

Playing to Sell-Out Crowds: An Original Essay. By Christopher Staron

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PREFACE:

I have undertaken this article at the prompting of a good friend of mine who asked me to put into writing some of the items that we discussed over lunch. These things have been in my mind and heart for a long time and I am thankful now for the opportunity to print them here. These thoughts are not popular today. But if I were worried about popularity, I would be preaching a whole different game than what we will discuss in this article. We use many verses in this text; however, I would like to highlight some that are important in general to prepare our minds for this study:

Philippians 1:9 (NASB)

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and *in real knowledge* and *in all discernment* so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ."

Philippians 4:8 (NASB)

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

PART I: OCCUPATION

SECRETARY

short story by Chris Staron

2/22/05

Claudia is one of those sweet, tiny, be speckled women who are present in every church. She has a mouse-like voice and is always so sweet to everyone she meets. In fact, Claudia is active in every organization the church operates. When the plate is passed, she always gives above 10% and she hasn't missed a Sunday since her mother died ten years ago.

She visits the elderly.

She helps the youth group.

She supervises the nursery.

Claudia is into everything.

One day, Mrs. Paulette Banks, church secretary, realized she knew nothing about this saint. So, she asked Claudia if she could spend the day with her. Paulette treated her out to lunch and the two women enjoyed a leisurely stroll around the park.

At one end of the park, Claudia stopped and put her hand to her chin.

"I think I ought to stop in at work. See if things are okay," said Claudia.

Paulette knew that Claudia was a secretary, but she could not remember for the life of her whom she was a secretary for. Was it a doctor? A lawyer? Dentist?

So the two women scuttled across the street and a few blocks south until they reached the red light district. Their conversation quickly changed from the beauty of the fall day to the unsightly neighborhood in which they found themselves.

"It's just ahead," said Claudia, pointing to a dirty stoop a few feet away.

Claudia opened the door to Paulette who stepped cautiously in. She was surprised by how dark the office was. The walls were bare. Other than a small green couch, there was only a little desk and a staircase leading to the darkened upstairs. Claudia politely offered her to sit at the couch, but Paulette declined.

"Just one moment. I need to check the machine," said Claudia. "Then maybe we can get some ice cream on the way back to the park."

That sounded nice to Paulette. She continued to walk around the small office and look at the sparse furnishings. This did not seem the right neighborhood for someone like Claudia to be working in.

The answering machine beeped loudly and began playing back messages.

“I’m calling in a 10:30 for ‘Roman’ with Sandi for Tuesday,” came a man’s voice on the other end of the line.

Paulette thought that sounded funny. She looked at her watch.

“Looks like he missed his appointment. It’s already past noon,” she said.

Without looking up from her schedule book, Claudia replied: “No he didn’t. He meant ten P.M.”

This too sounded strange. Ten *P.M.*? Why on earth would someone have an appointment that late at night? Paulette decided it wasn’t polite to ask questions. Instead, she continued to nose around the office. She started humming one of her favorite hymns to keep her mind off of the shady neighborhood.

With a jingle of bells, the front door opened and in walked a woman in a red dress. She was... showing in several rather scandalous areas. Paulette nearly choked on the hymn when she saw her step in. *Who knows what kind of riff-raff frequents this neighborhood?*, thought Paulette.

When Claudia looked up, she smiled at the woman in the red dress and handed her a stack of notes.

“Here is today’s client list, in order. Your first appointment is at 8. I’ll forward your calls,” chirped Claudia.

The woman just smiled and thanked her and then headed upstairs. Paulette was now really confused.

“Claudia,” she said, “does *she* work here?”

Claudia smiled. “Work here? She owns the place.” She went back to checking the messages. Paulette changed her mind about sitting on the couch and slowly set herself down. This surely was an odd place for her to be in. What kind of woman comes to work dressed like that?

“Goodness sakes,” said Claudia, looking behind her desk. “The laundry service hasn’t come today.”

This was the final straw for Paulette. What kind of lawyer’s office has a laundry service pickup? She stood and took her place across the desk from Claudia.

“Claudia,” she said gently, “are these women prostitutes?”

“Well,” said Claudia, picking up the phone to call the laundry service, “that’s not their preferred description. But... yes.”

Paulette was confused and shocked at the same time. Was Claudia working in a brothel? What was a God-fearing woman doing in...

“You work at a brothel?” asked Paulette.

