

Beware of Superstar, Self-Appointed Church Personalities

Are these popular ministerial personalities great in the sight of the Lord or only in the sight of man? Are they really known in heaven or only on the Earth? Are they God-anointed or self-appointed? Is it ministry they deliver or some subtle form of hype?

“Many who are great in the sight of the Lord are living in cottages and hovels, and are scarcely known, unless to a few neighbors equally obscure,” said William Jay.

Believers, especially Christian ministers, need a baptism of clear seeing and holy discerning. Our ministry marketing budget may be soaring high, but our perception can sometimes be so low. Our motives need refinement. The refiner’s fire is near the door. Will you open it? Can you see the narrow way to holiness? Or is all the smoke blocking your view?

Before me now I see the impression I saw months ago. There are two scenes. One is of a clear and sunny horizon lined with an endless row of people. The other is of a vast forest. Dense fog covers the forest, and out of the fog comes the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, for the most part, is not found among the general populace. People have to really look to recognize Him.

Think about it. Our Savior was not born in a big metropolis, but in the small town of Bethlehem. And He grew up in the despised region of Galilee. He was not born in a palace where kings are, but in a lowly stable. The wise men had to really search and diligently follow the star to find Him. When Jesus entered into ministry, it is written that He had no place to lay His head (Luke 9:58). He did not have a ministry headquarters. He died a criminal’s death on a cross, naked and

nearly alone. His grave was a borrowed tomb. His throne was an invisible one hidden from the multitudes of those who were healed and delivered through His ministry. He was called meek and lowly; certainly not the description fitting for a king. But today, ministry is so different.

A church brings in a special speaker. He's known all over, so the people flock to hear him. They come from everywhere, every night. At the meetings they jump, sing and shout. They hear the newest revelation proclaimed with jubilation. The people are saying of the special speaker:

He's on TV,
I love his personality.
His ministry is so big,
His clothes I really dig.
He's so wonderful!
And his wife looks so smart,
Her latest hit song
Is at the top of the chart.
Oh, I love to hear him speak,
And I hate to see him go.
Maybe he'll stay another week,
Or speak again on his daily show.

The same church brings in a name unknown. The people stay away by the droves. A few faithful gather to hear the Word of God. They long for holiness and a vision of Jesus. With a broken heart, the little "no-name" preacher weeps for lost souls as he delivers a word from God.

The big personality was sent by man. The little "no-name" was sent by God. The crowds who came from miles away came to hear a man. The smaller group came seeking Jesus. One set of meetings produced much excitement but no fruit of holiness. The other smaller meetings generated far less excitement but resulted in a brokenness and a lasting work of holiness in those who came. This may seem like an extreme example, but it

makes the point.

Just because someone or something is big doesn't mean it's godly (and it is also understood that bigness is not tantamount to ungodliness either). In fact, it's a greater test of our devotion to be big (whatever "big" means to us) and yet remain holy, than it is to be small (whatever "small" means to us) and holy. And let's not forget that smallness is not equivalent to godliness either. Discerning the difference between hype and holiness is what's important. But we are so often fooled by the "big" while being unaware and undiscerning of the "small."

Holiness is not only sought but bought: "Buy of Me gold tried in the fire that you may be rich" (Rev 3:17). Have you been tried in the fire? Have you tested your teachings? Have you experienced and even suffered for the truth you believe? Truth is to be bought, not sold. We sell the truth when we sell our souls to pleasure, profit and earthly popularity. We buy the truth when we are tried and found true, when we suffer with godly sorrow the pains of our personal Gethsemanes, and yet remain private about them. When we allow God to strip us of all glory-seeking and subtle pride, we are buying the truth.

Too many today are selling messages they never bought. When we minister forth from what we've personally experienced or suffered, the Spirit will produce a far greater effect of holiness in the hearers. The deeper the suffering is—or has been—usually the more perfect the obedience. The more fiery the trials, and the deeper the burning, the purer and richer the vessel becomes.

This is what we must understand: God's measuring gauge and standard of holiness is so different from man's. Bigness and smallness are terms not found in Christ. Here is the criterion for holiness: Is Christ made visible? Is He seen and heard? Is the ministration of Christ being imparted? Is His Word being made manifest? Are the people changed more into His likeness?

Is it producing a spirit of holiness and an increase in the fruits of righteousness? Are they paying less credence to men and personalities and reverencing God?

The problem with today's generation is that we elevate the teachings of popular Christian teachers and we have a tendency to place greater value on them than the Scriptures. We elevate their charisma, their eloquence, their humor and wit, their style, and even their cuteness and good looks. We even sow our finances into the same.

Beware of hype. Beware of those who glory in appearance void of substance. Beware of emotional excitement that lacks depth. Beware of hypnotic smoke with no holy fire.

Hype fakes the happening while delaying true holiness. Hype is infinitely more dangerous than we can ever imagine, because it lies to us and tells us that something great is happening, when in fact, very little is going on.

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