



The "YouTube Syndrome"

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)

It would be difficult to estimate the number of sermons, articles and chapters in books teaching something about the spiritual deception of our times which begin by quoting 2 Timothy 4:3-4, so if you're expecting yet another such exposition, be warned this is not going to precisely follow that path. Whereas this is speaking about the outright deceived, those who willfully "turn away their ears from the truth" and could care less if someone's teaching is genuinely scriptural (or that someone even quotes Scripture), there seems to be a parallel problem among a great many who proclaim they only follow "biblical" teachers and only seek those who preach the substance of the Word. And that problem has to do with their failure to actually follow through with 1 John 4:1, to test all things by the measure of God's Word. What happens when those who say the Word is important to them don't really read and apply it any more than those who are outright deceived and following false teachers? Is there really a discernible spiritual difference between the two?

For most of the past 30 or so years, we have been presented with the problem of "church transfer growth". In the context it is most often presented, this is not usually speaking about those who are already a born-again Christian who find themselves in a situation where they need to leave a bad church or fellowship for a good one, but a nomadic mass of Christian "shoppers" who go from one self-pleasing place to the next. They'll go where the music is the best, or a particular program is appealing, the food is good, or for whatever particular thing, in the final analysis, appeals most to a desire of the flesh. We have looked upon them with great concern, knowing that this is a symptom of someone who may believe in Christ intellectually, but for various reasons is

"The 'YouTube Syndrome'", Page 1 of 5

not willing to follow through with a personal sacrifice of self and dedication of service to Him alone. They go to church regularly, but ultimately they do not seem to be personally changed by it. And when it gets boring or, God forbid, the attitude of the pulpit changes and begins to actually challenge the quality of their commitment, they shop for something better.

But now we have what appears to be a new and different generation of spiritual wanderers. Among the things they seem to have in common is that having come out of a bad church experience, they desire something genuine, and that struggle has given them an appreciation not just for the truth, but even more so for the Truth of God's Word. However, instead of roaming from one brick and mortar church to the next, they go from one YouTube teacher to the next. They go from one Christian website to the next. They go from one Christian blog to the next. They are a type of "transfer growth" who don't have to leave the comfort of their computer, iPad or smart phone. They don't even have to leave home.

To be sure, I am not saying anyone and everyone watching anyone and everyone providing an online teaching is evil and doomed and headed for hell. Go back to the verses cited at the opening. I'm addressing a growing constituency of those who don't **follow through** with their own personal investigation and verification by the Word, and end up having their ears tickled even if many—or even **all**—of those they're watching are sound teachers. Those who qualify for this new variation of "transfer growth" are clearly identified when, sooner or later, it comes out that they cannot actually tell the difference between the sound Bible teacher and the patently false. Their basis for deciding what is or is not "truth" has nothing to do with measuring it against God's Word, but is based on what sounds right, what looks good, and what is also, in the end, appealing to the flesh in some way.

In other words, the standard they wind up using to evaluate a YouTube teacher is not far from the worldly measuring stick the transfer growth adherents employ as they go from one self-pleasing place to the next. Those infected with the "YouTube Syndrome" judge not the context, but the presentation and the presenter by testing them against the worldly standards of being appealing to the senses. They look good, they speak well, it all sounds very persuasive, the graphics and set production are outstanding, so it must be good teaching. If it looks biblical, and talks biblical, and walks biblical, it **must** be

biblical, right? Except they don't check the Bible to find out what is or isn't actually biblical.

Again, I am not talking about the patently false teachers and their regular following who have no desire to really hear anything about God's Word and who themselves have personally forsaken it. That which I'm addressing here has recently been on display in specific Facebook groups' pages and related online forums among the very group I'm speaking about: saved Christians with a higher than average experience coming out of a false or bad church or movement and who have issued a near-universal declaration of their commitment to God's Word. These are Christians who are supposed to not just possess an above average spiritual awareness because of their personal experiences dealing with false teachers and because so many of them have come out from under the same, but who believe that they are the most aware believers when it comes to the deception and apostasy of our times because of their personal commitment to His Word.

