



Contending for the Faith

Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Jude 3

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Introduction to Contending for the Faith

The New Testament church has faced challenges since its beginning. False prophets and false doctrine have led people astray from the truths of Christianity. Jesus warned the disciples about false prophets.¹ Paul warned the leaders at Ephesus that “savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30). Unfortunately, things are not much better now than they have been in the past. Believers are under a constant barrage of misinformation, false teaching, and inaccuracy. Because this is the case, we must “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3). We must heed Paul’s admonition to be on guard, watch, and remember what we’ve learned, lest we be led into error (Acts 20:28, 31).

The purpose of this series of lessons is to warn Christians about current theological trends that are a significant threat to biblical, historical, conservative Christianity. While a study on cults exposes *external* threats, this series focuses on *internal* threats posed by elements within evangelicalism. These threats are all the more dangerous because they often originate from sources that have historically been reliable. Some Christians don’t sense the threat because they don’t understand the issues involved. So in this study, we’ll look at several movements and see how they undermine biblical Christianity.

¹ Mt 7:15 *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.* Mt 24:11 *Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.*

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God: Mighty Sovereign or Dependent Servant?

The Openness of God Debate

A movement swelling in evangelical circles may be described as “The Openness of God,”



“the Open View of God,” or “open theology.” Well-known evangelical leaders are embracing this movement, as are many laymen. The open view of God teaches that the future is undetermined (i.e., not settled or planned). This view teaches that:

- God frequently changes his mind in the light of changing circumstances or in response to prayer (Exod 32:14; Num 14:12-20; Deut 9:13-14, 18-20, 25; 1 Sam 2:27-36). God will change his mind if circumstances change (Jer 18:7-11; 26:2-3; Ezek 33:13-15). An aspect of God’s greatness is his willingness to change his mind (Joel 2:13-14; Jon 4:2).
- God expresses regret and/or disappointment over how things have turned out, even over previous decisions he has made which went awry because of human free will (Gen 6:5-6; 1 Sam 15:10, 35; Ezek 22:29-31).
- God may be surprised at how things turned out, for he expected a different outcome (Isa 5:3-7; Jer 3:6-7; 19-20).
- God at times does not know how humans will behave (Jer 7:31; 19:5; 32:35).
- God does not know whether his people will remain faithful to him (Gen 22:12; Exod 16:4; Deut 8:2; 13:1-3; Judg 2:20-3:5; 2 Chron 32:31).

The open view of God teaches that God does not determine all things; rather, he responds to man’s free choices. He does not know all future events or all possible events. Even God cannot foreknow any actions that come from human choices. God is all-*competent*, that is, able to cope with or handle whatever happens in the universe. God learns from creation. He waits to see what will happen and then responds accordingly. God is not independent from his creation; rather, he bases his plan on what creation does. This view strongly implies that God is neither omniscient (knowing everything) nor sovereign (controlling everything).

The larger discussion over God’s sovereignty and man’s free will is beyond the scope of this lesson. However, we will seek to show why the “open” view of God is contrary to Scripture and is theologically dangerous.

What does the Bible say about God’s omniscience and sovereignty?

1. God Controls All Things and Leaves Nothing to Chance.

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

God controls all things at all times without exception. There is no such thing as pure random chance or luck. Everything, every minute detail of the universe, is under God's sovereign control. This is what the word "sovereign" means—under control.

God controls all things in one of two ways: directly or indirectly. We see God's direct, immediate control of things whenever a miracle occurs. He suspends the normal laws of nature and makes something happen that normally cannot happen—the dead live, iron floats, people walk on water, the sun doesn't set, the sick revive, etc. However, most of the time God controls things through secondary causes. That is, God is providentially (not miraculously) guides all things through normal means—people and their choices, storms, animals, natural events, wars, political movements, and the like. In this case, God is behind the scenes directing events. A good example is the story Ruth. Nothing miraculous occurs in Ruth, yet God is clearly behind the scenes providentially directing the lives of the characters.

