their confidence on its foundation.

Such was Martin Luther. The religious structure in which he was raised provided all the means of ritual and religious practices that one could perform and feel assured that one's obligation and duty on behalf of eternal matters was settled. Yet it was not enough for him to find personal assurance. To validate the practices of his faith, Luther then turned to an in depth examination of the Bible. Normally it is the religious authorities who safeguard the interpretations of doctrine in order to ensure support and legitimacy of their religious structures.

But Luther turned the process around, and sought by the plain teaching of scripture to question the validity of the structures that for generations had provided security and a bases for community. He was able to provide the true bases for faith and community on the authentic teachings of the Bible which alleviated much of the abuse and insufficiencies of the previous established religious systems.

Such access to information was rare, as few had physical copies of the original manuscripts, and fewer still could read and correctly interpret them. Such a breakthrough of meaning and truth of which Luther was one of the significant catalysts, could only come about in history through limited opportunities of access to the information, the ability to interpret it, and the opportunity to communicate it and withstand the pressures to conform and remain within the proscribed doctrines of the established religious authority.

In many ways, the beginning implementations of our current technological media presented some to the same challenges to the ability of independent thought, as all media was controlled and disseminated by a few corporations and the content offered was often was only that which was in their own self interest. One source of information would thus broadcast to millions of households, who were only able to receive what was presented, with little ability to question influence what was presented from the source.

The advancement of interactive social media has unlocked not only access to information, but the presentation and analysis of that information. In such an environment, we can see where there is a need for a consensus not of opinion, but for the foundations to validate those opinions formed by the groups of individuals concerned with correct discernment and understanding of those issues and opinion. All is now in question, with a need to understand by what authority those questions are to be defined and answered, as those who once controlled access to the dissemination of that information are no longer in control.

We are in a unique place in history, one which has been facilitated by access not to an audience, but to the actual topics of concern around which an audience is formed. The bases of this state is to date an unregulated highway of information. Unfortunately, there is a need to maximize the open potential of this medium quickly, as world conditions and the instabilities that are growing in society will soon no doubt mandate that social and political authorities control the conduits through which the current stream of information flows.

What Are We Waiting For?

Often we are waiting for God to answer our questions instead of seeing what questions we need answered that He has seen fit to answer.

That God does not appear as a character within the movie we are directing of our own lives, speaking the correct parts that we have written for Him, so that we may rate His performance, is usually not an indication that God is not real, but rather He does not fit on the small stage we have made, and the world we expect to find Him is not the real one.

General rule of thumb is if we are still the center of what we think of as the world, then we have yet to see the true extent of God's creation, and our part as a created being within it.

God is not a participant, an actor or something we have created in our own world. Our world is something we have created within the worlds He has created. Our world is something we have created in His. And usually it is too small and limited for us to really get a big enough picture or view to see Him in it.

If we still experience and see the world as something in which we ourselves are in the center of it, we have yet to experience the real world as it is.

Too many are looking for a God who is compatible with a world of their own experience, a world limited to their own understanding, and in which they are at the center.

It is He who has made us, not we ourselves. We exist within His world. If we do not yet see Him in the world that we experience, we are probably not experiencing the real world.

Being Sociable

Social networking has changed the exchange of ideas in that previously, while we did have the capabilities of modern telecommunications, it was generally point to point, or in one direction from one point to many. And one needed to know the address, and be received by the one with which one wanted to communicate.

But now in the social networking sphere of communication we find people who can collaborate and exchange information but they connect not to each other, but to the topic of that information, rather than to the specific individuals who would be the audience or participants of that information.

And so we find the sheep talking from one pen to the other, no longer corralled and being carefully fed information from one controlled source that manages their pen, and now when they communicate with each other across their pens, and the only way to really evaluate their experiences together, is to have a common reference, which in this case is often a turning back to the Bible as a source of authority in itself rather than continuing to allow leadership to establish their authority over the sheep on the bases of their being the gatekeepers of Biblical insight and knowledge. Rather than being the judges, it is they themselves who are now being exposed in the public light and measured against the teachings of scripture.

