



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

February 7, 2018

TOO FAR AWAY

"Therefore," wrote Paul, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

Cartoonist Bob Thaves pictured a couple sitting in front of their television, cans of beer in their hands, junk food at their elbows. The caption reads: "There is no problem with your set. The rubbish you see on the screen is real. Please adjust your standards downward."

I couldn't help thinking of that as I pondered the fate of a well-known pastor who resigned from his church, a stalwart landmark in the community for more than 100 years. A graduate of a fine seminary, and a good preacher, this middle-aged man, nonetheless, left his church in shame and sadness, his morality in question and his family devastated.

Do we expect too much of people? Should we do what the cartoon suggests: "adjust our standards downward?" Is the answer to lower our expectations, or is something drastically wrong with how we live today, something which short-circuits us from rising above the downward pull of our old nature and our environment?

Men and women have always struggled with their old natures and inadequacies. But it is obvious today that something very radical is wrong with life and society. The failures of leaders, both Christian and non-Christian, are readily obvious and apparent. It's the whole of society. Marriage has suffered a complete identity crisis and the family unit that we knew in grand-dad's day has been turned on its head.

A generation ago before, we had copy machines and computers, let alone wireless printing from cell phones, if you wanted a second or third copy of a document which you were typing on an old typewriter, you inserted a piece of "carbon paper" between the first and successive sheets of paper. Naturally, the further the copy was from the first page original, the fainter was the impression. I've wondered if this may be part of our problem today.

The closer you are to a fire, the warmer you are. From a distance you may see the glow of the blaze, but you are much too far away for it to warm your cold hands. So is it with our faith. Mark, the writer of the second Gospel, tells us that when Jesus called His disciples, "He appointed twelve--designating them apostles--that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authorities to drive out demons" (Mark 3:14-15). Having first been in the presence of



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Jesus Christ, their lives had been touched by the Divine. They were different--not outwardly, but inwardly. Theirs was a vivid, first-generation experience.

The world took notice of these people, and what they saw often convicted them. Those who had been with Jesus were able to love people who were not very lovely. They were deeply committed to the fact that the forgiveness of God brings a changed life. And the real change was not cosmetic, or outward. It was the inward change of the heart which results in a different lifestyle.

This is why Paul was so dogmatic in what he said to the Corinthians, whose culture resembled ours today. "Therefore," wrote Paul, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (II Corinthians 5:17).

Obviously, the farther a carbon copy is from the original, the less the reproduction resembles the real thing. So is it with our lives.

The real solution isn't in lowering our standards, but in having that first-generation experience which results in spiritual regeneration. The grace of God means that there is forgiveness for our sins and failures, but with that forgiveness comes His help to live differently. Finding this grace and help is the real solution to the needs of our lives.

Resource reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21