2. God's Plan Is Comprehensive.

God's plan includes everything, including the following:

- ✓ the life span and living place of every human (Job 14:5; Acts 17:26)
- ✓ the rise and fall of every ruler on the earth (Romans 13:1)
- ✓ the circumstances of every person's life (James 4:13-15)
- ✓ the good actions of men (Ephesians 2:10)
- ✓ the wicked actions of men (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23)
- ✓ the most trivial of circumstances (Job 36:22-33; Mt 10:29)
- ✓ the certainty of prophetic events (Is 14:24, 27)

To suggest that God is somehow "outside the loop," a mere bystander in the affairs of his creation contradicts the biblical evidence. God not only knows what is happening, he is directing, guiding, and moving all creation to the ends appointed for it.

3. God Is Separate From his Creation.

God is fundamentally different from his creation. This is the essential meaning of the word "holy" — set apart, unique, different. The Creator moves the creation, not vice versa.

Is 46:9 Remember the former things of old, For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me,

Ro 1:23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Re 4:11 “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”

4. God Is Not Subject to Man’s Will

To suggest that God is somehow dependent upon man degrades God’s sovereignty and independence. We’re not suggesting that God is indifferent to man’s desires, but simply that God does not rely upon man for what he does. God is independent and autonomous. God is not bound by man’s choices.

Isa 40:13-14 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, Or as His counselor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, And taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding?

Dan 4:35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, “What have You done?”

5. God’s Knowledge Is Without Error

Job 37:16 Do you know how the clouds are balanced, Those wondrous works of Him who is perfect in knowledge?

The Hebrew adjective translated “perfect” is from a word that means “completeness” or “integrity.” It refers to the fact that God’s knowledge is sound and without error. God knows of errors, but he has no errors in his thinking. God’s knows things as they genuinely are. His knowledge is without fault and without flaw. He understands everything with perfect clarity. God’s thinks with perfect logic. Thus, there is no reason why God would ever make a faulty plan. It would never be necessary to improve upon God’s plan.

6. God’s Knowledge Is Complete.

There is nothing that God does not know. God does not learn because he knows everything from start to finish already. God is not lacking one bit of information. God’s knowledge includes all things past, present, and future, immediately, simultaneously, and eternally, whether things actual or possible: God is all-knowing.²

Ps 139:1-4 O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.

Ps 147:4 He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name.

Mt 10:29-30 Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Ac 1:24 And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen

² Rolland McCune, Systematic Theology notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary.

Heb 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

7. God's Person and Character Never Change.

Mal 3:6 For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

The theological term for God's unchangeableness is immutability. When we say that God is immutable or unchanging, we mean that he is changeless in his being and purposes and is incapable of growth or decay in any way. God has not learned or forgotten anything. He is not something today that he was not yesterday. God does not come to know events as they take place in time. He knows the future because he has planned the future. Any seeming change in God or his character is apparent only.

8. Historically, Baptists (and most conservative Christians) have upheld the orthodox notion of the omniscience and immutability of God. The Second London Confession of Baptists in 1689, in Chapter II, "Of God and the Holy Trinity," paragraph 2, says:

In [God's] sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the Creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 3 and 5, says:

God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass. . . . God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

It is remarkable that three hundred years ago Baptists (and others) explicitly repudiated an essential principle of contemporary openness theology; namely, that God's knowledge is indeed significantly "dependent upon the Creature." This openness view requires that for God many things are indeed "contingent or uncertain," an idea Baptists have historically rejected.³

Common Objections:

³ Taken from *Some Early Baptist Confessions of Faith Explicitly Disowned the "Openness" View* by John Piper, April 23, 1999.

1. Someone might say, "If God is in control, how can he judge me when I sin? If every thing I do is within His plan, then my sin is part of his plan. If that is true, how can God punish me for my sin? If God planned my sin, how can he turn around and punish me for it?"

