



May 3, 2009

Preconception

We are continually given the results of various polls and studies to measure public opinion on a variety of subjects from the performance of the president to what products are being purchased and used by consumers. Sometimes these studies are done objectively and there are some organizations that will reveal factual information. At other times studies, particularly those that have been sponsored by special interest groups, slant the results of such analyses in a subjective way to prove their own point of view. One example of this were studies that were done years ago showing that caffeinated beverages such as coffee elevated blood cholesterol levels leading to heart disease. Years later another group of studies revealed that decaffeinated beverages were elevating cholesterol due to the chemicals that were used in the process of decaffeination. Coffee vendors featuring products done with the Swiss Water method of removing caffeine were touted as not causing this since water and a “natural” means were involved without chemicals. These and similar studies have done more to confuse than to help and the end result has been that no one can say definitively what causes blood cholesterol to be elevated other than the influences of diet and genetics. Some people tend to cling to studies such as this and will alter their lives and seek to influence others as well. The opinions of many however are formed not by firsthand fact gathering, but by their reliance on the opinions of others. This is a form of peer pressure that reaches a level to effect the transformation of societal attitudes based on the subjective not objective sources. A more recent example was what was called the Mojave Experiment conducted by the Microsoft corporation with their new computer operating system Windows Vista. The new software was rejected by many people based on negative hype rather than actual experience. Microsoft, in the Mojave Experiment, brought individuals to their various facilities and presented them with a questionnaire about their perception of the new system. Most rated the system negatively. They were then asked to sit through a demonstration of a “new” system. After the demonstration the study subjects were asked to rate what they thought of the software. The general attitudes were favorable. Microsoft researchers then revealed that what the individuals had been exposed to was Vista. The ratings given to the demonstrated operating system were amazingly high and study subjects were surprised to learn that they had been introduced to the system that they “knew” was flawed and prob-

lematic. Although some researchers accused Microsoft of using this as a marketing gimmick, it demonstrates how solid the rejection was based on hearsay and perception rather than fact. The same thing happens in religion all the time. People are taught doctrines that present certain things as fact when in reality many of those doctrines conflict with what the scriptures teach. Many are surprised to find that some things that they have been told and have accepted over they years are not in harmony with the Bible and are sometimes shocked to be told that some “truths” are not found in the scriptures. The remedy for this is to gain the facts. That can be done by opening the scriptures and studying them individually rather than accepting something simply because it was presented in a credible light by one who appears to know what they are talking about. In the consumer realm we have access to certain things such as Consumer Reports, an organization that seeks to reveal the truth about products and their advertised claims. It is an interesting phenomenon that quite a few folks would not think of buying a product until they research it in the pages of Consumer Reports to find what the real story is behind marketing claims. Wouldn't it be interesting if there was such a thing as Consumer Reports that evaluated religious organizations and their teachings against a known standard and then rendered a rating on accuracy in teaching and practice of religious bodies based on an objective comparison to the known standard; the Bible. In effect that is what we strive to do when we seek to study and encourage others to read the scriptures for themselves. When it comes to religious matters there is a heavy reliance on evaluating religious experience on one's personal experience rather than a comparison to the objective standard of the Bible. How would people react if they could see a table that compared and rated the doctrines and practices of churches in this manner? Would they change their attitude and perspectives given the truth? In some cases this is what happens when some become disappointed and disillusioned with the variety of religious doctrines that sometimes contradict themselves. Altering our perspective in favor of what is real is a tall order at times but is a necessary activity that we promote when we seek to present only the word of God. How do your beliefs measure up?

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