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VOL. XXX
NO. 4
January 25, 2015

Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

They Profess to Know God

Today I was shopping for a video for a birthday present. I found what I wanted, but the clerk urged me to buy *Madea Christmas*, saying, “She’s a very religious person, but she’s quick to cuss you out!”

That eyebrow-raising exchange highlights a situation in our modern culture. We think we’re OK if we run through the motions of church, but do not live or speak as Christians. Somehow, being “religious” counts more for being righteous. Really, in the minds of most, there is no oxymoron in a foul-mouthed church-goer, a homosexual priest, or a belligerent Bible believer.

This illustrates Titus 1:16, “they profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him.”

Our society has no-doubt fallen victim to this mentality, and will one day learn the sober truth that lip-service doesn’t count for much (Matt. 7:21–24). But, has our church fallen victim to the same mentality? Are we any more consistent? Do we tolerate sins that are respectable and common in the eyes of society, but are nevertheless condemned in God’s word? It’s worth thinking about seriously.

—John Guzzetta

Can You Read the Signs of the Times?

Can you tell who is going to win a football game? As the weekend approaches during the football season, thousands of armchair quarterbacks look at the players' stats, the coaches' strengths, the predicted temperature at kickoff, the noise levels of the stadium, and give an emphatic prediction of the spread.

Can you tell what's going to happen in the stock market? Investors sift through mounds of data, P/E ratios, net debt positions, trends in technology, to argue convincingly for buying one company over another.

In these and many other areas, we consider ourselves experts at knowing what's going on. We consider ourselves authorities at seeing the signs, and drawing the obvious conclusions.

In Matthew 16:2–3, Jesus addressed the Pharisees and said,

When it is evening, you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red." And in the morning, "There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening." Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?

The religious authorities of Jesus' day had completely missed the obvious signs that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God, and that He was preparing to establish His kingdom. All the people, as farmers and shepherds in touch with the land, could instantly tell by looking at clouds and colors what the weather had in store for them. In fact, they were quite sophisticated in this, able to pick up on subtle clues to know that one kind of red sky indicated fair weather, and red sky at a different time indicated stormy weather, and they brought in the animals and prayed for the crops.

How could people able to predict the temperature and precipitation yet hidden beyond the horizon, be unable to understand the signs of the times? How could they not see that what Jesus did and taught (Luke 24:44–45, Acts 10:38–43) indicated His divinity? How could they miss

the sign of Jonah (v. 4), that is, Jesus' resurrection from the dead, declaring Him the Son of God with power?

Before we get so smug, Jesus might ask us the same question! How can a people so worried about sifting through fantasy football statistics, so capable at forecasting market trends, be so dense and oblivious when it comes to the kingdom of God? Can you read the signs of the times?

Can you tell what is happening in society? It doesn't take a politician or talk show host to know. Anyone can look at a map of states that permitted gay marriage in 2005 and compare it to a map of states that permit gay marriage in 2015. America is shifting away from freedom, personal responsibility, and uprightness. Concerned people work with their elected officials to slow the slide into immorality, to protect their children from the worst influences, and to brace themselves for time when Christians will find themselves on the losing side of the culture war and begin to experience persecution. Are we preparing ourselves and our children to weather the storms that are on the horizon?

Can you tell what is happening in doctrine? Those who call themselves Christians are letting go of basic truths. "In the last days, difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these" (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Will we read and cling to God's unchanging word?

Can you tell what is happening in this very congregation? Can you pick up on changes subtle and not-so-subtle? Can you add and subtract numbers on the attendance board? Are we sensing the slip, and are we taking diligent action to reach out to the doubting and struggling, to admonish the weak, and to preach the gospel to the lost?

Spiritual discernment is always necessary in any age. Can you read the signs of our times? Can you see what needs to be done? Most importantly, will you do it?

—John Guzzetta

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