

DESIDERATA¹

ROMANS 2:17-29, PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH

NOVEMBER 2, 2008

BIG IDEA: GOD IS PASSIONATE ABOUT SPIRITUAL AUTHENTICITY, NOT PEDIGREE.

INSIGHTS:

- **ONE:** Our culture has a blinding effect on us.
- **TWO:** We need to find periodic vantage points from where we can view ourselves more objectively.
- **THREE:** We profit from regular self-inspections.
- **FOUR:** Never rest on our laurels--Teaching is a character profession—bad plumbing/example.
- **FIVE:** Be forewarned: We are far more susceptible to externalism than we are aware.
- **SIX:** Our witness needs to be far more than just words:

THE CONTEXTUAL TIE-IN: ...Paul insists that their [Jews] privileges do not exempt them from God's judgment....Paul argues that neither knowledge of the law nor physical circumcision has value unless the law is obeyed....[Paul's] point in this section is not to demonstrate that Jews commit sins (no Jew would deny that) but that these sins, despite possession of the law and circumcision, make Jews just as liable to God's judgment as Gentiles....Paul insists that it is faith—only and always—that is the basis for a righteous standing with God. Therefore, the “signs” of election—the law and circumcision—are of no value without this faith. Only if the law is “done,” and, Paul implies, done perfectly, will the election on the basis of the Mosaic covenant be of value to the Jew.... (Douglas J. Moo, 158)

TO A LOUSE ON SEEING ONE ON A LADY'S BONNET AT CHURCH by the Poet 'Laureate' of Scotland, Robert Burns (1759-1796). [MODERN TRANSLATION:]

*O would some Power the gift to give us
To see ourselves as others see us!
It would from many a blunder free us,
And foolish notion:
What airs in dress and gait would leave us,
And even devotion!*

REBRANDING SIN: Adultery and racism are today's big sins, but many bother traditionally condemnable vices have fallen off the list in recent years. In fact, some theologians fear the concept of personal sin is almost lost.

When Pope Benedict XVI said at Easter that in the contemporary world, “the notion of sin” is jeopardized, he got some amens from Protestant pastors as well.

Presbyterian Tim Keller still preaches about sin, but with lots of explanation “because the word is essentially obsolete,” Keller says. His three New York City congregations are mostly young and single. “They do get the idea of branding, of taking a word or term and filling it with your own content, so I have to rebrand the word sin.”

One starting place is what qualifies as sin these days. A survey by Ellison Research shows that 87 percent of U.S. adults still acknowledge the concept of sin, but what is “almost always wrong” is changing:

Cheating on your spouse? Wrong. (81% call it a sin.)

Sex before marriage? Not so wrong (45%)

Racism? Wrong. (74%)

Gambling? Hardly wrong at all. (30%)

Of his Manhattan setting Keller says, “Around here [sin] means self-centeredness, the acorn from which it all grows. Individually, that means ‘I live for myself, for my own glory and happiness, tearing the net of interwovenness, the fabric of humanity.’”

So sin, as a list of acts offensive to God first and foremost, is difficult to sell. As a self-centered posture, you've got more traction. All the more important when proclaiming salvation in Christ alone.²

¹ Desideratum: Something considered necessary or highly desirable.

² Adapted from USA Today, “Currents,” “Rebranding Sin,” *Leadership* (Fall 2008), 11.

SWINDOLL ON INTEGRITY: *Do you put wire in walls? Do you repair cars? Do you work with numbers? Do you sell clothes? Perhaps you practice law or medicine. The important thing is not what work you do, but whether you do your work with integrity. Perhaps you labor behind the scenes, and your only thanks is the inner satisfaction of a job done right. Do you cheat on your exams? Are you cheating on your mate? Some have the audacity to do such things and call themselves Christians. No wonder the world is confused!*

*You want to shock the world? Start here--demonstrating the guts to do what's right when no one is looking. It takes real guts to stand strong with integrity in a culture weakened by hypocrisy. Start today.*³

PATRICK MORLEY ON THE NEEDS AND STRUGGLES OF CHURCH-MEN:⁴

In fact, men in the church face the same challenges and frustrations as men outside the church. For example, for every ten men in the church:

- *Nine will have children who leave the church.*
- *Eight will not find their jobs satisfying.*
- *Six will pay the monthly minimum on their credit card bills.*
- *Five will have a major problem with pornography.*
- *Four will get divorced—affecting one million children each year.*
- *Only one will have a biblical worldview.*
- *All ten will struggle to balance work and family.*

CLEMENT ON CHRISTIAN AUTHENTICITY (late First Century): *When the heathen hear God's oracles on our lips they marvel at their beauty and greatness. But afterwards when they mark that our deeds are unworthy of the words we utter, they turn from this to scoffing, and say that it is a myth and a delusion.*⁵--Clement

MICHAEL GREEN ON CHRISTIAN AUTHENTICITY: *"Unless the fellowship in the Christian assembly is far superior to that which can be found anywhere else in society, then the Christians can talk about the transforming love and power of Jesus until they are hoarse, but people are not going to listen."*⁶

PETER ON SPIRITUAL AUTHENTICITY: 1 Peter 2:12, *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

WAY TO GO IN FRESNO! Alan Doswald is executive director of Evangelicals for Social Action/Love INC in Fresno, CA. One day a friend of his who is a prof at a city college in Fresno set up a lunch appointment for him to meet with an atheist professor colleague who was always putting Christians down. *"They're hypocrites, they don't care, they don't make a difference, they don't do anything."*

So they sat down at lunch and the prof went off on his hypocrite speech. So Alan said, *"Tell me what other group does more than Christians to help people in need outside their own group."* A silence followed. *He couldn't think of any.*

"Locally, do you know of such a group?" I asked. "Nationally? Internationally?"

He said, "What about Marxists?"

"Are you serious?" I said. "Stalin killed millions of his own people."

"Well, maybe not," he said.

*He eventually admitted that no other group comes close to doing what Christians do to help others outside their circle. There is no Hindu homeless shelter in Fresno. There is no Buddhist food pantry in Fresno. There is no Muslim clothing ministry for street people in Fresno.*⁷

WAY TO GO IN ALEXANDRIA! *In Alexandria, [in the early church] women rounded up destitute babies and orphans and cared for them. Christians in the Egyptian cities knocked on poor peoples' doors and offered to move in to nurse the sick, deliberately exposing themselves to illness.*⁸

³ Taken from Charles R. Swindoll, "A Battle for Integrity," *Insights* (March 2003): 1-2. Copyright © 2003, Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

⁴ Patrick Morley, David Delk, and Brett Clemmer. *No Man Left Behind* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 33.

⁵ II Clement 13:4.

⁶ Sider. *Ibid.*, 176. Michael Green in his plenary address at Lausanne.

⁷ Alan Doswald, "The Largest Company in Your City," *Christianity Today*, January 2005, 50.

⁸ Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1987, 83.

Timothy G. Walton
Alderwood Community Church
110208