Answer:

- ✓ God can use the sinful actions of sinful men for his own purposes. See Mt 26:24; Acts 2:23, 4:27-28. This does not imply that God wants them to sin or that they will not be held liable for their sin. People sin because they want to. The fact that one's sinful action is also within God's plan does not release the sinner from responsibility. God is never responsible for sin; he never compels anyone to sin (James 1:13).
- ✓ God punishes the sinful actions of men that he has planned because man chooses the sin and loves committing it. Isaiah 10:5-13; Luke 17:1
- ✓ Read Romans 9:18-24.

2. What about prayer? Doesn't prayer change God's mind?

Answer: No, ultimately speaking, prayer does not change God's mind. We should pray because we are commanded to pray. A prayerless life is a disobedient life. Further, we should pray because God uses prayer to accomplish his plan. God plans that our prayers will have an impact. So we must pray because our prayers are part of God's plan. They do not change his mind, but they are useful as part of God's plan.

3. What about God "repenting" and changing his mind? E.g., Jonah 3:10.

Answer: Jonah's simple message was, "Nineveh will be overthrown in forty days." The question is, "What was God's intent in sending Jonah to them?" It apparently was God's intent to spare the Ninevites. Did God change his mind? No, his intent all along was to spare the Ninevites. That is why he sent Jonah to them in the first place. Jonah himself knew that this was God's purpose (see Jon 4:2).

The Ninevites changed their minds, but God did not change his. God planned all along to withhold judgment from them if they repented, and he used Jonah as a tool to help bring it to pass. Jonah's message was a warning of what would happen if they didn't repent, not a guaranteed outcome.

Thus it is with any apparent change in God's plan. God changes the outworking of his providence and his methods of acting with men. God does not always *intend* to do what he *threatens* to do. When people respond positively to God's warnings, God withholds punishment. See Jer 18:8. God does not have the human limitations of knowledge that would involve him in changing his mind the same way humans do. Instead, God's "repentance" is an expression of an attitude that is fitting in view of new circumstances. True change of mind cannot be ascribed to God. If God is

all-knowing, he'd never have to change his mind or his plan. He'd never learn, never be surprised, never have to change his mind because he knows the end from the beginning.

Conclusion: The God of the Bible is not like us. He has no limitations, is not lacking in any respect. He sits upon his throne and executes his eternal plan with utter precision. The God of the Bible holds the hearts of the rulers of the earth in his hand, and he turns them however he wishes. He has free reign over his creation, and man's will holds no sway over God in any way.

We should be thrilled that God and his plans never change. If God was changeable, then he could not be trusted. Maybe he'd flip-flop and decide to be a wicked God. Today God is love, tomorrow he may be hate. If God's plan is changeable, than his Word cannot be trusted.

God knows everything, and he has known everything since before the first light shined. God is unchanging. He is constant in his person and attributes. His plan is unchanging.

The "open" view of God defends human free will at the expense of God's sovereignty, omniscience, and freedom to do as he chooses with his creation. This view teaches that God does his very best in managing the universe, but occasionally has to change his mind because of human free will and self-determination. Man limits God. This position is simply unacceptable, both biblically and theologically.

Discussion:

1. Why do you think the openness view of God is gaining in popularity? *Because it plays up the idea that man is important; it gives man free will. It makes God dependent upon man, an idea many people find appealing.*
2. Are those who accept the openness view of God unsaved? *No, they're in error, but embracing this view does not necessarily mean anyone is lost.*
3. Why is it necessary to interpret God's *apparent* changes of mind as apparent and not actual? *If God really did change his mind, it would mean that he is not omniscient. An omniscient God would never change his mind. A genuine change of mind would contradict scripture. God would have to change his mind only if there was some lack in his knowledge.*
4. Why is this an important issue? *Because it deals with the very nature of God and his relationship to man.*

Salesmen vs. The Spirit

The Church Growth Movement



Rom 1:14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. *as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

