

Pastor Karl Payne- January 14, 2018

Acts 17:10-15

10 Circumstances and feelings are not a good indicator or litmus test for God's will or blessing. Look at the bookending of verses 10 and 15. (Uber absolutely nailed this subject last Sunday and if you missed that sermon, listen to it on the web or app. It will be worth your time, convenient or inconvenient.)

11 Before we dig into verse 11, let's look at **1 Thess. 1:2-8** and **2 Cor.8:1-5**. Were the Thessalonian Christian's faithful, committed men and women, who according to Paul were used to spread the gospel far beyond their borders? Yes. Now look at what a commendation he gives to the Christians at Berea. Wow!

In spite of a "great ordeal of affliction" and "deep poverty" experienced by the churches in Macedonia, with Christian leaders being treated harshly, and eventually run out of town, just as they were previously in the churches of Galatia: Antioch Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and now the churches in Macedonia: Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, look at the impact these Christians made in their cities, providences, country, and eventually around the world.

How did this happen? There are a lot of variables, probably more than we know, but I believe it had something to do with their foundation, the Scripture, and focus, preaching, teaching and discipleship training, which they refused to deviate from regardless of the circumstances or persecution.

They received the word with great eagerness. (**2 Tim.3:16-17**)

Examining the Scriptures. (**2 Tim.2:15**)

Daily. (**Deut.6:4-7**)

12 "Therefore, many of them believed..." Common people, prominent people, men and women. The gospel was the message they refused to quit sharing, & God produced the fruit, regardless of ethnicity, gender or competing cultures. Scripture was the brick; their blood, sweat & tears the mortar.

This same foundation, Scripture, focus, preaching, teaching and discipleship training, and results, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as the promised Savior for salvation by grace through faith from the penalty of sin, represents a consistent pattern of behavior and response we see taught and experienced throughout the entirety of the N. T. For example:

Matt. 11:1

Matt.26:6-11 (We forget, His highest priority was not the poor or the outcast; it was the gospel?)

John 8:31

Acts 4:1-2

Acts 5:41-42

Acts 8:29-36

Acts 11:26

Acts 14:21-22

Acts 15:35

Acts 17:2-3

Acts 19:8-10

Romans 1:16

1 Cor.1:17-25

1 Thess.2:4, 11-13

13 How was Paul received once again? Willie Nelson would have been proud-on the road again.

14-15 How were Silas and Timothy allowed to stay when Paul was run out of town?

a) The assumption may have been if you take the head, you will kill the body.

b) Timothy could legitimately wear two hats, and was considered a gentile by the gentiles because of his dad, rather than a Jew because of his mom.

How could the work continue under the direction of Silas and Timothy without their teacher and mentor? They had been taught and trained as disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ by Paul, **2 Tim.2:2-4; Luke 6:40**. They knew the Scripture, the gospel, and the mission, which they considered more important than their circumstances in life or the applause and approval of others, **1 Tim.4:6-16**.

Was the basis of this success and expansion of the church from emulating the cultures where they preached, taught and made disciples; while they served as faithful ambassadors of Christ and fought as courageous soldiers for Christ? No. They would not have been persecuted if they blended in.

So what has changed in the 21st century? The change has not been in God's Great Commission and Command. It still reads the same way whether it is proclaimed by Matthew, John, Paul, Peter or Luke.

Matthew 28:18-20 The Great Commission of Jesus.

John 15:16 The Great Commission of The Apostle John

2 Tim.2:2 The Great Commission of The Apostle Paul

Acts 10:38-43 The Great Commission of The Apostle Peter

Acts 1:8 The Great Commission of Dr. Luke

Seek the approval of your community so they will accept you as a good human being and acknowledge your Christian faith is not totally antiquated, bigoted and worthless.....**Matt.6:33**

Hand out cheese logs and sandwiches in the park to show mercy and win the right to speak....**John 8:31**

God is all about love and tolerance. As long as a person is loving and sincere God will ultimately accept them, so quit being so negative about God. My God says yes to His children, not no! **Matt. 7:21-23; John 14:6; 2 Tim.4:1-5**.