“Yes,” she juggled the phone, “can you hold on a moment?”

Claudia dialed the number for the laundry service. Paulette reached down and hung up the phone by depressing the trigger on the telephone console.

“You work at a brothel?” Paulette repeated.

“Yes. What? It’s not like I’m sleeping with strange men myself. I’m just the secretary,” justified Claudia, brushing Paulette’s finger from the phone console. Paulette held her ground.

“Still. Doesn’t it bother you that you are a part of this?” Paulette searched Claudia’s eyes for some explanation.

“Look,” Claudia said with a slight giggle, still in her sweet, mousy voice. “It’s not like I come here myself! I’m just a secretary like any other secretary. I answer the phones, I book appointments, I sometimes take out the trash. Just like you do.”

“Yes, but I am a secretary for a church. You help these women participate in sexual immorality.”

Claudia didn’t get it. She just looked at Paulette with that sweet smile she always wore... Much to Paulette’s shock, Claudia did not seem to understand the problem with her occupation.

Paulette continued, seeing that it hadn’t quite sunk in yet. “You can’t just separate your job from what your occupation and company stand for.”

Even with Paulette’s fine argumentation, Claudia did not see the problem. Once the phone calls were finished, Paulette and Claudia left the red light district and found their way to the ice cream store. After leaving the sketchy neighborhood, Paulette was still uneasy. How could Claudia not see that her role in this company was aiding other people’s sin?

When Paulette got home, her mind was full of questions. She needed something to take her thoughts away from what she had seen that day. She opened a Christian magazine and read a nice article about comfort in the Psalms. When she had finished the article, she flipped to the next page and saw an article for a “Christian” rock artist who had his shirt off, showing his muscles and attractive body. A quick look at the song list and she could see clearly that this album was not worshipping the Lord.

Next she turned on “Christian television”. There was her favorite program, just cutting to commercial. And that commercial was for a televangelist who was selling “blessings” at two hundred dollars a pop. This network was making its money by allowing heretics to sell their wares.

Agitated, she picked up her church bulletin and scanned the rows of announcements. There she found an advertisement for the church bingo night. Only fifty cents a card to raise money for the youth group. Did she work for a church that encouraged gambling, even in this slight way?

Paulette sat back, lost in thought. Did this mean something? Was there a trend here, or was she just being a legalist? She knew that’s what her friends would call her if she said anything. Her eyes moved slowly from the magazine, to the television, to the bulletin and back to the magazine. She was in check and didn’t know where to go.

PART II. GOOD VS. BEST

A. Am I like Claudia?

Hey. Take a deep breath. We’re going to get into some heavy stuff that is just not popular. In fact, you’d be hard pressed to find this being preached on today, or even talked about. Come in with an open mind. This applies to you.

I work in Hollywood at the moment. Most of the money I have earned in the last year comes from secular television channels like VH1, Fox and Spike TV. The question that has been ripping into me lately has been: what am I doing working on this show? For this network?

Much of the secular work I have done has been on reality shows. Producers are always looking to find the dirty stories and ways to embarrass the cast; to catch them in “random” acts of debauchery. The shows display such “pure” entertainment as: encouraging people to covet hot cars, lusting after models, and constant barrages of cursing and sex.

But hey. I was “just” shooting it, right? It’s not like I was out there doing it myself, right? I was only taking out their trash, right? Answering their phones....

Being their secretary...

And millions and millions of people have seen this garbage and been effected by it. And I was one of the people who helped put this thing together.

I hope you got a change to read the story “Secretary”. I’d like you to think about your reaction to it. I’m hoping you were thinking, “what is a Christian woman doing working as a pimp?”. I am still asking myself a similar question: “what is a Christian man doing producing such trash?”. You know what the answer is?

I doubt I ought to be doing these projects.

But I anticipate that some of you are thinking, “but she was in a great place to witness for the Lord. Jesus ate with tax collectors and prostitutes.”

And *that* is the first half-truth I want to address.

B. Half-Truths

If I could wish one thing on the people of God today it would be discernment. You hear so many people talking about wanting to speak in tongues or to have the power of healing. Rarely do they get excited about discernment.

Discernment is the ability to cut through the jibber jabber and really see clearly into the issues.

The most necessary need for discernment lies in the area of half-truths. This is a lie that is buried in a bit of truth (and, no, it does not have to be a 50/50 split). Or, it could be a bit of information that slightly knocks people away from the pure truth.