1 Cor 2:5 [Y]our faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Over the past 50 years or so, a significant movement has become influential in evangelical circles. In an attempt to reach more people, churches have evolved from keepers and proclaimers of the truth to centers of entertainment. Instead of focusing on making disciples of Jesus Christ, churches are focusing on making the unchurched feel comfortable at church. The unsaved come to hear a concert, a comedian, or an encouraging sermonette, often sprinkled with jokes, inspiring stories and pop psychology. Unsaved people have little interest in the clear exposition of the Bible or in the teaching of doctrine, so these churches provide easy-to-digest, non-threatening, uplifting entertainment in the hopes that they can persuade the unsaved to try Jesus. Such churches often reach thousands of people and enjoy huge, modern facilities.

This movement goes by many names—The Church Growth Movement, The Marketing the Church Movement, The User-Friendly Church Movement. One church member expressed the idea this way: “You know what they say, ‘The customer’s always right.’ We’ve kind of employed that theme, which I think is excellent, much like a fine hotel or a country club.” The church this man attends staged a wrestling match in order to perk up their Sunday evening attendance. They hired Tugboat Taylor, a former professional wrestler, to train 10 people from the church staff in wrestling techniques such as hair pulling, shin kicking and body tossing.⁴

The premise of this movement is simply that if you are going reach people, you must give them what they want. George Barna, who is one of the leading voices of this movement states, “My contention, based upon careful study of data and the activities of American churches, is the number one problem plaguing the Church is its failure to embrace a marketing orientation in what has become a market-driven environment.”⁵ In other words, since businesses become successful by giving people what they want, the church must do the same if it wants to succeed.

⁴ *Wall Street Journal*, “Mighty Fortresses: Houston’s Second Baptist Church Uses Secular Attractions to Bring in a Huge Congregation.” May 13, 1991. Mentioned in: Wenz, *Selling Jesus*, p. 87; MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, p. 69.

⁵ *Marketing the Church*, p. 23.

What is marketing? Marketing involves the selection of target markets rather than attempting to be all things to all people. Marketing relies on designing the organization's "product" in terms of the target market's needs and desires, rather than the seller's personal tastes.⁶

Bill Hybels, pastor of a mega-church in the Chicago area, said it this way: "Generally a pastor can define his appropriate target audience by determining with whom he would like to spend a vacation or an afternoon of recreation."⁷

Once a church determines its target audience, it then develops ways of making itself more appealing to that group of people. Today, many want a warm, supportive, informal and positive atmosphere. Anything that distracts from this will be an instant turnoff, while anything that's done to make the atmosphere non-threatening improves effectiveness. "Talks" (certainly not "sermons") should be short, simple, humorous, uplifting and personally inspiring. Topics are carefully selected to stress the personal over the doctrinal and the relational over the abstract. Stay away from uncomfortable topics like sin, guilt, money, and immorality. Use entertaining features like drama, skits, and lively music to generate enthusiasm and excitement.⁸

Unfortunately, many churches are willing not only to change their format to be more appealing, but also to change their message and compromise truth in order to gather a larger audience.

Is church marketing a proper method of church growth? Note several reasons why church marketing is unbiblical:

1. God's Way of Reaching Man Is Opposed to Human Logic.

While marketing may indeed be the key to success in business, it is not the key to success in the church. In fact, Paul admitted that the gospel is considered foolishness to most people. We are to reach the lost through the "foolishness" of preaching, not through other methods that lost people might find more appealing. We don't change the message just because unsaved people may find it offensive.

1 Co 1:18-24 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: *"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."* Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

⁶ *Marketing for Congregations*

⁷ Quoted in Douglas Webster, *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong With Marketing the Church?*, 58.

⁸ Webster, *Selling Jesus*, 75.

2. God Targets Everyone To Hear The Gospel.

The “shotgun” approach to evangelism is biblical—broadcast the same message to *everyone*.