Expand if there is time.....

Genuine Christian salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ should produce people viewed as good human beings who care for the needs of others, protect the innocent and stand up for justice for all people. However, not all people viewed as good human beings and caring for the needs of others are genuine Christians. The culture, particularly among our youth, have been indoctrinated to believing that humanitarian activities are more important than the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and biblical faith. Philanthropy is part of our mission, but it is not our commission.

Are we actively seeking the approval of man or God? One lasts for time, the other for eternity.

Galatians 1:6-10

The Apostle Paul indicated in the book of Romans that he was not ashamed of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which helps explain why we still talk about him two thousand years after his beheading by Nero, **Romans 1:16**.

I think too many Christians today are ashamed of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and think history is going to both reflect and reveal this to be the case. **Why chase the approval of culture rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. One will always insist it is not enough, and the other has already told us, it is finished!**

What has happened? How has Christianity wandered so far away from its biblical and historical foundation and focus?

I believe the change has been in the failure of Christians to stand firmly and defiantly if necessary on the foundation of Scripture, and the focus of preaching, teaching and making disciples. In my short life time this change has been gradual, subtle, and progressive; coming primarily from within the church and professing Christians.

The late 60's and 70's witnessed the rise of the Charismatic movement. It was sometimes explained as the first, second and even third wave of God releasing the Holy Spirit to deal with mankind. Although the foundation was still the Scripture, they were increasingly interpreted through emotion, allegory, spiritualization or personal experience, and the focus shifted from preaching and teaching the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, to a growing fascination with spiritual gifts, particularly those involving prophetic utterance, with speaking in tongues being presented as the sole authentication of salvation or the filling of the Holy Spirit. Rather than asking people "What would you say to God if you were to die tonight and He asked why should I allow you into my heaven?", the first question often became, "Does your church believe in the full gospel?" or "Have you experienced the fullness of God's power by speaking in tongues?", or, "Would you like to experience all of God's blessing and power or only part of it?" or, "Are you a spiritual full glass of water or only a half glass of water?". There was lots of excitement and lots of confusion as the gift of tongues even morphed in some circles into laughing in the Spirit, and barking in the Spirit, neither of which have any foundation in Scripture.

The late 70's and 80's witnessed the rise of friendship evangelism. The foundation was still in Scripture, but the focus was on winning the right to be heard and presenting the gospel through building relationships with friends or strangers. Aggressive, straightforward evangelism was ridiculed as boorish and ineffective, being replaced by a gospel that was sometimes so subtle and vague that people at times did not know what they were committing themselves to. Although the motivation was honorable, at times the relationship building took so long that neighbors and colleagues moved away before the right to speak to them was ever earned.

The mid 80's and 90's witnessed the rapid rise or reestablishment of Covenant or Reformed theology, through a number of leading luminaries of that camp, including the late James Montgomery Boice, John MacArthur, John Piper and R.C. Sproul. The foundation of this group was and is the Scripture, and the focus is on salvation by grace through faith, which is only considered genuine after being authenticated by complete repentance and good works, because true faith is "always accompanied by non-saving, but absolutely necessary works." You try to wordsmith that description of theological gymnastics. This group grew up at least in part out of frustration because of what they perceived as the theological confusion of the Charismatic movement, the "sloppy agape" of friendship evangelism and their open contempt for

popular dispensational teaching which they believe teaches Christians to go on vacation from daily obedience as they eagerly await the return of Jesus Christ for them before the wrath of God is poured out for a seven year period on the nation of Israel, but extending throughout the entire world. For the champions of this movement to castigate others for teaching confusion, they could just as rightly be accused of dividing brothers and rejecting the Christian faith of many who they subjectively believe do not exhibit enough good work to authenticate genuine salvation. Since they have no way to qualify how much good work is necessary to authenticate genuine salvation the wake they often leave in theological circles inside and outside of their own is pride, because God is in the process of building a gated cul-de-sac that only their members will have access to, and fear, because as John MacArthur said at the 1990 JETS meetings I personally attended, it is impossible for a person to have 100% confidence that they have genuine salvation. Why? Because it is always possible that even if they begin well, they may still fail to produce enough good works, that as RC Sproul stated, are non-saving but absolutely necessary for salvation. Degrees and pedigrees seem to mean a great deal to this group, along with a library filled with books written by Calvin, Gill, Owen, Warfield, Luther, Spurgeon, and a host of other Reform theologians and writers from the past.