For example (oh, the mail I’m going to get from this one!): St. Francis of Assisi’s only famous quote*:

“Preach the gospel: if necessary, use words”.

That is to say, preach the gospel through the way you live. And you know what? I agree that the gospel should be lived out in our daily lives. But the reason I classify this statement as a half-truth is because it discourages people from using words to share Jesus.

Romans 10:14 (NIV): “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

Ouch. There are a lot of good points here. People cannot believe in someone they have not heard of, and they cannot HEAR something until it is SPOKEN. Good works and a godly lifestyle are great, essential, but on their own they only communicate that you are a good person, or maybe even a “spiritual” person. But people cannot trust in Jesus, the only way to God (John 14:6), unless they know who He is.

And that is why I classify this famous quote as a half-truth: because it is misleading. You may not think so. But believe me, there are a lot of very comfortable congregations, not just in churches but also on colleges and in small groups, who are content to be good people without speaking about Jesus. Finally, I think it is necessary for us to not only make Christ a part of our physical life, but also a part of our verbal life. Christ needs to be in our conversation.

I learned a great lesson from watching one of my close friends at college. Not only did she “walk the walk” of her faith, but she was also always talking about it. Not necessarily yelling at people and telling them they are sinners (yes, there is a place for that!), but when something good would happen to someone she’d say, “Praise God”. Or if someone was having a rough time, she’d offer to pray for them and then she would. You could hardly keep her testimony inside of her. She was always telling people about how God had turned her life around. But it was always just part of the conversation-- and rather than scare people away, since they could see the true person she was, it attracted them. And that attraction drew people to Christ.

All this to say that half-truths are dangerous because there are elements of truth in them. I’d rather be faced with a flat-out lie than a half-truth because lies are much easier to detect, and easier to diffuse. But life is a minefield of half-truths.

**As one of my friends recently pointed out, it is debated whether or not this is an actual quote. I have not researched it heavily, but the information I have heard is that it does not appear in any of his writings. As my friend has argued, he was also very engaged in evangelism. There is also a debate whether it is "if necessary" or "when necessary".*

C. Jesus and the Tax Collectors

Another great half-truth that is bound to earn me some hate mail is maybe even harder to discern. In the Bible, Jesus spends a lot of time eating and talking with tax collectors, prostitutes and other people who were not well thought of in His day. So, a lot of us have taken on this “be in the world, but not of the world” philosophy. And this is a good way to go. We do need to be out in the world, living amongst people who do not trust Christ and serving amongst them in order to spread the gospel.

However...

While people are quick to point out that Jesus hung out with these people, they never quite mention that Jesus never aided them in their sinful occupations. Jesus did not collect crooked taxes with the tax collectors. Jesus did not book clients, nor frequent, prostitutes. And yet, He was reaching out to these people.

And THAT is the point of “Secretary”. Claudia lives like many people do: working in a job for a company that does not glorify the Lord. This raises some really tough questions:

Can Christians work at Playboy?

Is it wrong for believers to sell advertising and gain money for their networks and publications if their sponsors are heretical?

Can Christian models show immodest parts of their bodies?

Is Chris Staron really able to justify working in reality shows?

Before you start trying to figure this out based purely on your own desires, consider this: Whenever I am stuck in a moral dilemma, I try to ask myself, “when I am standing before the judgment seat of God, how is He going to react to this?”. Often, this is all I need to cut through to the heart of the matter, to gain discernment. In other words, when I die and go to the judgment seat of Christ, and we get around to talking about this part of my life, what is He going to say? Is Jesus going to thank me for helping produce reality shows? Or is He going to ask why I was not producing God-fearing programming?

Does this mean that the people at Playboy are not going to be reached? No. We can reach them through getting to know them outside of work. It just means being picky about our employment, and being creative about reaching out. We can't simply say, “I can work here. It's not like I'm the one doing [fill in the blank].” or, “I may work at Playboy, but that does not mean I'll be affected by the magazine”. You may not be actually performing the act, but you are aiding it. Aiding in the process can wear down your defenses. It may not be literally the same act as working at a brothel... but how many of us work in industries, like the entertainment industry, where the Holy Spirit is blasphemed? Others may be pushing sex, but we may be unwittingly pushing the unpardonable sin.

