

News: The Good, Bad & Ugly

In the “good old” days, the challenge of “keeping up with the news” was far easier:

- The news sources, for the average person, were limited in number and time: a town usually had one or two newspapers, the major networks had a 30-minute newscast at 6:30 each night and the local news was a 15 to 30-minute program.
- Newspapers and networks were not obviously left- or right-leaning except a few newspapers, read by a relatively small number of people, on the fringes.
- Some people subscribed to weekly news magazines – *Times*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report* – that was it!

As such, these major news outlets were far more limited in their ability to be blatantly biased, much less peddle (as is so common today) fake news and lies since people simply would not tolerate it – everyone was consuming much the same news so it had to be more objective.

Today?

- 24-hour “news” has evolved into obviously and unashamedly Conservative *or* Liberal commentary – more opinion than objective news (not so unlike the propaganda of totalitarian countries). Newspapers (especially the larger one) have typically followed this same left *or* right model as well.
- Social media (similar to politicians as highlighted in the prior <https://789graceplace.com/blog/item/our-times-unprecedented-or-same-old-same-old> Blog Post) is replete with even more biased half-truths, outright lies (fake news) and ignorance on an unbelievable level. And they have mastered the art of talking out of both sides of their mouths since, unlike TV networks and newspapers available in a single format to all, Google, Facebook and other internet platforms are happy to make conservatives feel they are right by presenting them *only* conservative-slanted content while, at the same time, encouraging liberals further into radical liberalism by suppressing any reasonable conservative content in their *supposed* news feeds.

What current “news” outlets have learned (and there are *many* times more sources of purported news now than in the past) is that “feeding the bias” (telling people what they want to hear) is what sells newspapers and attracts consuming eyes.

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine [or Good News]. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers [“news” outlets] to say what their itching ears want to hear. ² Timothy 4:3

As a result, the now dominant algorithms of Silicon Valley (Google, Facebook . . .) are prospering by tracking our internet searches and feeding us “news” based on our predilections and preferences – no wonder the divisions in all countries are widening as people are shown more and more authenticating “news” confirming how they are SO right and others SO wrong and bad! We are now purposely presented with the best of those we agree with and worst of others now considered our enemies (enemies being those who disagree with us). So, we no longer zig and zag in our thinking; typically we are either on a path of perpetual zigging OR continuous zagging – further from any correcting “news” that may challenge and cause us to consider other ideas as potentially of *any* merit. But why should we since we are right? We “know” this because virtually everything we are exposed to confirms our thinking, we can’t even imagine how those not agreeing hold such loony ideas! We develop deeper and stronger opinions without any thought that we might be less than 100% right – everything we believe is confirmed by our news sources:

- Believe *Black Lives Matter* is the most important issue in the world and that anyone who thinks otherwise is a flaming racist? Of course – isn’t that what CNN, CNBC, The New York Times. . . and other “news” outlets feed 24-hours a day (until a new hot liberal hate topic replaces it)? This is supported by the Liberals’ internet-based news feed (Facebook, Google . . .).
- Believe *Black Lives Matter* is the most dangerous issue in the world and that those who dare claim otherwise are low-life Marxists rioters? Fox makes it seem so! And this is supported by Conservatives’ internet-based news feeds because they know our biases based on what we “click” on or search – and to **keep us on their platform** longer and longer (earning more ad dollars) they feed these folks what they already believe as increasingly hardened Conservatives.
- Coronavirus all a hoax, Coronavirus a serious pandemic of unparalleled seriousness, it is all Trump’s fault, Democrats are using Coronavirus simply to unfairly undermine Trump, wearing masks in public is foolish, anyone who doesn’t wear a mask all the time is a total idiot, we can’t afford to print trillions of new dollars to bailout everyone, we should be doing even more, much more, to help people financially, schools cannot start back, schools must start back NOW . . . everyone has their opinions and they KNOW they are right because this is what they hear and see in their personalized news all the time!

Historically, the major characteristics of news were defined as:

- Accuracy – Now? Anything but.
- Balance – No way, not any more.
- Objectivity – Again, NO, not now!
- Concise and clear – 24-hour news: they drone on and on, replaying their murky and ambiguous (and too often hate-filled) opinions.

- Current – elections 2 years in the future or past, as examples, are not current. “News” has lost any high ground they may have, at one time, held. This is where we are, thus leaving only one other possible alternative.

Is There Any Good Option for News and Staying Current?

It is important adults stay up with the news, otherwise they will suffer from a sense of disconnectedness. The issue, then, becomes where to find news that refreshes rather than drains us – that which is personally relevant, not “trash” news that only produces irrelevant, to any good purpose, emotional and adrenaline rushes in an attempt (which they have successfully mastered!) to keep us coming back for more and more.

The Alternative Then?

