

Faith and Works XXXI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

The Media is the Messenger

It is sometimes very difficult to discuss Biblical topics that depend on contextual reading of scripture these days, despite the fact that most of those who identify themselves as Believers in the Bible personally own numerous editions and translations of what was once a banned book written in a language that few could understand.

The reason seems to be that the context of each individual verse in the Bible is now being evaluated within the larger context of the latest popular teaching, rather than the latest teaching being evaluated by the complete witness of God's truth in the whole of scripture. After all, it is hard to argue with success in a results oriented society. It is also hard to evaluate the merits or truth of a particular teaching when all that is known of what the scriptures teach comes through the interpretation of that teaching. As the current popular understanding of politics and social issues is now predominately being shaped by the media, it is not surprising that once commercial religion found a home there as well, that as long as it was entertaining and catered to the largest audience, it should begin to significantly influence, as long as it continued to be culturally relevant and entertaining, the Biblical understanding of its ever growing audience.

It is evident then, that the success once fervently sought by many sincere believers of Biblical truth in order to bring a relevant witness of faith into the arena of the modern media marketplace has had some unintended consequences. The Media is now the messenger of news that is good, not necessarily the good news of the faith once delivered to the saints.

During the latter half of the last century, communications had developed and pervaded the where music, movies and television began to shape and lead the development and direction of social thought and values. Pop culture did more than influence trends, it became, as the focus of the ears and eyeballs of the marketplace, the focus and target of what products would be offered and how they

were marketed. It is no wonder than, as the market place of both goods and ideas was no longer the public square or the community religious center, that Christian earnestly sought a viable presence and witness representing the Christian point of view that could compete and be successful at drawing an audience as the secular media.

Once successful however, the commercial religious media grew, just as popular media had in the secular commercial arena, to become for many the main influence on religious belief and practice, even precipitating the following trends within popular religious culture. Never mind that a good many of the early media "successes" soon fell victim to the life style of the rich and famous including drug abuse, divorce and immorality. "Coming out" is now considered by many to be an example of truth, love and tolerance. Theology is now in the commercial arena evaluated increasingly by how well it accommodates the dictates of the marketplace which in turn was of course driven by the things that the gentiles, those not seeking God, seek instead of God. The new media had to sustain itself, and its life blood was attracting audiences by offering what was popular. No longer influencing or being a witness to the current media led culture, the commercial religious media became an avid student and follower of the popular secular trends.

By closely following the secular pop trends, religious products began to gain commercial viability within the media arena, however, the price paid for that success was the foundational truths of God being replaced by marketing techniques targeting ways to draw attention by the same means of entertainment as the secular media. The truth of God could sometimes be found mixed in the message of this media, but to be successful, the media needed to market itself to develop a captive audience based on the expectation that something unique would only be found by followers giving offerings, purchasing teachings and products of a given media "ministry". The more successful these media "ministries" became at drawing an audience to themselves, the more revenue they could devote to air time and marketing, thus insuring that not those programs proclaiming truth, but those

that were a commercial success would eventually dominate the available prime time programming.

There would be no "buzz" or repeat business if all they did was offer Christ, the end of the law, the end of the methods men would turn to seeking to improve themselves and control their circumstances. For in Christ that life comes to an end, there is no more dependence on the old foundation for who and what the individual is. Success and completeness from a Biblical standpoint are now to be found in Christ based on faith in His finished work, not in what progress we have made ourselves.

Today it is evident that many see success as whether or not one is granted a presence within the broadcast media, such so that new stars are created by commercial enterprises that then draw the audience needed for success based on marketing techniques and media saturation. If it was not popular, it would not be true, because success is now gauged in terms of media market share. The more people that watch, the more true it must be. In general, people watch what is popular simply to keep current on what the cultural standards are, as they themselves seek acceptance by following them, and what is popular is what is presented to watch. Truth in the popular media is by popularity, what draws the largest following.

This is nowhere more apparent and in evidence than in the commercial religious arena, where proof of the success and truth of what a given program presents is given validity simply by how many people are being drawn to follow. The miracle of drawing the largest crowds is now the idol that people worship, rather than truth that is confirmed by the hand of God and His word. The bigger the stage, the bigger the audience, the greater the event is rated as a success. This is now true in the secular media, it is true in the commercial religious media. Marketing forces now determine what will fill the shelves of the local religious franchise book store. If Bibles are bought, it is usually not to read them as the Word of God in its

entirety, but rather to use as a reference for individual scriptures used in the context of the current popular teaching.

The ironic point here is that those who are successfully are based on the numbers of supporters than can draw after themselves, and this they do promising to enable their followers to achieve the success that they have achieved. If this circular kind of system is an example of anything, surely it is the biblical observation that in the last days there will be those always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth, as truth is in Christ whom we can abide in by faith only when we come to the end of ourselves and no longer seek to build on the old foundation.