Working in Hollywood I have been to my share of “Christian in the Entertainment Industry” gatherings. All of this is necessary and well intentioned. But I continually hear, “you can be a Christian plumber and reach out to people. Why can't you be a Christian camera operator? Why can't you be a Christian makeup artist?”. Nobody's saying you can't.

Just remember: Jesus was no pimp, so why would you want to be?

D. Good vs. Best

This leads us to a quick discussion of the difference of doing good and doing what is best. Recently, my brother and I have been offered great full-time jobs with reputable film companies. However, we have also been feeling the call on our lives to produce evangelistic Christian films of our own. We have been praying about this for years. Lately, God has been lining us up to work with some of the best Christian filmmakers in the US, and meeting several more from around the world. God has definitely blessed us in getting here.

However, in praying about these jobs, which I would have jumped on a year ago, we have discovered the difference between doing something good and doing the best. To date we have been offered full time work at with at least two “Christian based” production companies (in other words, not necessarily producing Christian movies, but a place run by Christians). These are good jobs with guaranteed pay and some benefits in cool locations, with high-profile work.

...But...

Nick and I have been praying about these opportunities, and, although they are good, they are not God's best for us. Our philosophy has become, "why run the race if you aren't trying for first?". In other words, I want to be going for God's ideal, or else, going for nothing at all. In our spiritual walks this is represented by Jesus saying it is better for us to be either hot or cold than lukewarm (Revelation 3:16). Can't the same apply to our occupations? In real life it means running so as to win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24).

E. Challenges to Consider

Are there half-truths hiding in your heart?

When in need of discernment, ask yourself what God's reaction is likely to be on the judgment day.

Is this God's best? Or is this something less than best?

This will all tie back in later on...

PART III: REDEMPTIVE MESSAGES IN MEDIA

A. *Weekend At Bernie's 2*

Do you remember the movie *Weekend at Bernie's 2*? What an AWESOME picture of the Bible. Think about it:

Bernie's still dead from the first movie. BUT an enchantress casts a spell on him so that whenever there is music playing, Bernie gets up and starts walking. IN THE SAME WAY God resurrects us whenever the music of the Holy Spirit plays in our lives. Right?

OH! AND remember how Bernie always walked towards his treasure when he was listening to the music? That's because when we listen to the Holy Spirit, He will lead us to our treasure.

AND THE BEST PART! Remember how the one guy gets a curse on him and the only way he can be cured is by the blood of a pure virgin? WELL, we were healed by the blood of the offspring of the virgin Mary!

Isn't it amazing how the writers of *Weekend At Bernie's 2* were just sitting there preaching the gospel right under Hollywood's nose? And it's so clear!

Okay.

I

hope

you

realize

I'm

using

hyperbole

(i.e. I'm blowing it out of proportion)

to

prove

a

point.

B. Debunking other Illustrations

BUT you will hear people saying this all of the time about many different kinds of movies. Their favorites are The Matrix , Bruce Almighty, and The Lord of the Rings. I'm going to skip The Lord of the Rings because, quite simply, I haven't ever heard anyone find a single biblical parallel in the film, and therefore, I think that argument alone knocks it out of the discussion. I think people just like the idea of being brave. And here is my problem with using the other two movies as illustrations:

Remember our discussion of Francis of Assisi's quote? A little bit of lie in a lot of truth is often more dangerous than a flat-out lie because it is harder to detect. That is why I do not think that movies like these should be used as illustrations of the Bible. In fact, we need to stop supporting this kind of trash. Perhaps our next big opportunity to do this is going to be with The DaVinci Code the movie. Ron Howard and Tom Hanks are just two of the big names attached to this project; it is going to draw a lot of people to see it. And it does not hurt that it is based on a best selling book.

My fear is that Christians are going to see it, support it, and then try to use it as an illustration when, in fact, it's whole purpose is to mock Jesus. Their reasons for seeing it will be 1) Because they want to see it so they can disprove it. 2) Because they want to learn more about the Gnostic writings 3) Because everyone else is seeing it 4) Because it talks about God.

In my opinion, those who see it for reason #4 are in the most dangerous position.

This is because their minds are in “there is truth in this” mode, instead of looking at it for what it is: propaganda to reject Jesus and turn to the divine feminine. Those who go to see it to debunk it are also, unwittingly, supporting the film. Do not forget that every time you buy a movie ticket, or rent a DVD you are giving money back to the people who produced the film. They, in turn, will take that as a good sign to keep producing films that bash Christ. Believe me, I work with these people. And regardless of the “bible based” trash that is coming up (I have to work with these people, don’t make me say their names...), or the “Christian” companies that produce Oscar winning films featuring glorified crudeness and sex, I refuse to support it. Because the money speaks to them. And when the money comes in, they consider that our support. Because where our money lies, there lies our hearts also.

