

Stop Worshiping & Idolizing Celebrity Preachers

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Question: What would you say to someone who faithfully, regularly is listening to your sermons on the Internet, but they are not regularly and faithfully being in the Word of God and in prayer?

Paul: Then hearing you are not hearing, and seeing you are not seeing. Again, listen, all men are fallible. There's no such thing as a great man of God, just wicked, tiny, pitiful men of a great and merciful God and so on and so forth. You can't live your life based upon the reality of other people. I greatly admire men like John Piper, but I can't live on John Piper. I can't live in some parasitic relationship in which he hears from God and I feed off of him. I have to go to the Word. I have to know God. I have to experience these truths. One of the greatest maladies, and a thing that's quite ridiculous that I see today is when I see a young man take a sermon from someone like John Piper and preach it word for word, because not that the truth isn't important, but I can tell in a second. When that comes out of Dr. Piper's mouth, it's a reality. When it comes out of that young man's mouth, it's like a parrot talking to me. It's not a reality. It's not something he's experienced. They need to get in the Word and prayer. Lock themselves away. Let me say this, when I first was called into the ministry, my pastor who was a very godly man, who walked with God, he looked at me one day and he said, "Boy, can you be alone?" When he said that I thought he meant that if I preached the truth, I would be alone. That's not what he meant. What he meant was this: When all the other boys are going on Christian retreats and hanging around in bachelor packs and going to Christian conferences and everything else, can you go into the closet alone and be with God? Can you go to your study and be alone with God? One of the things that you're going to have to realize, the young men who aspire to be used of God, is you're going to have to be a man who walks with God. And not even your closest friends can come with you. Not your wife. No one. You walk with God in the Word of God and prayer.

Question: Kind of as a follow-up question, is it possible for someone to get so caught up in the personality or the ministry of a preacher, that they're more caught up with that man than they are with Jesus Christ Himself?

Paul: Definitely. That's the case with me. I hope that I am preaching the truth. I trust that I'm saying things that are important, but I realize, it's just like David. Do you realize that the first people who aligned themselves with David, they aligned themselves with David just because they were mad at Saul? There are young men particularly out there today, they're mad at everything they see in Christianity. So the first supposed radical voice and radical life they see, they want to latch on to that. That's very, very dangerous. You see, the whole thing that we need to look at here is truth and character. The idea of someone being radical; the idea of someone being zealous, to latch yourself onto a person like that because they seem that way is very dangerous. Very dangerous.

Question: Is it possible for someone to love the preaching ministry of someone like yourself or John Piper and still be lost?

Paul: Oh yes, it is very possible. It is very, very, very possible. You can become mesmerized by so many things. But you have to ask yourself, do I love Christ? Do I desire Christ? Some people like to hear preaching just because it's radical and they want to be radical. I know of a girl who literally was on her way to hell because she would not surrender to Christ and she would not surrender her life to Christ because she was afraid that if she surrendered her life to Christ He would not let her be a missionary. Anything can send you to hell.

Question: You know a lot of people do really look at you as a celebrity. I don't know if there's anything you want to say to address people out there who do that because it does need to be addressed? And who better than you?

Paul: Okay. A few years ago, I was preaching up in a place, and I had chosen that that week I was going to teach on the Old Testament. Many, many people came to hear me preach. Many people came to hear me preach. And the church filled up. There were seats put out and everything. And when I got up to preach the first sermon, I looked over to my right, and there seated was a man nobody knew. A Hebrew professor from India. And I knew something about him. And it just struck me as so ironic. First of all, he was very, very godly. Very godly husband, very godly father. He has forgotten more about God and the Old Testament than I'll ever know. I was terrified to think that he was in the audience and was going to hear me preach on the Old Testament. And the ironic thing is this, (incomplete thought) oftentimes it is not the man of highest character or the greatest nobility or the greatest knowledge that God uses. And many times, those who've been called to go out front, one of their greatest burdens and chains is they know that there are men that they're not worthy to carry their sandals who are sitting there in the audience and no one knows their name, and yet they're far more the man of God than the one speaking in the pulpit. God uses the ignoble. He uses the weak.

