

“That if thou shalt confess

Concerning the movie, Christians used to avoid the theatre and scorned or were at least highly suspicious of anything that came out of Hollywood. (Of course believers will want to take advantage of every situation that gives us opportunity to witness to the reality of who Christ is and to introduce people to a Savior who not only died, but rose, ascended, and is coming again). However, many in the name of Christ are promoting a film that demeans the Savior, misrepresents the Bible, adds to His Word, venerates Mary, promotes false doctrine, and distorts the very gospel of God Himself!

“Is this motion picture event another inducement for the rapidly developing market-oriented, entertainment-hungry, ecumenically-prone evangelical church?” (T.A McMahon)

We are living in the age of an experience seeking church. A movie is a powerful media capable of evoking strong emotional feelings through visual imagery. Undoubtedly many will leave this movie affected emotionally perhaps in a way they never have before. Today much of the church is drawn towards such experiences. Many churches design programs and services to capitalize on this desire. Multitudes who place themselves under the banner of Christianity and for that matter, many true believers, believe that “church” should be such an experience. They desire to be emotionally stirred, visually stimulated, and delightfully entertained. The following is but one example that can be cited to illustrate this current trend.

“Churches are always asking for money. But we are going to turn it around”, said ... Tim Dyson of Church Alive in Tampa, FL. “The church plans on giving away checks and gift certificates to newcomers - the most, a check of \$2,004.00.” *“Church Offers Lure of Almighty Dollar!”* Tampa Tribune, Tampa, FL Jan. 21, 2004

Now while it is true that God has designed us as emotional creatures, entertainment and experiences are shallow soil in which to grow strong believers. Many people flit from one church to another seeking the best

with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,

entertainment, the most electric experience, or whatever is the order of the day. And why not - if one of the main criteria for “church” is finding a place where I can feel good and be happy. Many are only concerned with where they can get the biggest WOW!

Fact or Feeling

What a lesson we might learn from the life of Daniel.

Daniel was a captive in Babylon. In Babylon there was much that was impressive. One of the so-called Seven Wonders of the World, the hanging gardens, was there. Babylon’s architecture, temples, gardens, and wealth were unequalled by earthly rivals. However there was a more powerful influence on Daniel than all that Babylon displayed. Jerusalem was the place where God had placed His name. There was nothing at that time in Jerusalem to appeal to the physical sight, even if Daniel could have seen the city. But for the “eye of faith” there was strong appeal. That city lay in desolation and disrepair. The actual temple had been burnt to the ground. But towards that city Daniel, at the risk of his life, cast his eyes and prayed.

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Dan 6:10). For God’s Word said, “That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place” (1Kg 8:29,30).

When the living God first came down to dwell in the midst of a corporate group of His people He dwelt in a tent. Though there were many glorious features found in the tabernacle the structure itself was not impressive either in its size or outward appearance. The average Israelite wasn’t even allowed inside the curtains to view the gold covered furniture or the intricately embroidered veil. The outside of the tabernacle proper was a covering of rough animal skins and the whole tent itself was smaller than many of the houses in which we live.

and shalt believe in thine heart

When the Son of God walked on this planet housed (tabernacled) in human flesh He had no outward form or peculiar beauty that was attractive to men. It seems the church today has missed or ignored the lesson. Today, elaborate, ornate buildings, so impressive that some of them would rival Solomon’s temple, are used to appeal to the natural senses of men and women and to make them comfortable. It is not surprising then that so many would be drawn to a film that is designed to have maximum emotional effect.

Which sustains you - the Bible or experience? If it is just emotions – what happens when they change? There are many people today who violate their marriage vows and forsake husband or wife because they don’t “feel” towards them as they once did. It is not emotional experience or good feelings that will sustain us but the strong, solid foundation of God’s Word – taken by *faith*.