The Internet offers an alternative avenue to the Christian media, and there is a growing pressure against for profit nonprofit prophetic media ministries to expose the fraud and exploitation of those who do not know the truth of the Bible, but who are instead being lead astray by those seeking to teach false doctrine in order to lead people to themselves.

The Christian media is what Christians turn to because they do not want to be influenced by the Godless programming on the secular channels. But the secular channels are not run by God, they are up for grabs to those with the most money who are the most successful at drawing donations to their organizations, who then in turn, purchase and dominate the prime time programming slots of the religious broadcasters.

When those seeking truth tune into their programming, they are taught false doctrines to make them think that God will only bless them if they bless the media organizations. But if the current Internet pressure continuities, there may be a time where these ministries lose their tax exempt status and will then have to open their accounting books to the investigators.

And due primarily to the influence to those operating supposedly as ministers of the Gospel within the Christian media camp, today the Bible is seen as merely a

catalog of potential products that can be extracted and packaged to be used to draw an audience, products and teachings that focus attention on what the people must do, rather than the simple truth of what Christ has done.

And invariably, the success of the those offering the product, measured by how many they have managed by the gift of marketing to follow them, are pointed to as proof of the products validity. Jesus pointed out that people search the scriptures looking for how to do the works of God, but miss the point that they would arrive at if they humbled themselves before the whole counsel of God's word, that the true spirit of prophecy, the sum of the law and the prophets, is the testimony of Jesus.

The yeast of the Pharisees does not always manifest in long robes, long prayers, and long winded theological statements. Religion is best understood as any system that bases mans progression from human to divine, from fallen to redeemed, on the foundation of the fallen nature itself and its assumed ability to be able to improve itself by its own works, even good works that in themselves are based on individual truths from the Bible. Paul taught in Romans chapters 6 and 7 that the Law of God actually enabled the sinful nature to increase in sin, and also taught that by the works of the law, any law, but especially God's Law, that no flesh would be justified before God. Too often those who began as children accepting the Gospel become adults seeking to be perfected by the works of the flesh.

Yet the viability of the teachings depends on the assumption that now that we have begun in the spirit, we are not to be perfected in the flesh. The religious products being offered assume that they offer a way to do the works of God, that instead of our attention fixed on Christ, even as Moses lifted the bronze serpent in the wilderness, instead one's focus returns to the work of continuing to build on the old foundation. And as the media is predominantly a matter of showing what is seen, one falls back into measuring one's self by the standards being presented. The mind set on the flesh of course will inevitably produce death, not life, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus that is the central focus of the inspired writers of the New Testament.

What is truly unfortunate is that while God's word says that the things that are esteemed by men are despised by God, that those first now shall be last later, that it was the false prophets, not those truly speaking God's word, that were well spoken of by the culture, all these have been turned around so that success is now measured by the external things, rather than peace and trust in the unseen eternal things hidden in Christ in God. Jesus could indeed draw large crowds with loaves and fishes, but when He then presented Himself to those same crowds, and even to His own disciples, that He Himself was to be the way, truth and the life, that no one could be restored to relationship to the Father but through Him, with a cross, not a makeover or refurbishment, for the old life that was based on the fallen nature, then the crowds, and even some of His own disciples, no longer followed Him.

While the gentiles flock to the latest teaching that promises them a short cut to the things they seek as debtors to the flesh and its need to overcome its fallen state, God is offering in the gift of His Son a different treasure for those who no longer have a hope in continuing to build themselves on the old foundation, but instead now hunger and thirst for God's righteousness rather than their own. When we currently hear that God has a plan for your life, it is now more on the lines of a celebrity makeover, and how to increase in goods and become the envy of the gentiles based on our success, rather than being found in Christ clothed with His righteousness, always being ready to give a reason for the Hope that is within us, a hope not based on the obvious material contentment and pleasures that the world seeks to take comfort in, and which all too well understands.

While we must concede that there are sincere believers who have never examined the Bible apart from the context of modern popular teachings which present it as being nothing more than a repository of laws and methods by which one can improve ones control over life's uncertainties and win God's favor, or even become as God oneself, yet the foundational truth of a believers life hid in Christ, of being complete in Him, is undoubtedly in some cases being diminished or even lost on an individual experiential level of faith, and in a mixed or non-existent public

presentation of the Gospel has surely more than any other reason, such as lack of prayer and fasting, tithing or other religious works, been the reason in the modern media dominated societies that there is so little evidence of God "stretching out His hand to perform healing and causing signs and wonders to be done in the name of His servant, Jesus" (Acts 4:29).