Rom 1:14-17 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “*The just shall live by faith.*”

1 Cor 9:22 I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.

Paul targets all groups to hear his message, not just those he’d enjoy playing a round of golf with. He states that he is in debt to give the gospel to everyone (Greeks and barbarians, wise and unwise). To suggest that churches should cater to a specific segment in society is unbiblical. Churches are responsible to reach everyone from all classes. Further, Paul does not poll his audience to find out what they’d like to hear. He gives them what they need—the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible, not the audience, determines the content of the message.

3. The Marketing Movement is Man-Centered, Not God-Centered.

Marketing is based on appealing to man. “Give the customer what he wants.” Marketers suggest that the church has to come up with innovative and exciting means of attracting an audience. Once the audience has arrived, the church must keep the audience’s attention. Whatever it takes to do so is legitimate. The whole process is man-centered.

This sentiment obviously runs counter to biblical teaching which requires the church to be God-centered. The church should care primarily about pleasing God, not entertaining people. The worship services of the church are not about entertainment or excitement. They are about believers coming together to worship God. The goal is to please God. How people feel about it, especially unsaved people, makes no difference.

4. Christian Worship is Primarily for Christians, Not for Unbelievers.

One of the primary errors of the marketing movement is the underlying assumption that the church’s greatest task is to evangelize. If such were the case, then any and all methods of reaching people would be suitable and should be used. However, the greatest task of the church is not to reach the lost; it is to honor and glorify God. This only believers can do. Unsaved people cannot worship, honor or praise God properly. Further, believers should not attempt to reach the lost in ways that are less than honorable or biblical.

While the church is certainly responsible to reach the lost with the message of Christ, the worship services of the church are primarily for believers, not for lost people. It is

therefore illogical to format the church worship services to appeal to the values of the lost world.

The church should not neglect the preaching of the gospel during its worship services because some unsaved people may be there. However, the normal worship services of the church are not the primary or only means the church has of evangelizing. Christians are responsible to proclaim the gospel to their friends and neighbors whenever they have the opportunity. Evangelism happens when the church is dispersed into the community, not just when the church meets.

The church is something like a club. If you are a member of the club (saved), you understand and appreciate the club's traditions. If you are not a member (unsaved), then you don't understand the club's traditions. To make a club cater to non-members is illogical and dangerous. Likewise, non-believers should find the church a bit unsettling and different from what they are used to. If non-believers find the church too comfortable, something is wrong.

5. Christian Message is Neither Easy Nor Palatable.

Jesus said that men would hate believers and treat them with contempt. Paul said that the gospel was foolishness to man, and that God has chosen the weak, the foolish, and the unwise to confound the "wisdom" of the world. The Christian message directly confronts the world's love of sin. The message of the cross is offensive to unbelievers (Gal 5:11). Thus, most people will find the church, its people and its message, unappealing. Only God can convince a man of his need for Christ. The church should not attempt to "sell" itself or its message.

The Christian message must not be diluted to gain a following (e.g., John 6:53-66; Mt 19:16-22). The gospel is not what people want, it is what they need. What people want is the stroking of their egos and the soothing of their guilt. What people want is an "I'm OK, you're OK" message. But that's not the gospel. We must confront people about their sin and present Christ as the only answer for their sin problem. People are not OK, and if we care for them, we cannot let them think that they are.

Jesus, Paul, and the other NT authors were very forceful and up-front in their proclamation that Christianity demands commitment (Mt 28:18-20; Rom 12:1-2; Gal 5:16-26; Eph 4:1-3; Col 3:1-14). Many people are willing to be involved casually in church, but genuine Christianity exacts a high price of commitment. Discipleship calls for personal sacrifice. It involves giving your life. Such a message is not appealing to the unsaved world, nor should anyone change it to make it more acceptable.

6. God Uses the Proclamation of Truth to Further His Goals

2 Tim 4:2-4 Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

The last thing the unsaved world is interested in is someone preaching to them about their need to turn from their sin. Yet that's exactly the duty of the church. The Word "preach" was commonly used of a herald making a public proclamation on behalf of another. Much of what is called "preaching" today is nothing of the sort. Genuine preaching is the explanation and application of God's revelation.

