

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian
Students

Presented by the
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Theological
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Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season,
out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort
with all longsuffering
and doctrine.”

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Bringing the Cinema Home

Roy E. Beacham

In an earlier article I asserted that true Christians, in their identification with Christ, should strive to live in holiness like Christ. This standard of holy, Christ-like living necessarily assumes the existence of a kind of living that is unholy, unbecoming, and unfit for one who names Christ. I suggested that both kinds of living, holy and unholy, were deeply spiritual: living in the Spirit of Christ or living in the spirit of this age. While these two lifestyles are both deeply spiritual, they necessarily find objective expression in that which the Scripture calls, among other things, “fruit.” What one truly believes and what one truly loves will be seen in how one actually behaves. In making these assertions, I alluded to a host of biblical texts that advance both the positive and negative, internal and external sides of Christ-like holy living.

Having established the biblical premise, I suggested that in the realm of unholy living there are forms and styles of personal appearance, attire, speech, and so-called “art” and “music” that are purposefully, clearly, and unmistakably anti-Christian. These are forms and styles so imbued with godless antichristian content and character that they ought not be embraced in any way by those who claim to be Christ's. To associate oneself with such apparel, language, “art,” and “music” is to disassociate oneself with Christ, his ethos and lifestyle. Further, I suggested that there are “places” that partake of the same nature and quality. These are places that have no real significance or essential purpose beyond the promotion and practice of antichristian lifestyles and culture. Along with brothels, bars, nude beaches, drug dens, and nightclubs, I suggested that movie theaters be counted among these kinds of places. I forwarded the idea that to attend, much

less to frequent, any such place is, in my mind, as antichristian as the intrinsic purpose and practice of the place itself. To associate with that kind of place is to disassociate with Christ.

Avoiding the aforementioned kinds of appearances, types of speech, music styles, art forms, and places takes a measure of discernment, though it should take precious little discernment if one truly cares about holy living and a genuine, spiritually endowed Christ-likeness. If some styles, forms, and places are indeed clearly and purposefully antichristian, as I have suggested, then how much discernment should it take to realize that Christians should avoid them? Unfortunately, in our world, some of us who profess association with Christ appear to be either horribly myopic or just plain spiritually care-less.

But it is not always that simple. There are tangential issues. The problem here is that unmistakably antichristian forms and styles are not limited in practice to clearly antichristian places, neither are they limited exclusively to godless settings and expressions. We all know that things that are clearly and unmistakably ungodly can so permeate society that they become mixed with the good and, hence, become more difficult to recognize and, thus, to avoid. As lines become more indistinct and muddled, levels of discernment, value judgments, and personal and corporate behavioral postures become more and more complex. A bar may have no purpose or function as an establishment beyond that which is clearly antichristian, but what about liquor stores? What about grocery stores with liquor sections? What about eating establishments that serve alcoholic beverages? What about the use of alcohol as a medicine? The "list" is unending. The more unholiness permeates our world, the more complex becomes the issue of discerning and avoiding that which is unholy.

Consider again the movie theater. It is one thing to attend the cinema. It is quite another to bring the cinema home. The issue, then, is no longer clearly the "place." The issue mutates to *levels* of "place" and ultimately, to questions of the "thing" itself. With regard to levels of "place," where does one acquire a movie to watch at home (or to watch anywhere else, for that matter)? Is a video store whose only purpose is to sell and rent movies for private viewing to be counted as a clearly ungodly "place" and thus always to be avoided? What if those same videos are offered for rent in a small corner of the grocery store or in a kiosk at McDonalds or on a shelf in the public library? And then there is the movie itself. Here again, it is not actually the physical "thing" anymore than it was the physical "place." There is nothing intrinsically wrong with putting images, dialog, and sound effects on film and playing them back. The problem centers on that which is depicted and spoken, viewed and heard, suggested and glamorized.

If professing Christians are not exclusively attending "good" movies in the theater, what do you suppose they are watching at home? Do we who name Christ view in private that which we condemn in public? Do we allow into our homes, by means of this medium (or any other), behaviors, language, images, and ideas that we would never allow to be expressed in our homes by our children or our guests? How much profanity and God-cursing is acceptable in a movie? How much sex and innuendo? How much immorality? How much violence? Can we begin to imagine that we are wholly unaffected by watching and listening to these offences to God day after day and week after week? Should we not learn, rather, to be offended *like* God? What makes a movie "good"? Is it the ratings of people who warn us of its content? Or is it conformity to the nature and revelation of the one and only true God? In a fallen world, where that which is good may be tainted by or even permeated with that which is evil, where do we draw our lines? When

it comes to varying degrees of moral pollution, the answers may not always be simple. But are they really *all* that difficult? Perhaps we do not ask the right questions. Maybe we really don't want the answers. Is it possible that we might actually fail in having our senses exercised to discern both good and evil? And worse yet, could it ever be that we might turn our liberty into libertinism and then spend our days attempting to justify our carnality?

It is one thing for ungodliness to infiltrate and permeate society. It is quite another thing for ungodliness to infiltrate and permeate a Christian and Christian society. True Christians cannot love God supremely and, at the same time, embrace the world and the things in the world. Genuine Christians who are wholly conformed to Christ cannot also be partially conformed to the world. Does not God plead for our conformity to Christ? Were we not redeemed for the purpose of growing unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ? Has God not chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him?

In a world where lines between holiness and unholiness become more and more muddled, which Christians are most adequately able to practice genuine holy Christian living? First and foremost, they must not merely be "professing" believers, but *true* believers impregnated with genuine spiritual life. They must also be believers in whom the person of the Holy Spirit resides ungrieved and in whom the power of the Holy Spirit burns unquenched. These are Christians who, through diligent examination and practiced contemplation of the Word of God, strive with all assiduity to know intimately and, thus, to fear soberly the holy God of Scripture. They want nothing more than to grow in singular love for their singular God. They want nothing less than to live in a way that wholly honors and perfectly pleases a God who really does care about their every thought and deed. These are men and women of God who are becoming so like Christ that they truly love only the things that he loves, and truly despise all of the things that he hates. When all is said and done, *this* kind of Christian will actually wrestle less and less with the minute and mundane questions of marginal living. For the closer we draw to the vividly clear and perfectly revealed center of divine holiness, the less we need to concern ourselves with the indistinct and muddled lines of the margins. ✕

This essay is by Roy E. Beacham, professor of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

A HYMN TO GOD THE FATHER

John Donne (1572-1631)

WILT Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore ;
But swear by Thyself, that at my death Thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore ;
And having done that, Thou hast done ;
I fear no more. ✕

Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis | [Contact Us](#)
900 Forestview Ln N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 1-800-827-1043 | www.centalseminary.edu