

Articles and Sermons :: Two pitfalls which all Christians must avoid by Paul Hattaway

Two pitfalls which all Christians must avoid by Paul Hattaway - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2014/5/1 15:59

“Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1-2).

In our March newsletter we exhorted readers to keep walking in God’s grace and truth, and to beware of the twin pitfalls which all Christians must avoid—legalism on one hand, and the false prosperity Gospel on the other. Having seen the faith of countless believers shipwrecked by these two distortions, we wanted to encourage all who love the Lord Jesus to continue in God’s Word and relationship with Him.

Quite a few people have strong reactions to our message, both positively and negatively. Helen from Australia wrote, “Many thanks for your wonderful message to us in the March newsletter. It was very powerful and it has strengthened me so much. I feel greatly encouraged.”

Stan from Illinois shared: “I couldn’t agree with you more. The Christian life is not about living up to a standard; it is about living under an influence. The influence is the Holy Spirit, of course. Legalists think about living up to the standard. Prosperity gospel people do not think about living under the influence, only about the benefits that the influence is supposedly guaranteed to bring. Hebrews 11 is the chapter that really puts the nails in the coffin of the prosperity gospel. That chapter lists the heroes of the faith, but they fall into two categories—those who get rescued and those who meet horrible deaths (sawn in two, etc.) What strikes me is that BOTH categories are held up side by side as models of genuine faith. There is no hint that the rescued ones had more faith or better faith than the ones who died for Christ. It’s the total opposite of the prosperity gospel explanation of suffering.”

On the other hand, others challenged us for mentioning the Prosperity Gospel in a negative light. One man wrote, “I felt very discouraged after reading Paul and Joy’s message. If our churches are too legalistic and others teach false doctrine, what is the answer? Are we not to continue to invite our neighbors to church even when they never come? Our church is dying in our small community. We are all over the age of 50. What can we do?”

Friends, we believe one of the major problems in the Church today is that much of what is portrayed as faith is actually just humanism with a Christian veneer thrown over the top.

For example, Western culture teaches that from an early age, “You can be whatever you want, and you can do whatever you put your mind to.” Is that true? Certainly not! On the contrary, we can be what God wants us to be and do what He calls and empowers us to do, if we walk in obedience to Him. We meet many Christians who have become disillusioned because they were told they hold the keys to a successful life, if only they strive hard enough, or believe strongly enough. Then as the years pass by and their hopes and dreams fail to materialize like they expect, they grow increasingly despondent and their hope fades. Disappointment sets in—even bitterness towards God—even though He has never once told a person to try to fulfill their own dreams and desires. When the inevitable trials and hardships of life come along their faith crumbles, just as Jesus warned in the Parable of the Sower: “The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away” (Matthew 13:20-21).

Humanism is rampant in many parts of the Church today.

In subtle ways it places people in God’s position and attempts to place God in our position. Everything is turned upside-down. In the Bible people were exhorted to believe in God, but these days we’ve heard preachers tell their audiences that God believes in them! We are told to trust ourselves, but Jesus said we should trust in Him. Humanism says people are basically good, but God’s Word declares, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

In one sense, a Christian is not called to live for Jesus! Rather, our job is to die to ourselves and allow Jesus to live through

us. We need to get out of the way and humble ourselves. Only when we do this can His glory shine through our lives.

The Prosperity Gospel is not simply about financial matters. It is a broader philosophy that believes if a person follows Christ then things will generally go well for them in this life.

Such a teaching is popular and enticing, but is it Biblical? Did you ever consider that of the 12 men Jesus called to be apostles, ten were murdered for their faith, one (John) died in exile on a small island, while one committed suicide? Was something wrong with the apostles' faith? How about Christians in China, Iran, North Korea and a host of other nations who are beaten, imprisoned and even killed because of their love for Jesus? We have even heard people say that persecuted believers need to trust God more in order to "experience the victorious life" that the Bible promises!

Dear Christian, don't be deceived by the false teaching of humanism that is presented as truth in many churches today.

It will not bring you closer to the heart of Jesus, but will only result in heartache and confusion. It's better to live in truth, humble ourselves and seek God's glory, than to pump ourselves up into thinking we control our own destiny and well-being, which only ends in bitter disappointment.

The secret to the Chinese revival we have spent many years sharing on is this: The mighty movement did not come about not by human desire and endeavour, but through hardship, sacrifice, and people humbling themselves to obey God's will in their lives. Nobody will ever understand the revival that has brought as many as 100 million Chinese people into the kingdom of God unless they first understand the role of suffering. Suffering has been the launch-pad for revival, helping the Church in China to walk in obedience to the will of God.

Before any resurrection can occur there must first be death. The Church in China was first called to die before they experienced the miracles and resurrection power of Jesus in their midst. Many believers today desire to experience God's power like in the Bible, or in China, but the question to ask is this: "Are you willing to first die to yourself?" God will never share His glory with someone who lives for their own desires and reputation.

Such talk is nonsense to anyone who has swallowed the lies of the humanistic "Prosperity" Movement. The Scriptures state that even the Lord Jesus "learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). If the sinless Son of God needed such a lesson, how much more do we!

The true Gospel has not changed, and never will.

God's kingdom always advances through human weakness, not strength; "for when we are weak, He is strong. This is the truth, whether we like it or not. Those who really want to follow Jesus must find the true Jesus of the Scriptures, not the twisted caricature of the Lord that is often portrayed today. Only knowing the true Jesus will set people free to know and obey the will of God.

Whenever God has moved in awesome power throughout history there has been no room for humanism in the Church. Christ alone is exalted, and all people are humbled. May we learn this lesson in our own lives and churches. Any true faith will display the equation shared by John the Baptist: "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

We would like to conclude by sharing a selection of quotes a reporter wrote about a powerful revival which occurred more than a century ago, which resulted in thousands of people coming to Christ. Note the deep humility and self-abasement that is the mark of this and all true moves of God. Humanism cannot exist in such an environment. May we get to a place in our lives where all we desire is for Jesus Christ to be exalted!

"I came to abhor myself. I begged the Lord to drop a curtain so close behind me on my past that it would hit my heels. He told me to forget every good deed as though it had never occurred, as soon as it was accomplished, and go forward again as though I had never accomplished anything for Him, lest my good works become a snare for me."

"Men must come to know their own weaknesses before they can hope to know God's strength. The natural strength and ability of man is always the greatest hindrance to the work of God, and to God's working. God exalts no man or mission, but rather humbles all in the dust together, that He alone may be glorified."

"The temptation seemed to be always, toward empty manifestation. This does not require any particular cross, or de

ath to the self-life. Hence it is always popular. But there is only one safe, honest course to pursue with the "old man." Bury him under six feet of earth, with his face downward. The harder he scratches the deeper he will go.

from: <http://asiaharvest.org/a-word-from-paul-and-joy>

Re: Two pitfalls which all Christians must avoid by Paul Hattaway - posted by KPYee, on: 2014/5/2 2:43

Good article . I agree with what the brother said here .

I remember Watchman Nee said something along this line the key to victorious Christian life is not in trying . But in dying ..