As for those “Christian” companies...you’ll know them by their fruit.

I’ve had a lot of individuals come back and say to me: “but the writer just wrote it based on his research, not on intentions to indoctrinate people”. It really does not matter what the writer’s intentions were. We need to look at what the outcome of watching something like this is going to be. It will cause countless numbers of people to question Jesus as Christ, thinking that the Gnostic gospels are proof, which they are not. I’m not going to get into a discussion of the entire book/movie *The DaVinci Code*, you can read a number of good books on the subject. I recommend the one by Lutzer because he is a straight shooter. Please, please, please do not investigate it by reading/watching it. You only support it by doing so.

My point is that Christians and many “spiritual” people of this age are keen on watching movies and trying to find what they call “redemptive messages”. They look for characters that can represent Jesus or other Biblical people and twist the logic of the movie to justify how it fits in their worldview. Like looking for the Holy Spirit and resurrection in *Weekend at Bernie’s 2*, this is absurd and, often, harmful.

The effects of it are often not clear. Instead, they are like a single grain of sand that is hard to detect, but if it’s in your clothes all day, it will start to wear you thin. It’s why God told the people of Israel over and over not to intermarry with the people of the lands they conquered: because it would lead them astray. Maybe not in the first generation, but certainly as time goes on. I strongly urge you to read C.S. Lewis’ essay “[Men Without Chests](#)” from *The Abolition of Man* for more information.

I think it is wise to ask yourself before you see a movie, “when I’m standing before God on the judgment day, am I going to be glad to have spent two hours honoring this film? Is Jesus going to be glad I used this movie as an illustration in my sermon *without* debunking it? How am I going to account for using the Lord’s money to pay to see this film?”. Seriously. If these questions do not even pique your curiosity, or else, you are thinking about writing me off as a legalist, you should take a look at your motives. Shouldn’t we be mindful of that which is pure and God has approved of? If so, why are we not questioning ourselves as to the impact of these movies?

I did not see *The Matrix* sequels. But what I know of them from doing research, I

am glad they were made because they finally shut people up about the series being Christian in nature. Everyone who saw the sequels told me about how weird and New Age they were. But the first movie is still often quoted, especially in books about being bold and books on being men of God. What the filmmakers admit they did was take pieces from Christianity, Buddhism, New-Ageism and the like to fit their story.

The only reason I dare speak of these movies in a publication is that I hope believers will be encouraged to de-bunk these myths. My whole purpose in including this section is to show you how these films are not the types of films we want to discuss with God on the judgment day. They are films filled with rot that believers should not see. "Like what?", you may be asking. Well, here goes nothing:

Reasons why these movies are not good for Christians to see and certainly why we dare not classify them as Christian films.

The Matrix:

a) Jesus knew He was God His whole life. Neo did not. Gnostic's and others believe that Jesus didn't know who He was. This is also called the "Gardener" theory after the book and movie Being There.

b) The amount of sexuality. We are supposed to flee from sexual immorality, not go to see it on the screen. Don't believe me? How modest are Trinity's outfits? How pure are the nightclub scenes? I rest my case.

c. Jesus was never in love/ married. Again, Gnostic. This is another heresy that DaVinci is trying to push, like in The Last Temptation of Christ. Many Gnostics believe that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that they had a daughter together. This belief is contrary to the Bible and is blatant heresy. That Neo and Trinity are in love with each other automatically disqualifies him from being a "Jesus figure".

d. The emphasis on drugs (the pills).

e. New Age beliefs like "the spoon is not there" (the little kid with the spoon). These want you to believe you do not exist in reality. New Ageism. See our film "It's A Banana" for my argument against this belief.

f. The idea of us not mentally engaging in the reality we are actually in. Neo and his gang escaped from the Matrix and are the only ones living in true reality. This raises questions to what is reality. Anyone who does not think this is a big issue has never attended a college debate on the existence of God. It always comes around to reality. When you question reality, you question absolute truth, when you question absolute truth you question the existence of a one way to God philosophy, when you question "one way" you question the validity of the Bible and verses like John 14:6, when you question John 14:6 and passages like it then the whole thing collapses. It's the "slippery slope" effect. You have to extrapolate the data and think about what happens down the road when you watch this stuff. It gets in there and starts wearing away.

g. We are supposed to focus our minds on that which is pure. Watching this stuff does not help.

h. Obvious glorified violence. Yes, The Passion of the Christ had a lot of violence in it. But you didn't want to go out and scourge someone after you were done, did you? All I can think about from these movies is how cool the gunfights are.

