

I love a parade. I remember several million Red Sox fans lined the parade route in Boston, celebrating their first world championship in 86 years. As I watched the parade on T.V., my heart swelled with joy and empathy for these loyal fans in New England. Joy is contagious. I walked away from my television feeling good. I began wondering when the last time the Christian community in the U.S. had an event to celebrate something so joyfully that it infected others who were watching with the same, infectious sense of joy? Isn't that what the love of Christ is all about?

I wonder how Christ looks upon the self-described "Christians" who fill the media with hateful, hurtful outbursts that remind me of the song, "I Wouldn't Want To Be Like You!" For me, it's been a heart-breaking Gong Show. As one author writes:

"The core of the gospel message is not about church-growth strategies, faith formulas, spiritual-warfare techniques, religious dress codes or the latest revelations about the end times. Why do we complicate what is so simple? Lately I've watched respected church leaders fight each other, break fellowship over nonessential theological points, take each other to court, flippantly divorce their wives, assassinate each other's character and engage in cutthroat competition for money and influence. Then they go on stage and teach people how to hear God's voice and experience miracles. Loveless Christianity is a counterfeit. When we spread the gospel without the love of God, we stage our own Gong Show."¹

Thanks be to God that his love, grace and mercy do not contain the hateful, self-righteous judgments that many Christians proliferate—particularly during ongoing debates over socio-political issues.

I have become very sensitive to condescending, ridicule-laden brochures and emails that are sent by well-intentioned Christians in an attempt to garner support for a

certain cultural or political viewpoint. The vast majority of it is the mongering of ill-will. This is an area where we Christians simply must become vastly more aware, sensitive, exercise restraint and change our behavior. Honestly, the character of behavior like this is the definition of "self-righteousness." It's time to wise up.

Culture War?

Christians in American society have fallen prey to an ongoing effort to divide and deceive us that I have no desire to participate in. It is essential to point out that the subtle, emotionally charged socio-political issues the evil one has overwhelmed our culture with are designed to divert our focus from Christ. By dividing and distracting us with a myriad of cultural/political issues, this worldly "agenda" gets elevated to the place of his throne. One author cautions: "Dealing with burning issues without being rooted in a deep personal relationship with God easily leads to divisiveness because, before we know it, our sense of self is caught up in our opinion about a given subject."²

Unfortunately, the Christian in American society has assumed the role of judge, expounding rulings about "what we're against," and condemning those who are still lost. As Henri Nouwen wrote, "The long painful history of the church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led."³

Perhaps the words of Francis Schaeffer provide us with the essential insights we need to be reminded of: "Christian apologetics is not like living in a castle with the drawbridge up and occasionally tossing a stone over the walls. It is not to be based on a citadel mentality—sitting inside and saying, 'You cannot reach me here.' ...The purpose of apologetics is not just to win an argument or a discussion, but that the people with whom we are in contact may



become Christians and then live under the lordship of Christ in the whole spectrum of life."⁴

Jerramy Barrs adds:

"We face the same problem today, for the more secularized and

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'post-Christian' our society becomes, the great temptation there is to love only our fellow believers who are fighting by our side in the 'culture wars.' We retreat from the command to love all people as we consider those outside the church as too worldly, as too dangerous to our spiritual well being. Rather than loving them, we feel constrained to keep ourselves separate from them, to strive for a purity of being uncontaminated by having no contact with the sinners out there. But, as Schaeffer points out, this is not the kind of purity that God's Word has in mind for us."⁵



I regularly advise people who send my wife and I correspondence to leave us off their list in the future. For us, it is a trap that serves to divide, inflame and obscure the Christian disciple's priorities and loving witness to the world, and our focus on Christ. It is very easy to get caught up in the flow of what everybody else is doing. That flow can take us to places Christ never intended us to go.

What We Stand For

Rather than succumb to the temptation to criticize and judge in matters of politics and cultural issues today, the Christian witness must be the infectious loving service concerning what we are for, rather than what we are against. Our "witness" to the unsaved world is "under observation." As Yancey says: "Rightly or wrongly, they see Christians rather as restrained, uptight, repressed—people less likely to celebrate vitality than to wag our fingers in disapproval!"⁶

My prayer is that Christians will not be drawn into the shouting match, condemnation, character assassination and finger wagging that our society (Christian and secular) has developed an accepted preference for. All the empirical evidence is in...we're (Christianity in the U.S.) losing the war we are enlisted to fight on his behalf. The words of A.W. Tozer are as pertinent today, as the date they were written some twenty years ago: "There are today many millions of people who hold 'right opinions,' probably more than ever before in the history of the Church. Yet I wonder if there was ever a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb."⁷

Imagine what the Christian witness in this culture would be like if Christians spent half the time we spend espousing our positions on this and that socio-political issue, seated with a Bible in quiet contemplation seeking the face of Jesus Christ? Perhaps it's time we pause and listen to the tirade coming from the mouths of Christ's

mainstream Christian community in the U.S. It's difficult to hear a conversation when one is in the midst of a loud parade.

