

The End of Triumphalist Christianity

Read Time: 4 Minutes 20 Seconds

There is a Christianity that struts and boasts, a Christianity full of riches and swagger, a Christianity full of carnal energy and worldly success. It is a Christianity so full of self that it is virtually devoid of God. That kind of Christianity is headed for a major fall.

That Christianity is like the church of Laodicea in New Testament times which said of itself, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." It was a church that flexed its muscles, a church that had arrived, a happening church.

But Jesus saw things differently. He said, "But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked," (Rev. 3:17, NIV).

What an extreme contrast in perceptions!

As the Lord said in another context when rebuking the religious leaders of the day, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God," (Luke 16:15, NASB).

Triumphalist Christianity boasts in its numbers, its power, its wealth, its buildings, its outward success. It leans on the arm of flesh. It preaches an ear-tickling, crowd-please message. It gains celebrity status in the eyes of the world.

This was the way of the so-called "super apostles" who pulled people away from Paul's ministry in Corinth, promising riches and success. They had arrived. They were powerful. They had

their act together. Who would not want to follow their lead? Who would not want to be just like them?

For those who had been seduced by these false apostles, Paul had some very strong words: "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things," (1 Cor. 4:8-13, ESV).

Triumphalist Christianity can only exist when the spiritual climate is favorable, when persecution is minimal or non-existent, when the gospel can be touted as the fast track to success.

But it quickly withers and dies when testing comes, when persecution increases, when following Jesus means loss rather than gain.

In the words of Jesus from 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," (Matt. 13:20-21).

It is wonderful when God gives His people a time of respite, when the fierce opposition dissipates and the church enjoys a time of peace. As described in the book of Acts, "So the

church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied," (Acts 9:31, ESV).

And it is wonderful when God blesses His people with financial abundance, lifting off the daily pressures, enabling His children to care for the hurting and needy, also helping them to spread the gospel around the globe.

But let us never boast in our riches or numbers or buildings. Let us never become complacent or lose our sense of urgency. And let us never forget that the gospel always means the way of the cross—the way of death to self, death to sin, death to this world, death to human pride, death to human boasting. As Paul wrote, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world," (Gal. 6:14).

In different nations today, a distorted form of the gospel is spreading rapidly. But it is a mixed gospel at best and a false gospel at worst. It is a gospel of success, a gospel of prosperity, a gospel of self-exaltation, a gospel of empowerment.

It is a gospel that builds the sinner up rather than calls the sinner to repent. It appeals to the flesh rather than crucifies the flesh. It presents a Jesus who is the gateway to the fulfillment of your earthly dreams. It is a gospel without reproach.

Such a gospel does not save or deliver or transform. It simply adds outward blessings to an unrenewed heart, and in the end, rather than leading to eternal salvation, it leads to disillusionment and death.

For now, it may continue to spread and gain adherents. But when the testing increases and the persecution rises, it will quickly fade away.

So enjoy the blessings of God as He sends them, and be good stewards of His abundance. And thrive during times of rest when you can practice your faith freely. He may even bless us with big budgets and beautiful buildings. He may grace us with gorgeous cathedrals.

But we must always remember that His strength is made perfect in our weakness, and it is by dying that we live.

To say it once more: beware the snare of triumphalist Christianity, a Christianity that marches out to conquer by its own might and power.

It is not the faith of the New Testament. It is not the faith that will endure. It is not the faith for which Jesus died. It is not the faith that will change the world.

That faith—the real New Testament faith—cannot be stopped or thwarted. It cannot be intimidated. It cannot be conquered. It cannot be destroyed.

It is the faith that will shake whole nations. It is the faith that can shake America. It is the faith that we must embrace.
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