Bruce Almighty:

a. Remember focusing on that which is pure? How does watching Jennifer Aniston have an orgasm play into that? Or hearing Jim Carrey cursing? Or watching him fling his clothes off? Or the focus on Jennifer Aniston's chest?

b. The only time Jesus' name is mentioned is in vain when Jim Carrey slams his shirt in the car. Blasphemy is generally a give-away that something is not a Christian event. Meanwhile, Gandhi is spoken of fondly.

c. Do we need beads to pray?

d. When Morgan Freeman ("God" in the movie) goes up the ladder at the end, there is a somewhat cloudy message there. Some take it as building confidence in man's ability to experience miracles in small ways, and his ability to triumph. Others can take it as saying that we never needed God to solve our problems because we can do it ourselves. And you know what? A lot of people don't see this message in this scene. But it is not implausible for someone to pull this out. Again, see C.S. Lewis' "[Men Without Chests](#)" for the very best exploration of how even a hint of a lie can lead us astray. Seriously, if you disagree with me on this point, you must read Lewis' essay.

e. There is no attempt by "God" to show Bruce the true way He communicates with the world: the Bible.

f. Even though Bruce now knows that God is real and that he has free will, does he know about Jesus? Is he going to Hell when he dies? This may sound petty to you, but I want you to realize that Christianity has little to do with good works, being a good person, understanding free will, and getting what you pray for. It has everything to do with Jesus. To not even mention Him (beyond that one taking His name in vain) is a disgrace and a striking misrepresentation of Christianity, Christians, and God. Too much of the world, thanks to media and popular rumor, thinks that Christianity is a religion of works and that Heaven is obtained by being good. The Bible is infinitely clear that this is not the case. For another clear picture of this thought see the movie Time Changer.

g. What are the repercussions on Bruce for taking revenge on the people he hates (think of the monkey and the street gang)?

I would be wrong if I did not state that there are some good things in this film. That

Bruce actually cares for his girlfriend and does not want to cheat on her (though he gets pretty close) is a positive. Plus there are some good points made. However, I stand firm in my conviction that movies like this do more damage than they do good. Again, our works, our knowledge of God, or our love for each other will not get us into Heaven. Satan does not have to keep us from learning about “god”; he only has to keep us from accepting Jesus as Lord of our lives. Being “close” doesn’t cut it, and movies with sexually charged scenes do not help our cause.

Again, what is God going to say about this two hours I’ve spent?

C. Wrap Up

I will never forget about a conversation my brother had with a man at a museum in Hollywood. It was about The Matrix. This man honestly believed that we are all plugged into a computer somewhere and that we need to unplug from it if we wanted to see reality.

No. I’m not kidding.

There honestly, seriously, are people who buy into these fantasies 100%. I’m not saying that we have to make exceptions just because of extreme cases. However, it is something to think about. After all, the movie does end with Neo bringing what he learned in the first movie and applying it directly to the audience during his closing narration. His character talks right to the audience, trying to convince us that we do not operate in reality.

Aside from cases like this one, it is important to remember that little grain of sand. Or that a boat that is one degree off of it’s course, when going a short distance, only goes a little out of the way. But as it continues to go on, that one-degree gets further and further from the goal. In the same way, when we allow philosophies contrary to the Word of God into our heads they wear at us. It may take a long time for them to do so, or it may happen quickly. But the point is that it always happens. Always. And once we have accepted these contrary philosophies, we are then open because they fit into the first lie, and so on.

Remember, the devil does not have to make us worship him. Instead, his goal is to get our attention off of Jesus. He can do that slowly if he wants to. If he can make us think that we can get to heaven by good works, he has won. If he can make us stumble into impurity, he might just gain the edge to steal our devotion to the Lord. We are under attack. The enemy doesn’t have to fire at us directly with a gun. He can pick the ground out from under us until we fall down in a hole. Or he can wear us out until we are susceptible to any number of other attacks.

