

## **Modern Evangelical External Evidences for the Legitimacy of their Faith**

Because Modern Evangelicals are not content to find assurance of salvation solely in the cross (for several reasons) but focus mostly upon some human response or action, such as a decision to follow Christ, they look to outward evidences for assurance. One evidence they use is success.

Many Christians, not just evangelicals, have pointed to the success, wealth and prosperity of America as proof of God's blessing because America is (was) a Christian (mostly Protestant) nation. This same thinking is carried over into the evaluation of churches' success. If a church is growing in numbers, or programs, it is seen as a sign that God is happy with the church. Sometimes if a church fails, it is seen as an indicator that God was unhappy with something about the church. However, most Evangelicals would be very uncomfortable in claiming that individuals that are wealthy are so because God is happy with them, and those who are poor are so because of God's displeasure with them. It is easier to hide the problems with a view when it affects only organizations instead of individuals. Indeed, all of these views seem to run counter to Jesus' statement that His kingdom is not of this world. A church may die because it refuses to go along with the views of current society as to its message and practices. But Jesus is not unhappy with the church for that reason.

Many Evangelicals have mostly avoided this money trap, but still use many outward evidences as proof that God is pleased with their ministries. Often, success in drawing significant numbers to make decisions to follow Christ is seen as proof of God's approval. However, God works through flawed and sinful people to spread the message of the Gospel. It is entirely possible that the people who made decisions to follow Christ would have been receptive to the true message of the cross and the continual reception of salvation through the sacraments without the Evangelical's teaching about trusting in decisions to follow Christ, etc., and have been better off if the Evangelicals had presented them this message instead.

Often times, coincidences are seen as proof that God is working in a person's life. Certainly, the Bible makes it clear that God does work often in ways in which it is not obvious to everyone. However, many Evangelicals are putting an awful lot of interpretation of God's pleasure with their work and lives on some very questionable evidence. In the Bible, God would use some unquestionable display of his power to signal his approval or disapproval of human actions. Stones were burned up, withered arms were made whole, and stinking dead bodies were brought back to life. But, today, an awful lot of weight is being placed on evidence such as a certain amount of money appearing when a need is realized, or health problems such as limps and dizziness disappearing. Certainly, God can work in this way, but He does not intend that these should be used as a way of escaping the hard decisions that should be made about whether any group or activity is furthering His kingdom. Money arriving just in time to allow a new church building should not be used as an escape from examining whether the goals of a church should have been to support missions more instead of adding on a beautiful addition to the church building. Indeed, all actions of the church and

individuals should be open to examination as to their effectiveness in carrying out the great commission.

God is working in the world to create conditions which are conducive to the spread of the gospel. Possibly, the peaceful world conditions which occurred at the time of Christ are an indication of this. Every action which promotes the positive conditions which allow the spread of the gospel may receive His help, and supernatural support. This does not necessarily mean that he is endorsing the theology or even aspects of the practices of the person involved. Certainly, the dream sent the Midianite that Gideon would come and massacre his people was from God, but was not a sign that God was pleased.

Even the opposition of Satan is seen as an endorsement of God's favor. However, even though Satan is craftier than any human, he did not seem to understand the mission of Christ. In a statement which probably refers to Satan's followers, but possibly applies to him also, I Corinthians 1:8 states "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (NIV). Even today, Satan probably doesn't understand how God uses the law and the gospel to bring people to true faith. Satan is power hungry. He views the world entirely in this light. He struggles against any activity that is seen as favoring God's purpose in the world. He probably opposes any action which we see as good or nice, whether it is being accomplished by Moslems, Buddhists, or atheists. But while we support kindness, love, and mercy, these should not be confused with our directive to spread the message of the cross. Certainly he focuses much of his opposition upon the church, because he knows that Christ is the Son of God, and this message is a direct threat to his claims to power. The point is that even the opposition of Satan should not be used as evidence for the correctness of the Evangelical's doctrine. Only the scriptures should be used for that purpose.

The Evangelicals need to take a hard look at their decision centered theology. Then, maybe the message of the cross will replace their man-centered decision theology.