The proclamation of the Word is necessary because man hungers more for novelty and entertainment than truth. The phrase "itching ears" is a figure of speech meaning "curiosity." It refers to the pursuit of anything new and spectacular. The church should stay far away from the sorts of entertainment and hype that the unsaved world enjoys.

Biblical preaching is not suited to tickle ears or make people feel good about themselves. It's not interesting stories, dramatic productions or funny jokes. Instead, preaching must convince man of his need to turn from his sin and trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We can't give up biblical preaching just because the unsaved world doesn't appreciate it.

Conclusion: The obvious error of church marketing is that it puts the focus on pleasing unsaved man rather than pleasing a holy God. The church must be God-centered, not man-centered. The church reaches the lost through the simple declaration of the gospel, not through slick advertisement, hype, promises, customer service, entertainment, excitement, or any other method of selling a product. God, not a fancy marketing campaign, causes people to accept the message.

The church must guard itself against the temptation to dilute its message or use dishonorable methods in the pursuit of a larger audience. It must not give in to the temptation to make the gospel appealing in order to pack the pews. We cannot weaken the gospel of Christ or diminish the importance of Christian commitment. The church is commissioned to evangelize and make disciples in a way that honors God. We must reject the marketing movement as a serious threat against biblical ecclesiology.

Discussion:

1. Why is it invalid to try to "sell" somebody on the gospel? Why not make the message attractive and appealing as possible? *Several reasons: 1) whether someone accepts the gospel is not based on a sales approach. No one gets saved because the "salesman" convinced him that he needs to "buy" the "product." 2) Salvation is a work of God, not merely an act of the will. God has to enable the person to accept Christ; 3) Often times in an effort to package the message in a more attractive way the message changes. The message is inherently unattractive to unsaved people.*
2. How can one criticize the marketing movement if it is reaching so many people with the gospel? *It may be attracting lots of people, but whether these people are hearing the gospel is a matter of dispute. Such marketing-driven churches often play down the offensive elements of the gospel and of discipleship just to keep a large audience. Most likely, few people are genuinely getting saved at such churches.*

An Inside Look at Church-Marketing

Dr. Joseph Zichter* (This is a condensation of his Ph.D. dissertation)
As Delivered to the Wisconsin Fellowship of Baptist Churches Annual Meeting,
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A Brief History of the Church-Marketing Paradigm:

- 1955: Donald McGavran publishes *The Bridges of God*
- 1964-1975: Donald McGavran publishes *The Church Growth Bulletin* (journal) to convince the academic community
- 1965: Donald McGavran founds “The School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth” at Fuller Theological Seminary
- Mid-late 1970’s: Peter Wagner (charismatic disciple of McGavran) begins publishing church marketing concepts to convince pastors
- Late-1970s: Key mega-church ministries are founded (Leith Anderson, Bill Hybels, Rick Warren)
- Mid-1980’s: George Barna (marketing expert and member at Willow Creek) begins publishing church-marketing concepts to convince pastors and laymen.
- Early-1990s: Numerous church-marketing opponents begin publishing their critiques of the church-marketing paradigm (MacArthur, Pritchard, Guinness).

Summary of church-growth writings:

- 1955-1980: Focus on evangelism
- 1980-1990: Focus on communication
- 1990-present: Focus on administration

Key Tenets of the Church-Marketing Paradigm

- I. The preeminence of evangelism: The church exists to evangelize, #1 goal. Anything that achieves this goal is good/acceptable.
- II. The necessity of numeric growth
 - A. God has not just called us to be faithful, but to be fruitful: A church that is healthy will grow.
 - B. Mission efforts should be directed toward the responsive. Don’t waste time and money on those groups who are unresponsive.
- III. Targeted people-group evangelism
 - A. Cross-cultural church planting is ineffective.
 - B. 2. God calls each Christian leader to reach a different segment of society.
- IV. The removal of extra-Biblical barriers to conversion
 - A. People should only have to cross Biblical, not cultural lines at salvation: “The only offense should be that of the cross” (I Cor 9).
 - B. Utilizing sociological and demographic studies is a matter of excellence and Christian stewardship.
 - C. Christian leaders must communicate true gospel according to the preferences of their respective target audiences without compromising flue

Scriptural message.