And so a lot of culture, tradition and even ethnicity had more to do with how people were corralled, sometimes for the gain of individuals, sometimes for the gain of those seeking a consistent target to market, into silos of controlled exposure to information and environments of words, sound and images built exclusively around a single world view or group consensus. They really did not allow outside influences of contrary information or alternative perspectives to be introduced.

But recently with the explosion in the use of social networking, there is a greater possibility of the cross pollination of ideas, provided the potential information available is not rigidly filtered to only that data already compatible

with a fixed mindset. We see people sharing and exchanging experiences and opinions, and we see people seeking a common frame of reference by which to identify and understand what was good and bad about their experiences, and how to better guide their choices in the future.

Cut Off From the Cut

The shift from attempting to realize truth through active engagement with the social fabric and structure of society, to a purely personal attempt to realize truth as a subjective experience either through spiritual or pharmacological means has been well documented.

This current generation will associate with those sharing in the same experiences they are having through the so-called social networks. But they are not connecting personally to each other, or for that matter, themselves.

They gather in groups to hide themselves, the nature of their fellowships being deliberately focused on idle chatter, distractions and the latest curiosity.

The goal is never to be committed, and one tries to adopt the role of the detached and bemused spectator, quite happy and quite content to never question their condition or to have it examined.

They become dull to meaning. A modern church that seeks to be relevant and attract such, by catering to their disposition and their natural avoidance of real conflict or self examination, such a church will need to put away the sharp scalpel of the Word of God, and never seek to cut too deeply into inner truth.

Berating people through legalism, and criticizing conduct, are all superficial, and do not reveal the innermost nature and intentions of the heart of man. For man never comes to the end of himself through religion. He simply comes to the end of the latest prescription of what to do to make himself holy or spiritual, and then he moves on to the next. All the while this is done under the assumption that within man is the capability by the works of the flesh to be justified by law.

It was once said that the unexamined life was not worth living (Socrates, in Plato, Dialogues, Apology). And yet today the life that many seek to live is

specifically designed to prevent them from having to consider the possibility that there is anything there worth examining.

People who can be amused, but not moved to tears, people whose hearts have become hardened, have become such due to over stimulation and indulgence in every new and novel thing.

The spiritual fortitude and character, the foundation of rock that Jesus spoke of that cannot be shaken when all else is shaken, will not be found underneath a generation that sought to content itself with what it could build on sand.

We have created through our industry and technology a culture and society that teaches and encourages the consumption of goods and the experience of pleasures. None seek after God and take time to listen to the still small voice, indeed we are driven to always be inundated with sound and images. We fill our head, ears and eyes with all the distractions of this world seeking fulfillment in them. This prevents the motivation and production of the true fruit that lasts into eternity that God is seeking from those who are truly saved and come into eternal life through faith and rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

True connection of one to another in relationship and fellowship takes place in the deep areas of the heart, and in identification and recognition not of the superficial actions, but of the motivations and aspirations, hopes and dreams of the inner most man, not to be amused or distracted, but to be eternally complete through union with God. Fellowship is two souls on a journey together.

When Christ is identified, and the individuals faith is in Him as the foundation for life and self identity, then there is unity with people of like faith in the body of Christ. Anything else is simply the gathering of people for the purpose of engaging in similar activity or to participate in similar experiences or events.

Men come to recognize and acknowledge before God their need to have their union with God restored in eternity as they see the inability of the temporal

fallen nature to meet their need and expectations to provide the foundation on which they can make themselves as God and somehow by their own efforts open the gates of Hades and escape the death that has reigned in mankind since the first fallen Adam.

But it is the Devil's business to keep us distracted and occupied so that our concerns rarely stray beyond the needs of the day, all the while reassuring ourselves that tomorrow will be like today, only more so.