Another thing, I know that - I believe God has used me, but it's been for a certain purpose. To cry out that things are wrong. But I know that's what I am. I am not a John Piper. I'm not the great expositor. I don't have the mind of an R.C. Sproul. I am what I am. And God will sometimes use people like me. We're limited, but we are used. Another thing I think is a very, very good story is I preached in a place one time and a genuine revival broke out. And I don't use that term lightly. Some people were being converted. Other people were fiercely angry, threw things at my wife and I as we walked across the campus. But a revival broke out. And afterwards, some of the young Bible students came up to me and said, "Mr. Washer, can we go to Peru with you?" I said, well, you can come and visit me. So, when they got off that plane in Lima, they thought I was the Apostle Paul. When they got back on that plane a month and a half later, they were praying for my salvation.

The point I'm trying to make is I hope I'm not a hypocrite, and I hope that I sincerely want to follow Christ, that I really want to follow Jesus. And that they didn't see someone who was fake, but all they saw was just what all men are. You know, a man is what his wife sees. A man is what the closest people to him know. And all they saw was a person by the grace of God seeking to follow Jesus whom God had helped in certain labors. I try to study the Word every day, systematically reading through the Bible. That's my devotional time. To pray, to be on my knees in the morning watch, to be on my knees in the night watch before I go to bed. Or if He wakes me, to be a watchman.

But I struggle - I struggle in Scripture memory a lot. I try to memorize Scripture, and I think my 8 year old's better at it than I am. I struggle a great deal at times with depression, but I am getting greater and greater victory over that because of some of the truths that I learned from Jay Adams actually. Just men... sometimes I have to apologize to my wife. Sometimes I have to ask my children to forgive me. Anyone who is used of God is just living proof that God still speaks through rocks and donkeys. That's about all that you can say about it. But He is faithful. He's very, very faithful. He's very kind. You know, those of us who believe in sovereign grace, we ought to have some toward other people. We really ought to. Sometimes I get very afraid when I think about what people think about me. Some people who don't like me are probably partially justified, but I think they're maybe partially wrong. A lot of people who really like me are sometimes very oblivious to what really goes on as far as weaknesses and not following Christ as I wish that I could. We just all need prayer.

Let me say this. In that statement about sovereign grace that David Miller told me that, so I want to give him credit. You know what scares me the most? Is if all of a sudden, the limelight dies down, and no one cares to hear me preach anymore. That's not what bothers me. What scares me is this: at that moment, my true heart is going to be revealed. What will it look like? I hope that I will still joyfully want to follow the Lord and preach and whatever He gives me to do, but I always think about that. What happens when one day you walk in the building, and sometimes it's better that someone be mad at you than no one feel anything at all. What happens when no one's even concerned enough about you to even be angry with you anymore? And you just kind of disappear, which will happen. Will my heart show that I'm full of pride? That I desire this kind of stuff? That's a good question.

Question: If you could, in a real compact form, what have you learned from Jay Adams concerning depression?

Paul: The question is what have I learned from Jay Adams concerning depression. And that is, I guess the greatest thing would be this, that to be able to discern when I am believing a lie - believing something that is not true, that does not conform to God's Word, and then to preach - instead of letting my heart preach to me, that I ought to preach God's Word to my heart and stand on the realities of God's Word rather than on feelings. Another thing that I think has been very helpful is that so many things that would cause us to pity and coddle a man, instead, the man should be rebuked because he's believing a lie. Or so many things that seem to be where

we treat ourselves as pitiful victims when in actuality, we're guilty criminals, and just facing that. Facing that with the Word of God and repenting. Another thing I think is very, very good is that it is not enough to say no to the flesh; to say no to an evil practice, but to substitute that evil practice with the doing of good, with virtue. It's not just putting off, but it's putting on, and much of that has been very, very helpful. Very helpful.