Interestingly and revealingly, the term “Bible” (meaning Book) never appears in the *Bible*. Instead, God uses the terms Good News, Gospel (also translated Good News) or simply The Word (of God) to describe the Scriptures. And God gave it this “moniker” at a time “news” legitimately signified accuracy, balance, objectivity, conciseness and clarity on a timely basis. In short, unlike today’s “news,” God’s Word declares it is the Truth: personally relevant, not slanted towards any biases, rather it corrects and mitigates these biases. Quite some claims for a book written, by various authors, thousands of years ago and remaining unchanged for the last 2,000 years. About itself, the *Bible* claims:

The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

a bold and testable claim, patently foolish unless, as is the case, literally millions of people find it to be so on a daily basis, as has been the case for now thousands of years.

As a result of the *Bible* being “alive and active” even the smartest person will only grasp a small part of what is written on each “read through.” Thus, any ideas that “I have read the *Bible* from cover to cover (and hear it preached each Sunday) so there is no need for me to read it every day” or that any preacher could “know the *Bible*” because he went to a top seminary, made good grades and has been preaching a long time are wrong and foolish. The *Bible* analogizes itself to food (spiritual food) for as Jesus confirmed: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Mt 4:4 In the same way we do not eat our fill physically and are, as a result, satisfied and full forever, the *Bible* is food to support a living and active spiritual life – this nourishment is required daily to support and sustain our spirit.

Jesus says in His Word (all of the *Bible* is, in effect, the words of Jesus):

Everyone who **hears these words** of mine **and puts them into practice** is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ^{Mt 7:24}

Besides the great differences between the world's generally sad and ugly news and God's Good News, as highlighted above, an even greater contrast is the reality that the vast majority of the world's news is bad while *all* of God's Word is "Good News." And **we should not be foolish to think we can be current in both – if we even had the time (which few do) they are so incompatible as to make the other repugnant and intolerable. No, we have our choice, but not for both.**

God's Good News Categories

The Bible is Good News in several ways, providing various benefits to its regular readers – a few examples are:

God's Offer of Eternal Life with Him . . . and the reality that, in His goodness, He provides a precise, well-defined, unambiguous, single, God-enabling Way to achieve the *Bible's* Good News defined goal of our faith: "the salvation of your souls."
^{1Pe1:9}

We find God's precise plan and purpose of this salvation in *Ephesians 2:1-10*, with the remainder of the *Bible* as commentary and guidance for living an earthly life supporting and completing this salvation culminating in the glory of heaven. Consistent with its theme of being Good News, the *Bible* is in obvious stark contrast to the world's sad and bad news. For in God's Good News we are told we will find:

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it **into practice**. And the God of peace will be with you. ^{Ph 4:8-9}

Can we apply any of these adjectives to the news of the world?

For God's salvation, we **must** have the Word of God that is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating even to dividing our soul and spirit, joints and marrow; judging and correcting the thoughts and attitudes of our heart – we **must** have practical, timely, personal guidance to lead and guide us safely and successfully through life. Does anyone think or expect the world's news offers this? God's Word does and this is the main thrust of His Good News.

God's Principles for Living a Life "For Our Own Good"

How anyone could consider the world's news anything other than hurtful and unhelpful is a mystery. Especially as God's Good News only provides that which, for us, is supremely helpful and hopeful:

What does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today **for your own good?** ^{Dt 10:12-13}

As such, there is not a single case in the *Bible* in which we are told to do (or not do) anything other than that which is for our own good!

His Many Promises, Not Only of Eternal Life, But Those Necessary for Our Daily Lives NOW.

Sadly, many people are never taught, read or know of Jesus' here and now great promises required to live a Christian life. In fact, only those will be blessed (as quoted above) who:

. . . hears these words of mine and puts them **into practice** is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ^{Mt 7:24}

otherwise we will not be saved, eternally or temporally, because we have built our life on sand. For, as Jesus rhetorically warns elsewhere:

I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ^{Jn 3:12}

We won't know Christ or His temporal and eternal promises unless we read what He has spoken! There is NO hope or reality of Christ saving us eternally if we do not seek, find, take, practice and grow in His salvation here and now, if we do not know and practice His truth and guidance for life on earth.

His Revelation of How/Why We Think and Act as We Do . . . and the associated **practical** implications to help us achieve our purpose in life and avoid that which would thwart this.

One of the great benefits gleaned from God's Word is showing us how/why we think and act as we do, often through the lens of seeing ourselves in others. As a case in point, we may read the book of *Exodus* a number of times before we realize "this is a picture of me, just how erratic and stupid I can be!" Many of the *Bible* stories are given for this purpose – to help us see ourselves in others.

"Our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. **Now these things occurred as examples** to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written:

“The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did – and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did – and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did – and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as **examples** and were written down **as warnings for us**, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” ^{1Co 10:1-12}

Everything that was written in the past was **written to teach us**, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ^{Ro 15:4}

Or, as the *Bible* so astutely reveals how we all from time to time think and lament:

“I do not understand what I do.” ^{Ro 7:15}

What could better describe the practical condition in which we, so often, find ourselves and for which God’s Word provides our best hope of discerning and correcting?