Who will those be who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, and seek Him, who come to love God with their heart, soul, mind and strength above all else? It will only be those who come to realize through self knowledge and reflection, who realize there is no satisfaction to be found in the things Jesus said the gentiles continually seek, and in which they attempt to place their confidence and seek their rest.

The Ties That Bind

But it is here some wisdom needs to be applied lest all fall into endless disputes concerning the law, washings, and so forth. Too often the exchange of ideas and opinions becomes a source for attempting to build self-esteem, to the end that one looks for arguments not on behalf of objective truth being discovered in the discussion, but rather that one may be the victor over the other. This is sophistry, where the argument itself is the point of the conversation. Winning the fight is what is important, not what the fight is about.

Too often it is the tendency of those feeling disenfranchised or impotent to seek the feeling of power that can come by defaming a popular figure. But when we criticize those in prominent and large ministries, too often we are only remarking on those who have fallen beneath our standards for how success in those areas should be measured.

the problem with this is we many never move beyond following personality cults, which can be done by both those who are in agreement and fans, and those who disagree and who define themselves less by who they are then by who they are not.

But to step far enough back, and using the Bible as the lens through which we evaluate the current state of religion in our time, it is possible to realize that while there are those who may not be performing the job of charismatic leader above the standards set by our expectations for leadership, we may need to that actual role itself, regardless if it is being performed well or not.

What is the criteria for what constitutes true faith in these dark days? This was a question that Jesus asked. While we have many talking and teaching faith, what was the faith that Jesus said He would be seeking on His return?

We are to renew our minds with the Word of God, but too often we are not renewing our minds so much as filling them with religious knowledge, but providing nothing to write on the tablets of the heart.

To discern between good and evil, to cut between soul and spirit, bone and flesh, the carnal and the spiritual, how do we avoid falling into the same patterns of natural religious thought on these matters, how do we mature to where we can evaluate what is spiritual and carnal?

So when we read 1 Corinthians, do we imagine that the appeal to reconcile the personal divisions and disputes over doctrinal issues that Paul is addressing is done on the bases of wisdom that Jesus taught, or perhaps teachings about Jesus? Or is Paul really saying that Jesus Himself is our wisdom from God, that He who has seen the Son, has seen the Father.

True Cohesion of the Body of Christ

Jesus is Himself the social medium of the true church, the bride of Christ. His bride can legally re-marry only when she has left as dead the old nature and foundation crucified by faith with Christ on the cross. Crucifixion is a matter of faith, a component of the complete saving faith of salvation. It is not a matter of severe treatment of the body which only brings attention to the flesh, and sets and focuses the mind on it and what it is doing and how well.

It is by faith the old nature and flesh is left as dead and worthless, no longer a creditor to which we are indebted, crucified on the cross with Jesus Christ. And by faith the true Christian is seeing themselves seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realms, Flesh of His Flesh, bone of His bone, a member of His Body, a joint heir with Him of all that He has as a Son of the Father in the Father's Kingdom.

Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, is to leave as dead in the waters the symbolize death, all that we once depended on since our birth as a descendent of a fallen race by nature children of wrath before God. And it is to leave all as worthless, as sand, and to begin to build on the foundation of Christ Himself, in whom we are now complete, in whom all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. Such was the gift given by a Father who would even now seek the coin that was lost, seek the lone sheep that has stayed, and set all of heaven rejoicing when that one that was lost is found.

Conclusion

The new interactive social media has allowed us to get a larger perspective of not just our own silo of social, political and religious information controlled by those managing the group and cause to which we have identified ourselves. We can now get a broad high view of all the available alternative viewpoints and opinions.

But finally the real question that the Gospel will cause us to ask once we clearly hear its message is why build the walls at all? It is not what hides, protects and justifies our egos and opinion of ourselves that defines us, but rather the foundation that we are building on, which from the standpoint of the Gospel, is to be the rock, Christ Himself.

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