The point is: when we come to Christ, He makes us pure. When we engage in impure entertainment we lose our purity. Sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly. But nothing is as better than God’s best. And His best is purity.

IV. THE NARROW GATE

Perhaps one of the most convicting sections of scripture for me is Matthew chapter 7. Read the whole thing some time. It's amazing how it all connects. I'm going to just share a piece of it here.

Matthew 7:13-21 (NASB) Jesus speaking:

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."

It goes on. There are a lot of things to cover here and my fingers are getting tired from typing. Here it goes:

A. The Good Fruit

Simply put: Looking at movies, music, writing, etc. What are the fruits? How many people came to Christ because of watching The Matrix? None. Maybe a Christian used the movie to speak to someone about Christ, but Paul spoke to the people of Athens in Acts 17 and used the "Unknown God" idol to lead people to Christ. Does that mean we should take people to worship before idols, hoping it'll bring us a chance to speak of the gospel?

I'm just sayin'...

What Paul did was take something they had already done and use it for Christ. We can use movies to bring up Christ. BUT that does not mean we show them ungodly films to do so. Nor does that mean we have to partake in these movies ourselves to do "research" as some claim. Paul got the gist of idol worship without worshiping the false gods. Goodness knows that if we need to know about a movie we can look it up online, or even draw the info from the person we want to share with. Witnessing is not excuse for sinning. Paul found it useful to refer to objects around him in order to lead people to Christ, but that did not lead Paul to run out and make more idols in hopes of reaching people. Why are we creating non-Christian films in hope that people will come to Jesus?

That said, I can get back on track: take a look at people putting out “spiritual films”. Even pseudo-Christian films. Like films that feature angels and demons. Is *Touched By An Angel* leading people to Christ? Is it bearing good fruit? Or is it just giving us a wishy-washy soft feeling and a non-biblical view of angels? *Dogma* may have had a few good points about Catholicism (please, I BEG you not to see this film), but it was also blasphemous, overly sexual, and also a non-biblical view of angels. What is the fruit of the film? Anger toward Christians, the Bible, and church. Good fruit? Methinks not.

They are wolves dressed like sheep.

B. ‘Lord, Lord’

I don’t know about you, but the idea of a narrow gate really wakes me up. To think that many of the people who call on God and who go to church are not getting into heaven is unsettling. But it strongly points to God really meaning what He says. He wants us to be pure. He wants us to do His will. His will is outlined in the Bible. If we don’t do His will, we will be like the branches that are thrown into the fire. Yeah, that does create a little bit of fear towards God, but that fear can either cripple you (which it shouldn’t), or it will get your engines revved to really run to win the race. I strongly encourage you to run hard and to keep your mind on that which is pure (Phil 4:8).

I also urge you not to, to coin a phrase, “New Testament-ize” everything. Don’t always be trying to make everything fit into the story structure of the Bible. This is a literal disease amongst Christians today. We do it to movies all of the time. Remember my *Weekend at Bernie’s 2* example? I hear the same thing about so many movies.

We’ve had many people watch our film, “*The Elephant*”. The movie is about how, when we let sin into our lives and we don’t take care of it, it kills us. People have come up with all sorts of New Testament interpretations. The worst of all is that the elephant trainer who kills the elephant is a Jesus figure. In truth he is a figure of Satan. When we open the door to him, Satan walks right in, plants temptation into our lives and if we don’t take care of it, it kills us. People have completely missed the point of the film because they so badly wanted to New Testament-ize it.

New Testament-izing also leads to encouraging Christians to see all sorts of films, to read all kinds of books, and to fall down a lot of trap doors. Sometimes we even look plain silly, like when we try to find the true spiritual nature of *The Matrix*, *Bruce Almighty*, *Weekend at Bernie’s 2*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Be careful. Guard your heart. When we New Testament-ize we start believing the wolves are actually sheep.

And that’s when they strike.

C. The Word

I’m going to let the Word of God wrap this section up for me.

Philippians 4:8 (NASB)

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

PART V. PLAYING TO SELL OUT CROWDS

I have belonged to several mega-churches. There is nothing inherently wrong with preaching to a lot of people. Jesus did it (without a microphone or PowerPoint I might add). But I have come to realize some trends in popular theology today that I must address. This whole argument up until this point has focused on keeping our minds trained for discernment and protecting them to stay pure. My concern is not for the preachers themselves, although this applies. Perhaps some day I will be able to write another series on what to look for in a pastor. Instead, my concern is with most of us: the crowd of sell-outs that tends to follow popular doctrine and pop culture rather than scripture.

