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Gleanings

Called to Cultural Transformation



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Since January, I have used *Gleanings* to share Billy's story. If you have been reading along, you know how Billy was converted from a cultural paradigm of Christianity that was common in his day and have read how his conversion to true Christianity presented a career conundrum for him. You heard how spiritual fathers helped him discern the will of the Lord and then how a godly community helped him hone in on his life calling. Billy felt called to two major works in his life, both of which were daunting and, in the natural, beyond his ability. This month, I want to share about the first of these two.

When Billy converted to genuine Christianity from cultural Christianity, he realized there were major differences between the two worldviews. The differences were so great that he believed cultural Christianity was not Christianity at all. This reality burdened him greatly. He believed the culture had been duped and felt led to respond to this travesty. His solution was to write a book.

Billy was in his late twenties when he was converted and he had little knowledge of the Bible. For the next ten years, he studied Scripture and compiled his thoughts on the differences between cultural Christianity and genuine Christianity. He referred to these differences as "issues of manners." He considered "manners" to be the ways in which people conducted their lives.

One of his core convictions was that theology drives everything in life. This means that your view of God will determine your practices and habits and, therefore, your manners, which then determines the results that you receive in life.

For example, if you believe that Christianity has nothing to contribute to the workplace, then your primary purpose for work will most likely be to make money, achieve power, or acquire influence. Success will be measured accordingly. But Billy viewed Christianity as the defining worldview of all of life, including work. Therefore his practices were first and foremost to reflect alignment with Christ. Alignment with Christ was most clearly attained by living biblically and obedience to God was primary. This meant that money, power, and influence were not primary purposes for work; they were at best only secondary purposes.

As an example, consider some Scriptural texts on money:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33 NIV)

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Luke 16:13 NIV)

The Matthew text states that our focus and priority in life must be to "seek first his kingdom [God's will] and his righteousness [God's ways]," which means that we must focus our energies on discovering God's will and doing his will according to his ways. This applies to every jurisdiction, including work.

The Luke text teaches that we cannot worship God and money; the worship of the two is mutually exclusive. The word *cannot* does not mean we lack permission to worship God and money; the Greek word implies that we lack the power. Furthermore, this text does not mean God is anti-money, but it means that in every area of life, including work, we must serve God and God alone. Whatever profit we attain through work is a by-product and never the primary goal.

The contrast between a cultural view of work driven by a desire for money, power, and influence and a Christian view of work driven by a desire to obey the will and ways of God is startling. Interestingly, the cultural view in Billy's day was essentially the same as the cultural view today—nothing has significantly changed.

In reading Billy's book, I found it, though written more than two hundred years ago, to be surprisingly applicable today. In fact, I found only one cultural issue of his day that is not an issue today. As I read the book, I told my wife that if you eliminated this one topic, it would be difficult to believe Billy's book had not been written recently.

Below is a list of some of the topics Billy addressed.



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Cultural Christian Beliefs

Your beliefs do not determine your actions.

Being morally good is enough to be acceptable with God.

Faith is a private matter, which is not to be shared with others.

Humans are not inherently evil.

Because humans are not inherently evil, there is no need of a savior.

Christianity is limited to Sunday.

Work consumes our lives; our spiritual life is secondary.

Genuine Christian Beliefs

Your beliefs determine your actions.

Being morally good is not enough to definitively conclude that one is acceptable with God.

Faith is not a private matter; it is to be shared with others.

Humans are inherently evil.

Because humans are inherently evil, there is need of a savior.

Christianity is a daily lifestyle.

Spiritual life is primary; work flows out of our spiritual life.

I was truly amazed. When Billy wrote the book, he was in his late thirties and had been a Christian only ten years. The book displayed deftness in scholarship and in his arguments. He clearly spent many hours studying and writing at a time when everything was done by hand. There were no computers, no typewriters, no dictionaries, and little printed material. It must have been very tedious and laborious to write a book of over two hundred pages by hand.

With few tools and given his relative youth in the Lord, he must have leaned heavily on guidance from godly spiritual fathers and his covenant community to teach him the many subtleties of Christianity.

Interestingly, Billy delayed writing the book because he wanted more time for research and reflection. But finally, he realized that he had to start. He could not wait any longer.

To lay out his arguments so adroitly required commitment, focus, patience, and perseverance. Undoubtedly, he knew that his book would be culturally unpopular, which means he didn't expect it to be a best seller and certainly didn't expect to get rich. His motive for writing was never money; he was motivated by God's call and by obedience to the commission he received from his heavenly Father. He knew that he was called to challenge the culture with biblical truth and nothing was going to stop him.

When a person is called to do something, the measuring stick of success is not power, popularity, or profit, but is obedience to the assignment. A desire for cultural transformation was deep in Billy's heart. His book was intended to disturb the culture of his day by presenting truth in a clear, compelling, and cogent manner, which he did most deftly.

The title of the book is *Real Christianity*. It is available in hardback, paperback, and Kindle editions. I encourage you to read it and allow Billy, a man called to cultural transformation, to reach through the ages and challenge your paradigm of Christianity.

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