

Please the People or Serve the Savior?

Joe Slater

Great crowds sometimes followed Jesus. They were fascinated by His miracles, intrigued by His teaching, drawn to His compassion. Few, however, remained with Him. The winds of controversial doctrine and challenging discipleship separated the wheat from the chaff.

In John 6, Jesus illustrated the deep commitment and oneness with Him that a true disciple must have by likening it to eating His flesh and drinking His blood. However, some didn't understand this difficult teaching. They murmured against Him (v. 41). Even some of the larger body of disciples (not the twelve) complained: *"This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"* (v. 60). Finally, v. 66 tells us that *"from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more."*

Significantly, Jesus did not alter His doctrine or His requirements so as to regain those who had left. He did not apologize for having offended them. In fact, He asked the twelve, *"Do you also want to go away?"* (v. 67). Of course He didn't want them to leave; but He left the option open to them, thus putting their commitment to the test. Whom would they follow – the crowd, or the Christ? On behalf of the group, Peter gave this happy reply: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (vv. 68, 69).

Today we hear loud demands, even from within, that the church must change in order to be more attractive to the world. These voices admonish us that controversy is an absolute no-no. Rather than uphold the truth, we

must re-evaluate and update doctrines and practices that modern society finds offensive. (Examples: gender roles, instrumental music in worship, fellowship with denominationalism.) Unless we modify these positions and practices, the church will fade into oblivion – or so we are told.

Brethren, we must make up our minds what our objective is. Will we cater to the crowds, or uphold the truth? God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). But Jesus knew that salvation does not come through stand-for-nothing fall-for-anything religion. Though He loved all, Jesus did not court the crowds. He let it be known up-front that following Him requires absolute commitment and self-denial. He encouraged people to count the cost. Some are willing to pay the price; most are not.

Brethren, there is no such thing as marked-down Christianity. Let us resist the temptation to trade truth for numbers. Jesus didn't, and neither should we.

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Our Greatest Need

If humanity's greatest need had been entertainment, God would have sent a performer.

If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist.

If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent an economist.

But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior.

--via House-to-House/Heart-to-Heart

What Are You Staring At?

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:2a).

If you look intently at someone, you may hear, "What are you looking at?" We do not like being stared at. It makes us extremely uncomfortable. Yet, we are encouraged, rather exhorted, to stare at Jesus.

What do we gain by staring at Jesus? We gain courage to follow Him throughout life in every situation. The difficulties of life, and even suffering, are brought into proper perspective when we view the Crucified One. We see Jesus and what He suffered and the hostility that He endured, and whatever we are experiencing fades in comparison (Hebrews 12:3).

He was steadfast in submitting to God's will. If we are looking at Jesus, we, too, should be steadfast. Jesus exercised faith, and we must live in faith.

Jesus considered the joy before Him, endured the cross, and despised the shame of death on a tree and the shame of being covered with all our sins. His eyes were fixed on the goal. He considered that being with God seated on the throne was worth it all (Hebrews 12:2).

Christ Jesus is not just our Savior. He is our example. We are not just to glance at Him. We are to stare at Him and follow Him. That is our short-term goal which leads to our ultimate goal, heaven.

We are not only to meditate on and admire Jesus. We are to respond to Him, and we must obey Him and respect Him.

His cross brings not only salvation, but also obligation. His cross not only frees us, but it binds us. His cross removes our sins in order to make possible a new clean, holy life.

Therefore, stare at Jesus. Don't stare at an artist's picture, but at the picture of the Son in God's word. Learn to be like Him.

--Ed Wittlif (Denver, CO)