As we have already covered, we need to strive for the best, not just the good. The danger the Christian church faces now is that of a generation of sell-outs. This generation is more concerned with looking righteous than actually being righteous. It changes with the ebb and flow of the current trends. It is like the people characterized in 2 Timothy 4:3 who want their ears tickled by what they want to believe, rather than the Word of God.

We want to believe that movies hold truth so that we don't have to go to the Bible for answers. Our TV's are tuned to "Christian" stations that sell blessings for \$200 because it's easier to give them my credit card number than to confess my sickness and ask others to pray with me. We search for light-rock, poppy "safe" white-washed music, rather than hymns and songs with convicting lyrics. Our magazines do not rely on the Bible for credit, instead, they quote Bono and U2 under the banner of being "relevant".

In short, we don't want the Bible to speak against what we are comfortable with. I don't want it to pick on me. I can point to verses that talk about bestiality and building idols out of gold because I don't do those things! I can flip through calming psalms to meditate on while I drive to my New Age stretch class. But I only stretch! I don't get into the New Age stuff they preach! I can talk about how Jesus really wants me to have financial and social success (i.e. "I can squeeze the camel through the eye of the needle!"). Or how I have to be like a barbarian who steps out of his comfort zone to... gain financial and social success.

There is SO much danger in being a sell-out. If you stop searching the Bible for answers, you get into trouble. Check out popular debates within Christianity itself:

What is the role of a woman in the family? In a church?

Is homosexuality really a sin?

Divorce.

Gay marriage.

Is Jesus the only way to God?

The Bible is so ridiculously clear on these issues. It just is. You could probably find the answers to all of these debates in Romans alone. But we don't want to hear it. We don't want the Bible to apply directly to us. Instead, we are more concerned about unity than we are about what the Bible says. We cannot trade truth for unity. Instead, our unity should be grounded in our common belief in the truth of the Bible.

Here is what a sell-out is. It is a person that has the gospel, but cheapens it with their laziness desire to hold on to whatever they feel they need. And you know what?

I'm a sell-out.

That's why I'm writing this. I want to call myself out of this sin just as much as I want to wake you out of your stupor. We are all susceptible to this. But we have to fight it. We have to read the Bible and see that it tells us to not be gluttonous, or to give in to sexual immorality, or to hate your brother.

The Bible tells us that when we are convicted of our sin, we are to act on that conviction and get rid of the sin, not try to justify it. Just as Claudia wanted to justify booking clients for prostitutes, we want to justify any number of sins. Instead, we need to keep our eyes open to God's ultimate standards. Again, we need to stop justifying our sins and take care of them.

Now that we have unearthed some of our sell-out tendencies like New Testament-izing, avoiding the Bible, and watching impure movies, we need to make a change. And that change needs to be a stronger commitment to the Lord. Not based on works, but grounded in a dedication to run so as to win the race.

Finally, we need to keep our ears open for those who are false teachers, those wolves in sheep's clothing. When we see them, we need to make others aware of them so that they can avoid the pitfalls of half-truths. Don't forget that throughout the books of Timothy we are given specific instructions on how to confront sin in the body of believers. We have to be responsible in that area too. We must teach each other to remain pure, to fight against movies and books like The DaVinci Code (which we MUST boycott when it comes out. But do it in a way that is under the radar-- one-on-one. It does not need more press) and half truths like that of Francis of Assisi.

When your preacher gets up week after week and preaches the same sermon, speak to him. If your friend is downloading MP3's that he didn't pay for, explain how

that is no different from tucking a CD under your jacket and bolting out of a store. We need to hold each other accountable. We need to stop being sell-outs who settle for the cheapest thing. As someone said, we chase after “lovers less wild” than Christ. You want adventure? You want a battle? Want to prove that you are a man or woman? Follow the Lord.

I encourage you all to read the Bible and really listen to it. We need to be a community of people seeking spiritual discernment. There are simply not enough people out there confessing and confronting sin and bad theology; people who are talking the talk and walking the walk. We need to keep in tune with the way God calls His people to live so that Satan has no open doors in which he can walk. May the Lord bless you all. I leave you with this exhortation that Paul gave Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:1-5 (NASB)

“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 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. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of the evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Sincerely,

[Chris Staron](#)