I believe it is time to re-examine the methods we have come to unwittingly accept and return to the truth of biblical principles of counterintuitive love expounded by Jesus Christ...oftentimes principles that are completely opposite of the intellectual and glandular impulses many Christians have come to adopt as acceptable Christian witness in our culture. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said:

"Their real goal," King said, "was not to defeat the white man but 'to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor and challenge his *false sense of superiority*'"⁸ (emphasis mine).

I truly, deeply believe that our "false sense of superiority" is something we Christians are being called on the carpet about today by Christ. Attacks on the moral character of people create collateral damage for Christ, Christianity and the Christian. Although we



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think we are shooting at the enemy, we are actually killing our cause. We are *all* sinners and indeed, “we are all in peril if the flawed messenger invalidates the message.”⁹

At my own admission, it is much easier for me to criticize rather than love. I have done the same thing as many of you on too many occasions. I fully expect that I will fall victim to the same, within 72 hours of writing this piece (God has a way of getting in my grill when I share things like this). God has dealt with my heart on this issue over the last twenty-four months. Frankly, he has broken my heart over it.

It's Time to Go Home

Once again, as his sheep, we have gone astray. It's time to return to The Shepherd. I am not suggesting that the Christian should be a doormat, uninvolved or apathetic to political and cultural issues of our time. I am suggesting that the *why* and *way* we do what we do matters. I am also recommending that it is time to re-examine how we spend our time and energy in these pursuits. For many of us, the time we sit with God and his Word pales in comparison to the amount of time and energy we exert in recoiling against the events, people and issues of our time. For many of us, it's time to go home—to seat ourselves reverently before his throne and stay there for a year, a few years, a lifetime.

Please accept what I am sharing here with you, as only part of what

God has shared with me. C.S. Lewis summarizes how God has spoken to me about this issue over the past two years:

“Fine feelings, new insights, greater interest in ‘religion’ mean nothing unless they make our actual behaviour better; just as in illness, ‘feeling better’ is not much good if the thermometer shows that your temperature is still going up. In that sense the outer world is quite right to judge Christianity by its results. Christ told us to judge by results...Our careless lives set the outer world talking; and we give them grounds for talking in a way that throws doubt on the truth of Christianity.”¹⁰

Let's put down the stones, drop to our knees and ask for his forgiveness. If I spent one minute in prayer for every well-intentioned, self-righteous communication I have received from a Christian, I would be vastly more transformed by his grace than I am at present. Please pray for me. I pray that he continues to hammer my heart about this issue, and that you will join me in repentance.

May we hear and heed the words of Oswald Chambers: “Narrow all your interests until the attitude of mind and heart and body is concentration on Jesus Christ.”¹¹

I want him to have his way with me. I know you do, too. Please be in prayer about this issue, as you contemplate the following from God's Word:

“Whom have you so dreaded and feared that you have been false to me, and have neither

remembered me nor pondered this in your hearts? Is it not because I have long been silent that you do not fear me? I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you. When you cry out for help, let your collection of idols save you! The wind will carry all of them off, a mere breath will blow them away. But the man who makes me his refuge will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain” (Isaiah 57:11-13). □

¹ Grady, J. Lee. “Strangely Warmed,” Charisma & Christian Life Magazine, September 2004, ©Strang Communications Company, p.6. (J. Lee Grady is Editor of Charisma)

² Nouwen, Henri. In The Name of Jesus—Reflections on Christian Leadership, “A Crossroad Book, The Crossroad Publishing Company New York, New York © 1989 by Henri Nouwen, p. 45

³ Ibid, pp. 77-78

⁴ Schaeffer, Francis. The God Who Is There, InterVarsity Press ©1968, p. 172-173.

⁵ Schaeffer, Francis. True Spirituality Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL. ©1971. Introduction by Jerramy Barrs p. XV

⁶ Yancey, Philip. Soul Survivor—How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive The Church, A Galilee Book published by Doubleday, a Division of Random House, Inc. © 2001 SCC by Christopher Lasch W.W. & Norton Company, New York, NY, p.9

⁷ Tozer, A.W. The Pursuit of God, © 1982, 1993 by Christian Publications, Inc. Camp Hill, PA p. 9

⁸ Branch, Taylor. Parting The Waters—America in the King Years 1954-1963, ©1988 by Taylor Branch, A Touchstone Book published by Simon & Schuster, Inc.

⁹ Yancey, Philip. Soul Survivor—How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive The Church, A Galilee Book published by Doubleday, a Division of Random House, Inc. © 2001 SCC by Christopher Lasch W.W. & Norton Company, New York, NY, p.39

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis. Mere Christianity, Harper SanFrancisco—A Division of Harper Collins Publishers. © 1952, pp. 207-208

¹¹ Chambers, Oswald. My Utmost for His Highest Journal Barbour Publishing, Inc. Copyright © 1935 Discovery House Publishers & Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., ©1963 Oswald Chambers Publications Association Ltd., January 22nd

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