In this peculiar situation, there was the long-standing teacher and head of a decades long, sound Bible-teaching ministry who discovered that he had brought into his ministry fold a pastor whose teachings weren't just contrary to his own, but undermining fundamental doctrines of the faith. When it finally came to the ministry head's attention, he of course understood the inherent contradictions and the inevitable process began to either correct or eject. (Yes, there's more to the soap opera, but let's stick to what is pertinent to our topic.)

The first amazing fact is how few and far between were even the marginal reports of the discrepancy in their teachings during the time of the questionable pastor's tenure. In other words, the followers of this main teacher who nearly all self-identify as Bible-using practitioners of the Word, seemed to not have been able to tell the difference between the sound teaching of the one, and the obvious aberrations in the other. In fact, it was not uncommon to find the repeated recommendation encouraging people to listen to **both** teachers because "they teach the same thing". This actually took place not just within the rank-and-file membership of the flock, so to speak, but even among its many mid-level pastors and leaders. There was but a trickle of discernment that they were teaching very, very different things.

But then the split occurred and fractured to a point where specific explanations needed to be provided for the biblical basis not just of the process of separation of the personalities involved, but the particular doctrinal issues at stake. Such have been provided (and seem to still be coming) from both sides. And yet, the responses of the flock indicate a large number who cannot distinguish what either is saying by the standard of God's Word. Many have disregarded the doctrinal issues and restrict it to some kind of personal relationship problem, and many have expressed their hope that the "differences" can still be somehow worked out. Even more alarming, it seems that the false teacher is getting more support in the wake of what has taken place. At the end of it all, the trend indicates that the false teacher is probably going to come out on top, numerically speaking, among a group that says its self-awareness of such things prevents this very thing from happening!

You see, rather than being exposed by documenting the heresy and error by his own hand in his public writings and by his own voice in his publicly posted videos, those who claim to be discerning and dedicated to God's Word in such things are showing how they **actually** measure things: "It sounds good to me". "It seems good to me". In spite of the original teacher having specifically taught against these errors for decades, in spite of his being able to accurately present the confirmation of the right handling of God's Word for each issue in question, it does not matter to a very large portion who have been following them both. They can't see any difference between them and cannot see this as anything more than some kind of personal tiff. Far too many cannot differentiate between the right handling of God's Word on the one side, and the mishandling on the other.

Just to beat the poor dead horse again, this is significant because this is a group who says of itself that they are "Bible-aware", that they measure things according to God's Word, that they are more than casual Bible readers who because of their life's experience only seek to follow teachers of the Word. We're not talking about the biblically lost who follow Benny and Kenny and Beth, to put a face on the kinds of videos the outright deceived pursue.

To be sure, there are other contributing factors, but one of the most significant is a generation who don't engage in literal transfer growth by exchanging physical locations on Sunday mornings, but switch from one video to the next, unable to actually measure the teaching by God's Word **even when it IS sound Bible teaching**.

"The 'YouTube Syndrome'", Page 4 of 5

*“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, **if possible, even the elect.** (Matthew 24:24)*

Commentators debate greatly over whether this is a rhetorical statement meaning there is no way the elect can be misled, while others posit it is a warning that it is, indeed, possible. I think this very situation is proving that this is already incipiently taking place. And I think all sound Bible teachers on every level need to be wary of their “number of views” for their online postings. It does not automatically equate to an affirmation that things are going in a positive direction just because viewership is increasing. There are deeper issues which need to be considered and pursued.

Yes, there is no doubt that there are personal issues involved, that human beings rarely handle such separations without due faults or shortcomings on either party’s part. But what I am observing for the first time on a large scale is the number who are unable to judge the truth of what either party **teaches**. Because they have stopped actually feeding on God’s Word personally, and seem to have substituted a diet of eye candy in their video habits, it’s not that they just can’t identify the false teachings, but neither can they confirm the good and authentic ones.

Perhaps the End Times is much further along than any of us fully realize, but this has certainly been an eye opener for me. I would suggest that it’s not enough to say, “I only watch those who teach from the Word” without following through with the Word yourself. We have apparently reached a time when we no longer are only warning and exhorting those who have lost an active interest in their Bibles, but need to encourage the rest to actually **use** their Bibles.

In Him,

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