His Revelation of How/Why Others Think and Act as They Do . . . and the **practical** consequences if we ignore and fail (by rejecting God’s Grace) to mitigate these dangers and errors in ourselves – if we allow the all-too-common bad news surrounding us to divert us from God’s Good News. Again:

These things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

The *Bible* is full of similar teaching examples showing us how other people (like ourselves noted in the prior point) are so often irrational in their (our) thinking – it is vital that we are alerted to this and, even more importantly, learn from these teachings.

Most Importantly, though, God’s Good News (Unlike Anything Else) Shows Us the Love of God – Both His Love for Christians and What and How Loving Him Really Means

“If you love me, keep my commands.” ^{Jn 14:15}

“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar.” ^{1Jn4:20}

You, beloved, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God as you await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you eternal life. ^{Ju 1:20-21}

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.
2Th3:5

We have come to know and believe the love that God has for us. God is love; whoever abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 1John 4:16

To say we love God and not trust, or care, enough to want to know what He says is hypocrisy. And in the same way, we cannot and will not know, apart from God's written Good News, the breadth and depth of His love for those He has saved.

A Serious Caveat

While for the reasons noted above (and more), God's Good News is vital for authentic Christians, Jesus warns about worshipping the *Bible* rather than seeking and finding Him in it, the purpose and focus of His Good News for us.

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. Jn 5:39-40

We could theoretically memorize the entire *Bible* (or a slew of *Bible* verses as some people do) and not be any closer to Christ and His salvation. Similar to people who complain they have tried to read the *Bible* and "it doesn't make any sense" . . . "is boring" or some other excuse, what these mis-focused people miss is Jesus' warning early in the *New Testament*:

Everyone who hears these words of mine and **puts them into practice** is like a **wise** man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because its foundation was on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and **does not put them into practice** is like a **foolish** man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its collapse!" Mt 7:24-27

God's Good News (unlike our habit and pattern with the world's news) is not to excite and titillate us, but to encourage, lead and guide us into practicing and developing disciplines of that which is good for us (and away from the bad) – God's Good News, properly understood and utilized, is practical (for practicing)!

The Great Paradox

A very great paradox is that the *Bible*, unchanged for 2,000 years, is alive and active (fresh, new, personal and practical) while man's efforts to present "news" is seldom anything really new or personally relevant and useful, it is depressing! This is certainly a miracle of God in His applying His Good News (for those who seek and read it) to our personal circumstances. Faith is built as we accept and apply this initially unbelievable truth and, as we do, the mystery is progressively unraveled so the

paradox becomes: why in the world would anybody spend hours chasing the bad while the (now obvious) Good is before us for the taking?

Final Thoughts

Over the ages volumes, filling many libraries, have been written about the *Bible* and all it offers us in the way of earthly and eternal life. Yet, the volumes are still being written because millions have found it personally true that:

There are many more things that Jesus did. If all of them were written down, I suppose that not even the world itself would have space for the books that would be written. ^{Jn 21:25}

Even a simple and cursory comparison of God's Good News to the world's bad and sad news will clearly reveal which offers hope by focusing on that which is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy . . . vs. a concentration and obsession on the negative: hate, violence, discord, tragic, visually sensational, distorted, perverted, evil, biased, untrue

A great reality about life is that our time is limited: each day provides every person a mere 24 hours. Will we choose to be consumed by the 24-hour predominately bad news of the world that offers little, if any, personal help or hope? Or, will we choose God's Good News providing both temporal and eternal help, direction and hope 24-hour a day?

Who should really worry that they would miss anything personally relevant or important by not reading, hearing or seeing the world's news for any period of time? Yet, we seriously risk missing something personally very important if we do not read God's Word in a day – His guidance to us for what we face that day, potentially large, but also certainly to help in our smaller daily needs of spiritual support.

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Above is only a brief outline of the massive benefits of focusing on God's Good News compared to the drain in today's surrounding din of the world's consuming and mind/emotion deadening bad and ugly "news" of no hope, help or positive future. Why then do so many languish in the latter when the Good News alternative is at-hand? A very practical and perplexing question and challenge for every person.

But How? A Simple Experiment.

Even the best notions are simply theory until we apply them. And designing experiments to test ideas can be the great challenge. See the following one-week experiment of self-blessing: replacing bad news with the Good <https://789graceplace.com/blog/item/an-experiment-of-selfblessing-replacing-bad-news-with-the-good> as a practical plan for this.

It is unclear whether our being buried by more and more bad news is the major cause for a related decrease in reading and depending on God's Word, His Good

News, or if a reduced reading of God's Good News resulted in a vacuum filled by the bad. But this is not really the issue. What is important, on a personal basis, is that we mature and take responsibility in this most critical area of life to reverse this otherwise inevitable decline for both our temporal and eternal benefit!

The *Bible* is alive and active, but are we? Do we feel compelled to read it daily to support and nourish our spirit and find God's personalized news for the day? If our answer is "not really" we are obviously (if we dare to believe God's Word rather than our or anyone else's feelings or opinions) not "in Christ" and, as a result, won't know ourselves or, in the end, Him!