1. An emphasis on felt needs. Preaching should be relevant, interesting and positive.
 2. An emphasis on persuasion
 - a) Rational apologetics: logical arguments to convince the doubter
 - b) Experiential apologetics: The ‘arts’ – dance, drama, video, comedy
 - c) Relational apologetics
 - Servant -evangelism
 - Friendship/lifestyle-evangelism
 - Team-evangelism
 - D. Supernatural apologetics: Power-evangelism, signs and wonders, “Third Wave” Charismatic movement
- V. A decentralized model of church organization
- A. Strong pastoral/elder leadership
 - B. Utilization of lay-leadership
 - C. The discovery of “spiritual gifts”
 - D. An emphasis on small groups

Key Questions About the Church-Marketing Paradigm (critique of the movement):

- What is the basic “root” philosophical problem in the movement (2 Tim. 3:16-17)? It’s not biblical. No genuine biblical support. More from business marketing than the Bible.
- What about “contextualization” (1 Cor 9:20-22)? Paul did *not* advocate “When in Rome do as the Romans do,” but attempted to remove causes of offense when with various groups. The marketing paradigm misinterprets and misapplies this text.
- Is evangelism the top priority of the church (1 Tim- 3:15)? No it is not. Evangelism at any cost is a bad idea.
- Should church leaders design their weekly public church worship services primarily with seekers in mind (Ezek. 44:23; Acts 5:11)? No, the worship service is for Christians, not primarily for the lost.
- Is the Scriptural emphasis on *how* one communicates the gospel message (1 Cor. 2:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom, 10:17)? No, it is on faithfulness to communicate the proper, accurate message. Methods vary.
- Should church leaders target specific “people-groups” for evangelism (Lk 8:5-8; 1 Cor 3:6)? No, we should be broadcasting to any and all.
- If one’s church methodology is Scriptural, will he always experience outward success (Isa. 6:9-12; Jer 5:14; Ezek 2:5; Jn. 6:65)? No, faithful people often fail to win popular approval.
- If the church-marketing movement is unscriptural, why does it appear to be

working through it? Outward success (numbers) is not necessarily an indication of God's blessing.

- Can church-marketers “systematize” universal church-growth principles and accurately measure their effects (Jn. 3:8)? No.
- Is there anything Fundamentalists can learn from the “church-marketing” movement? Yes.
 - A. Increased effectiveness in management
 - B. Inspiration and innovation in evangelism
 - C. A renewed emphasis on quality. “Spirit-directed,” prevailing prayer
 - D. Transparency and accountability regarding inter-personal relationships
 - E. Greater passion in worship without incorporating a style of worldliness
 - F. Building of stronger relational ties with the unchurched through community service.
- What is a Biblical paradigm for church growth (Acts 6:4; 17:6)? Purity, prayer and preaching of the Word in spite of persecution from the world.

* Update (as of 2009): Oddly enough, Joe Zichterman left the faculty of Northland Baptist Bible College and joined a very influential seeker-sensitive/marketing church, Willow Creek Community Church. After pursuing a Ph.D. at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he took a faculty position at Multnomah University (Portland, OR), a broadly evangelical school.



A Christless Christian?

Inclusivism and Religious Pluralism

Evangelicalism has historically taught that salvation is exclusively through faith in Jesus Christ. It is therefore surprising that some evangelicals are rethinking this idea. Perhaps, they suggest, Christ's sacrifice extends to those not typically included among the faithful. The name for this suggestion is Inclusivism.

