



The Tri-Cities Edifier

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Two Headlines

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The front page of the Fox News website (6/17/19) included the following two headlines: “Chinese Christians Jailed for Faith Memorize Bible” and “‘Below Deck’ Star Dishes on Same-Sex Relationship with Gospel Singer.” These headlines are mini-commentaries on Christianity in two vastly different cultures.

The second headline is revealing about our own culture. The “gospel singer,” Leah Shafer, is now in a lesbian relationship with Captain Sandy Yawn, who is on a Bravo Channel show called “Below Deck Mediterranean.” I don’t know either of these women and couldn’t care less about their music and/or TV show. But it is galling when image-makers can’t pass up an opportunity to market lesbianism as mainstream, even seeking to normalize it in a religious context.

Two things to notice here: First, what is a “gospel singer”? In reality, it is someone who is trying to build a successful singing career by using a religious persona and lyrics. In this case, Ms. Shafer is making a complete mockery of the gospel by her open lesbianism. There is nothing “gospel” about it, for the gospel is the good news of forgiveness and salvation *for those who repent of their sins and turn from darkness to light*. If Ms. Shafer would do this, she, too, could be saved by the gospel she supposedly professes in her songs. As it is, she wishes to have her cake (she is a practicing homosexual who flaunts her ungodly lifestyle) – and eat it too (by fleecing naïve consumers who are just as confused about the gospel as she is).

Secondly, such stories are revealing on the state of our grossly immoral, materially bloated, celebrity-obsessed culture. We are a rich, spoiled, self-indulgent, infantile, narcissistic nation who see ourselves “in need of nothing” yet “do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (to borrow from Jesus’ scathing rebuke of the Laodiceans, [Rev 3:17](#)). And such attitudes subtly work their way into the psyches of believers. When the social replaces the scriptural, when preaching is dumbed down to self-esteem therapy, when people are praised, coddled and catered to they are made ripe pickings for the unscrupulous who will lead them astray or use them to make millions.

Now, contrast this circus with the headline about Chinese Christians. Here are some excerpts from the article:

“Wayne Cordeiro, pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship in Honolulu, Hawaii, shared about a recent trip to China [where he met] with 22 Christian leaders ... 18 of whom had been imprisoned ... Their meeting was underground. ‘If we get caught, what will happen to me?’ the pastor asked the Chinese Christians who took a 13-hour train ride to attend the leadership meeting ... ‘Well, you will get deported in 24 hours, and we will go to prison for three years,’ they responded.

“In the beginning, short on Bibles, the Hawaii megachurch pastor asked them to turn to 2 Peter and he realized one of the women handed her Bible to another leader but she managed to recite the entire book. During a break he asked her about it. She said they have a lot of time in prison. ‘Don’t they confiscate the Bible?’ Cordeiro asked. They smuggle in pieces of paper with portions of Scripture on them. ‘That is why we memorize it as fast as we can because even though they can take the paper away, they can’t take what’s hidden in your heart,’ she shared with him.

“Another person attending a clandestine conference in China was asked ‘to teach them how to lead young people, worried they were losing them to Western values.’ ‘We don’t understand anything about ... Western leadership methods. Could you help us? All we know how to do is pray [and] believe God. That’s how we had revival in China when we’re not allowed to carry the Word of God. The only leadership training we give our people is ... how to witness to their executioner on their way to their execution.’”

Paul said, "For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you" (1 Cor 11:19). Jesus said, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15:2). Peter said, "Though now for a little while ... you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:6-7).

Perhaps our prayers need to change. Instead of asking God to maintain the peace and comfort we've always enjoyed, maybe we should ask for whatever hardship and trouble we need to perfect our faith. If we ever see our faith as a nuisance or burden, we need a serious attitude adjustment. I dare say our memory would suddenly improve if our Bibles were confiscated, and "gospel singers" would disappear if Christianity was outlawed. Satan uses our luxuries and indulgences against us. Excuses pass for reasons, molehills become mountains and apathy replaces urgency. God help us.

Toward Better Communication

- by Sewell Hall

"This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." (James 1:19-20)

Can you imagine better advice for getting along with others? How often we hear it said that the problem in a family, a plant, an office, a school, or even a church is a breakdown of communication. Obedience to this verse would change all of that.

"Be quick to hear." Listen! Try to understand where the one who is talking "is coming from" and what he or she really means. See if you can repeat what was said so accurately that the one who said it will agree that you have stated the position accurately.

Now, make sure a reply is needed. We do not have to correct every mistake we hear. Some are not serious enough to require attention. Others, though serious, may have to wait for a more suitable time to be corrected.

Even if a reply is needed, take your time. "Be slow to speak." Think of what you are saying. Think how it will sound to the one hearing it and how it will sound if it is repeated to someone else. Ask yourself if what you are about to say will do good or do harm. Ask God to help you to say only what needs to be said. Nehemiah was asked a question by the king and managed a prayer before he answered (Neh. 2:4-5). Remember that once you have spoken, you cannot recall your words.

Above all, "be slow to anger." Anger almost always breaks down communication; shouting matches seldom end in a better understanding of each other. And, besides jeopardizing human relationships, they endanger our relation with God. We may fancy that our anger is "righteous indignation," but the Holy Spirit says: "The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."

Are you thinking, "That's not much of a way to win an argument"? RIGHT! But it is a pretty good way to stop one. How would you like to be to argue with someone who is "quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger"?