Fact or Fable

This movie is built on the premise that God’s Word is insufficient and His revelation incomplete. One woman, when interviewed after viewing the film, exclaimed, “It’s the true story. It’s exactly how it happened.” But is it? One reviewer says;

“Another concern is that the material in the film which is not found in the historical gospel accounts was not just the product of a creative script writer who added events to make the film flow better where the gospel accounts seem vague. Most of the added materials came from Catholic tradition. The film uses the Roman Catholic meditations of the cross to frame Jesus’ carrying of the cross. This dictates the number of times he falls, the wiping of his face by a woman named Veronica and a meeting with his mother Mary. This film attacks the basic Protestant doctrine of “the Bible Alone” as being authoritative in matters of doctrine. It adds to God’s word with visions and traditions.

This is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that Mel Gibson states that he believes that God lead him to read the works of Anne Catherine Emmerich a late 18th century Westphalian nun who had visions of the events of the Passion of

that God

Jesus Christ. She wrote a book, “Dolorous Passion of Our Lord,” which was the source of many of the added events which he used to fill out the events of the movie. It is *this book* that has Pilate’s wife giving linen to Mary that is used to wipe up the sacred blood that was on the ground following the whipping of Christ, and the temptation of Jesus in the Garden *by Satan* suggesting that all the sins of humanity was presented to him so that he would see it was too much for him to bear. Belief on these events occurring is not based on the Bible but on the visions of a nun.

“Protestants should be aware that from their historical faith that this film mixes truth with error in such a way that it is hard emotionally not to see all of it as true. We need to gain a clear understanding of this film’s Roman Catholic structure and doctrine.” (The Men’s Ministry and [Christianity Today](#) March 2004 issue)

Visions from a nun that add to the revelation of God’s completed Word have to be questioned as to their source. Recognizing the completed revelation and finality of the Bible these visions must be demonic in origin. Could the source of this movie then be demonic in origin?

“For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus ... For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness ...” (2Cor.11:4, 13-15).

One of the unavoidable hazards of a movie is the ability to ingrain inaccuracies. People are sometimes surprised to discover how many commonly accepted traditions are not based on Scripture at all! Most might also be surprised to hear that the Bible nowhere says that the Lord Jesus stumbled under the weight of the cross. Why the Romans compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry His cross is not stated. Add to this the fact that Mel Gibson’s strong conservative Catholic views dominate the film and you have a mixture laced with error conveyed through a powerful visual medium.

hath raised Him

Mary or Jesus Alone

Mel Gibson told 'Christianity Today': "*I've been actually amazed at the way I would say the evangelical audience has—hands down—responded to this film more than any other Christian group.*" What makes it so amazing, he says, is that "the film is so Marian." Gibson knows that Protestants don't regard Mary in the way Catholics do. And Gibson goes beyond many Catholics when he calls her "a tremendous co-redemptrix and mediatrix." (Excerpt from review by David Neff ; Christianity Today; posted 02/20/04).

Throughout this movie Mary is referred to as "mother" by the disciples, following Roman Catholic tradition and heresy. On the way to Calvary Jesus always reflects back on His mother. And when seeing "Satan", the enemy only vanishes when Jesus sees His mother. All of this is designed to convey the false idea that the Son of God received the strength to go to the cross from His mother.

Tradition or the Word Alone

There is an eloquence to the silence of Scripture. One of the evidences of Divine Inspiration is the restraint used by the writers. Listen to the Scriptural account of the crucifixion given in just three English words, "...*they crucified him*...". The gospels record His words from the cross – not how He looked on the cross. Perhaps many of us are guilty of going beyond what the Bible says in our attempts to reconstruct the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. While we would in no way minimize the physical sufferings of the Lord Jesus, perhaps we have dwelt too much on what we can relate to, His physical sufferings, and have not dwelt enough on what we cannot relate to, His "spiritual" sufferings.

