

I Will Not Sell My Soul for 'Success'

I absolutely believe in the glorious, overwhelming success of the gospel, but I will not sell my soul or compromise my convictions for the sake of carnal "success."

I encourage you to stand strong in your resolve as well. It's better to be scorned by this world than to lose your integrity.

Recently, a young pastor wrote to me with a heavy heart.

He had been invited to a closed leadership meeting, with many well-known pastors in attendance. He explained to me that they talked openly about not using entire verses or passages from the Bible in their sermons and that it was fine to pull snippets of verses and to build entire messages from them, as if too much of the Word would drive people away.

He said that they instructed the leaders in attendance not to speak on sin, judgment, conviction, obedience, morality, etc., stating that it is not our job to convict of sin, only the Holy Spirit's job, as if the hundreds of verses in the Bible dealing with these issues were irrelevant, and as if they knew better than Jesus and the apostles, who often preached with words of deep, biting conviction as they labored together with the Holy Spirit.

And of course, he wrote, they told the other leaders to avoid politics and political issues, which is similar to the mindset of those who chose not to get involved in the divisive slave-trade controversy in centuries past or to oppose the Nazis last century.

This, they said, was the path to follow if you wanted to be "successful."

I categorically reject such a definition of “success.”

It has nothing to do with the true success of the gospel, which I love and revel in before God.

To be absolutely clear, and so that no one thinks that this is a matter of “sour grapes,” I am not speaking about any particular ministry and I have no idea which pastors and leaders were at this meeting. I love and embrace the expansive blessing of God.

By God’s grace, I have had the privilege of preaching in some of the largest and most influential megachurches in the world, and their growth was the result of the work of the Spirit in their midst, not the result of carnal techniques.

One of our ministry school grads, Daniel Kolenda, has taken over the leadership of Reinhard Bonnke’s Christ for All Nations, and Daniel regularly preaches to crowds of multiplied hundreds of thousands. Praise God for Spirit-anointed, Jesus-exalting, Word-based success!

When God opens new doors for our ministry on radio and TV, in print and online, or when He blesses our material with greater circulation and impact, I rejoice and take this as an answer to prayer, as providing another avenue to advance the work of the kingdom. Onward and upward in Jesus’ name!

So I am all for growth and numbers and prosperity when it comes from heaven as a gift from God, although I know that often, the most significant gospel work is totally hidden and obscure, taking place behind closed doors, with God using unknown saints who live in the midst of persecution and poverty. Their lasting fruit will put most of us to shame.

That’s one reason Jesus said that many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first.

Remember, it was the church of Laodicea that Jesus rebuked

saying, "For you say, 'I am rich, and have stored up goods, and have need of nothing,' yet do not realize that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

In stark contrast, He said to Smyrna, "I know your works and tribulation and poverty (but you are rich). And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:9-10).

In the same way, He rebuked Sardis, which had a reputation for being alive but was dead (see Rev. 3:1) and commended Philadelphia, which had little strength but had not denied His name (see Rev. 3:8).

What would our worldly minded leaders have told these congregations? And how would they have rated the "success" of these different churches? Obviously, their perspective would be a lot different than the perspective of the Lord.

Without a doubt, we have different callings and emphases, and while we should all do our best to be faithful to God's Word and "balanced," it's clear that one may be called to emphasize evangelism, another social justice, another holiness, another grace, another family and another the Spirit, just to mention a few. Some congregations excel in administration and management, while others excel in building community, and still others excel in sending out missionaries.

That's what makes the body of Christ a truly functioning body.

Let us learn from each other however we can, and let us complement each other in the work of the ministry, honoring one another as colleagues rather than criticizing each other as competitors.

But let us not deviate from the high calling of God, let us not form a theology that bypasses the cross, let us not water down the Word, and let us not mistake earthly growth and “success” for the blessing of God.

In the words of Charles Spurgeon, one of the most truly successful gospel preachers of all time, “Character is always lost when a high ideal is sacrificed on the altar of conformity and popularity.”

Don’t sacrifice your soul on that very seductive altar.

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