The 90's also witnessed the rise of a rapidly growing movement identified as the New Apostolic Reformation. Like the Reformed movement they have a host of pastors, writers and theologians who self-identify themselves as "Apostles" who God now runs and rules the world through according to them. C. Peter Wagner seems to be at the top of this pyramid of power and popularity, with Bill Johnson following close behind. The foundation of this group is both biblical and extra-biblical. Its focus is even more elitist than the new Reformed movement. Apostles and prophets in their camp are just like the Apostles and prophets of old; no step down for this group except they can be wrong in their prophecies and still live to talk about it. None of them, including Wagner as old as he now is, could possibly be over two-thousand years old and have walked with the Lord Jesus Christ from the beginning, which Acts 1:21-22 indicates was a non-negotiable prerequisite to be considered an Apostle by God the Holy Spirit and the original Apostles. Their focus on sign gifts, which they teach are normative and now available for all true Christians, makes the 70's Charismatic movement leaders and churches look like spiritual neophytes by comparison. Raising the dead, predicting the future, healing the sick, casting out the big demons that only they can cast out with their super power, the men who will represent the church conquering triumphant when they take over, rule and run the world for Christ, including most industries, financial, political, religious, education etc. Who would have guessed we have the privilege of living with God's new spiritual Hall of Fame Christian leaders. The original Apostles will be glad to be introduced to them someday. Jesus will probably have an upper room set aside for them to swap war stories.

Another movement that has more recently moved from the shadows to the mainstream and is attracting the attention of a growing number of young people who want to experience personal spiritual renewal, but not be closely associated with conventional Christianity is neo-Gnosticism. The foundation is both Scripture and extra biblical. The focus is inclusion, prayer, meditation, a sense of super-spirituality that knows and understands the will and mind of God going beyond ordinary Christians. Bible passages mean whatever the Spirit tells a person it means, whether that opinion is grammatically, syntactically and contextually accurate or not. Walking and talking with God is unique to each individual; religious programs do not let the Spirit lead, and are not only unnecessary, they often stifle true spirituality. Love is not only the main thing, it is essentially the only thing. True godliness is not gained through academics or study, but primarily through metaphysics. Humanitarian service is the ultimate expression of genuine faith and love for God and mankind. Most neo-Gnostics are sincere, self-absorbed and dialed more into what they think and feel than what they factually or biblically know,

which they view as a virtue not a vice. They represent new wine in new wine skins who have thrown off the confining shackles of conventional Christianity and its practices.

The latest movement in religious devolution now on the rise could be called neo-paganism. This movement is completely outside of mainstream Christianity while the other four movements already mentioned are found primarily inside the church. This does not mean there are not professing Christians involved in neo-paganism. It just means there is no way a professing Christian should be involved within this anti-Christian movement. It is not possible to reconcile Neo-paganism with biblical Christianity. Neo-paganism rejects orthodox Christianity as well as other monotheistic or organized religions. The foundation is not Scripture, but rather scriptures. It represents a collection of religious books, beliefs and practices, including New Age, Wicca, polytheism, druidism, magic and witchcraft. The Bible is viewed as a book promoting bigotry, racism, homophobia, sexism, xenophobia, murder and mayhem. Neo-paganism is the revitalization of many of the Greek and Roman mystery religions. Spirit guides or demons are not only sought, they are helpful friends. The focus of neo-paganism is the freedom to do anything a person wants to do or feels like doing. Dogs run free and so should we.