We need to understand that all of the brutalities He physically suffered at the hands of men did not atone for sin. "*For he hath made him to be sin [literally, a sin offering] for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*" (2 Cor.5:21 - The 3 dark hours). It is misguided at best and blasphemous at worst to place words in the mouth of the Son of God, and guess at His feelings – either on the cross, or on the way to the cross – as does this movie.

from the dead,

When one comes to the New Testament letters given as instruction for the church they expound the meaning of the death of Christ not the feelings of the Lord Jesus.

What really matters is not what Jesus felt but what His death accomplished.

Critics have noted:

"The Passion is a composite of the Passion narratives in the four Gospels embroidered with non-scriptural traditions as well as the imaginative inspiration of the filmmaker..." "Gibson has, perhaps, muted Christ's teachings, making it difficult for viewers unfamiliar with the New Testament and the era's historical milieu to contextualize the circumstances leading up to Jesus' arrest. And though, for Christians, the Passion is the central event in the history of salvation, the 'how' of Christ's death is lingered on at the expense of the 'why?'" (Excerpt from review by Jeffrey Overstreet Christianity Today; Posted 03/04/04). Another has stated: "Watching The Passion is like experiencing a woman's labor pains—but never witnessing the joy that makes the pain worth it all." (Excerpt from review by Peter T. Chattaway; Christianity Today; Posted 02/25/04).

Visual Images or Faith Alone

For most of Christendom's history "the faith" has been tempted by visual images (idolatry) - such as the crucifix with a man dying on the cross. This represents the false notion that Christ's sacrifice is ongoing, that His sufferings are unending, His sacrifice continual, His work unfinished. Against this stands the empty tomb – God's statement of a finished work, a once for all sacrifice, (Heb.10), a risen Savior, ascended, *glorified*. A Christ on the cross can never give the guilty conscience peace! Only the Christ on the throne (accepted by God) can give peace, assurance, and forgiveness (Rom. 4:25).

"*The Passion of the Christ*" emphasizes the cross and the sufferings of Christ, or as the director calls it, "the wounds of Christ". The Spirit's letters to the church (epistles) emphasize the Lord in glory.

thou shalt be saved." Rom. 10:9

How we ever need to be careful to stick closely to Scripture when we approach such holy ground as the Person of the Son of God. Let us beware of any misrepresentations that would in any way detract from His glorious Person or His finished work. As for those who have said the movie contains a "few minor inaccuracies", let us take seriously the Biblical warning, "*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (Gal.5:9). When there's "death in the pot" the whole stew is bad (2Kg. 4:40). How much wrong is today's church willing to tolerate?

The Passion needed today is for the glory of God – "ye that love the LORD, hate evil." (Psa. 97:10)

The very gospel we preach "the word of faith" is not based on presenting a visible Christ: "*faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God*" (Rom. 10:17).

"But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Rom. 10:6-8).

In Deut. 4:12-16 the Lord intentionally concealed the sight of Himself and they "saw no similitude [likeness]; only ye heard a voice." This was so that they wouldn't make any image of Him. Heb 11:1 tells us, "... *faith is ... evidence of things not seen.*" Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, said to Thomas after His resurrection: "...Thomas, *because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).

Besides – who needs to see the movie when you've read *the Book!* Larry R. Price / Larryrprice.com

Chronicle #5 of 'The Disciple's Walk' series will look at 'a love that hates' to encourage in a God-pleasing walk

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The Chronicles of the

Disciple's Walk

4

"The Passion of the Christ"

From a Biblical Perspective

The Scriptures say, "*prove [examine; critique; evaluate] all things – hold fast that which is good*" (1Thess. 5:21). The focus of the church is not the Christ on the cross but the Lord on the throne – in God's glory. "*Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more*" (2Cor. 5:16).

Note the following comments on this verse:

"The Christ risen and sitting on the throne as our Lord is not in the flesh, and the Christ whom the church adores is that risen Christ." "Even his [Paul] sight of Jesus with his mortal eyes was no longer cared for, in comparison with faiths view of Him after a spiritual fashion" (C.H. Spurgeon).

It is appropriate that Paul has often been referred to as the apostle of the risen Christ.