Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Brothers, We Are Not Rock Stars
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 2 Corinthians 4:7; Revelation 22:8-9
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by Travis Allen

Everyone wants a piece of today's A-listers. They're wanted by book publishers, conference organizers, and adoring fans everywhere. In certain circles, some of them have trouble getting around without being noticed.

Just to be clear, I'm not talking about Hollywood, Nashville, or Washington, D.C. I'm talking about the happiest place on earth: Evangelicaland. And to be even more pointed, I'm not talking about "prosperity gospel" heretics or charlatans. I'm talking about respectable Christian leaders—think John Piper, R. C. Sproul, and John MacArthur.

That's why I was so drawn to the panel discussion at this year's Together for the Gospel conference on the subject of celebrity pastors. It was encouraging to hear from gifted men, with a wide influence, who don't think of themselves as celebrities. And they don't want the rest of us to think of them that way either. Celebrated men, leading celebrated ministries, *decrying* celebrity status. Now that's something to celebrate.

The men on that panel uniformly acknowledged the challenge of Christian ministry in our celebrity culture. Actors and athletes, politicians and musicians, divas and dopes—they are often the producers of some of the most brainless tabloid drivel that dominates our media today. We are served a steady stream of that kind of pabulum. It infiltrates our visual and auditory senses through every means, inundating our minds.

Question is, what should Christians do about it?

First of all, Christians should not celebrate their leaders like the world celebrates its demigods. That kind of thinking is fleshly, worldly, ungodly. That kind of thinking divides Christians—it *never* unites them—because it detracts from the glory that belongs to Christ alone.

Paul rebuked the Corinthians for that very thing in 1 Corinthians 1-4. "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? ***Servants*** through whom you believed . . ." (1 Corinthians 3:5, emphasis mine). If Paul didn't die for the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:13), then neither has any man since died for the elect, the members of *Christ's* church.

Paul said, “This is how one should regard us, as *servants* of Christ and *stewards* of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1, emphasis mine). As such, they should be thanked for serving us the Master’s food; they can even be honored for bringing it faithfully, week after week, without spilling it on the floor. But they should never be adored or worshiped in any way. That kind of adulation belongs to our triune God, and to Him *alone*.

Today’s American evangelical church needs to own that rebuke. Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians is the Spirit’s admonition to us. We need to examine ourselves to see if we’ve been committing the sin of admiring Christ’s servants more than Christ. If so, we should confess, repent, and worship God alone.

At the same time, Christian ministers bear some of the blame. Shepherds have a God-given responsibility to look out for their sheep, to recognize and avoid the dangers inherent in the terrain. In our environment, in our day, it is a pastoral duty to divert people’s attention from the vessel to the treasure it contains (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7).

That’s exactly why Paul said what he said in 1 Corinthians 1-4. He recounted for the Corinthians how intentionally *counter*cultural he was in his ministry. “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom . . . I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:1, 3, 4).

The rock stars of Paul’s day were called *sophists*, public speakers with silver tongues. They wielded tremendous oratorical skill as experts in rhetoric and debate. They were witty, charming, and could sway audiences with ease. Sophists traveled the conference circuit (not unlike some of our own celebs), drawing massive crowds, dazzling and impressing the hoi polloi by waxing eloquent on *any* subject, ascending esoteric heights or even making mundane subjects sound absolutely sublime. In a day without mass media—radio, television, Internet—the sophists were *it*.

Contrary to common sense, Paul wanted to be as *unlike* the sophists as possible. What was he thinking? Didn’t Paul want to attract big crowds? Didn’t he want to see vast numbers, *swarms* of people, coming to Christ?

It’s not that Paul was unconcerned about results. In fact, he was *so* concerned about results that he chose to subvert cultural expectations. He didn’t give the people what they wanted; instead, he gave them what they needed—a faithful proclamation of the gospel message. Paul proclaimed “the testimony of God” to the Corinthians, determining “to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1, 2). He wanted to get himself out of the way, to give the Corinthians a “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” in the clear, plain proclamation of the gospel,

so their “faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (1 Coritnhians 2:4, 5).

And why did Paul take that approach? Because the wisdom of men *damns* men. It’s only the power of God in the gospel that saves them.

No true Christian *intentionally* sets out to prop up and worship a celebrated pastor. And no faithful pastor, celebrated or despised, wants his congregation to worship him either. That anyone would even be tempted to elevate him is a terrifying thought.

But the danger is with us at all times, in all cultures. From Corinth to America, from the first century to the twenty-first, *all* cultures are celebrity cultures, prone to worship its guitar heroes and rock stars. It’s the danger of idolatry that lurks in every human heart. Even the aged apostle John was susceptible to elevating the creature above the Creator.

And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.” (Revelation 22:8-9)

Knowing the danger that lurks within our own hearts—especially insidious in American culture, with the incessant temptations provided by modern media—it’s our job as Christians, pastor and congregation alike, to obey the command of the angel:

“Worship God.” And worship Him alone.

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