Inclusivism teaches that "God's forgiveness and acceptance of humanity have been made possible by Christ's death, but . . . the benefits of this sacrifice are not confined to those who respond to [Christ's death] with an explicit act of faith."⁹ In other words, man's salvation and forgiveness of sin are based upon Christ's death, but one does not have to believe in Christ in order to possess the salvation that Christ makes available. People who believe in religious teachings other than that of Christianity are included in the salvation that Christ provides even though they do not believe in Christ. Inclusivists claim that Jesus is salvation's only source, yet awareness and explicit confession of this source is not necessary for salvation. Some can be saved by responding positively to their deepest awareness of God, which may come through another religion.¹⁰

John Sanders, a college professor and author, states, "Saving faith . . . does not [require] knowledge of Christ in this life. God's gracious activity is wider than the arena of special revelation. God will accept into his kingdom those who repent and trust him even if they know nothing of Jesus."¹¹

Clark Pinnock states, "Faith in God is what saves, not possessing certain minimum information. . . . A person is saved by faith, even if the content of faith is deficient. . . . The Bible does not teach that one must confess the name of Jesus to be saved. . . . One does not have to be conscious of the work of Christ done on one's behalf in order to benefit from that work. The issue God cares about is the direction of the heart, not the content of theology."¹²

The motivating factor in Inclusivism seems to be the desire to believe that billions of people who do not believe in Christ may be saved after all. Increasingly, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims are neighbors, colleagues, and friends. Surely God is ungracious and unloving if he makes the door to heaven so narrow that such people of faith cannot enter. The idea of so many good people ending up in hell is unacceptable. God must be more open minded than we think. Another significant factor driving Inclusivism is today's "postmodern" climate. Postmodernists complain that any belief system that

⁹ John Hick, "The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism," in *The World's Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies. Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith*. Quoted by Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, p. 103.

¹⁰ Thomas Finger, "Jesus Christ And Religious Pluralism. *Catalyst*, March 1999 Volume 25, No. 3.

¹¹ John Sanders "Is Belief in Christ Necessary for Salvation?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 60 (1988) 252-3; Quoted in Nash, *Is Jesus The Only Savoir?* p. 123. John Sanders, *No Other Name*, p. 223.

¹² Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 158. Also quoted by Nash, p. 125.

claims to be the only true way is dangerous. They insist that no single religion can be superior to all others.¹³ We'll examine postmodernism in Lesson Five.

Some inclusivists suggest that Jesus appears to everyone at death, offering one last chance at salvation. Roman Catholics commonly hold this view, and more evangelicals are embracing it as well.

Religious Pluralism takes Inclusivism a bit farther, making the following claims:

- There is a mixture of truth and falsehood in the doctrines of all the major world religions.
- World religions have a great deal in common. All want to transform human life in similar ways. This transformation is called by various names: salvation, enlightenment, awakening, or liberation. Whatever you call it, the ultimate goal is the same in all the major religions.
- Each of the great religious traditions embodies a valid way for human beings to relate themselves to the same God, although God is known by different names.

Pluralists would advise a person to be the best Christian or Jew or Hindu that he can be, but also to be open to insights from other traditions. One should not imagine that his particular religion has a lock on the truth. No single way of perceiving God is complete and final. No particular understanding of how God relates to human beings is all-inclusive. There are many ways to be faithful to God, they assert.

It ought to be immediately apparent to any Christian that Inclusivism and Religious Pluralism contradict the Scriptures. There are several reasons why Christianity is an exclusive, not inclusive, faith.

1. There Is No Salvation Apart From Faith In Jesus Christ.

Jn 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Jn 10:9-10 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Jn 16:6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

Ac 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

1 Ti 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

1 Jn 5:12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Christianity is an exclusive religion. It has always taught that some will be saved and some will be lost. The NT repeatedly claims that repentant faith in Jesus Christ is the single requirement for eternal salvation. It is also the clear teaching of Scripture that

¹³ Finger.

there is no other means of salvation available. Just like there is only one true God and only one true Savior, so there is only one plan of salvation. Jesus claims to be the way, not a way.

2. Salvation Has Always Been Secured By Faith In the God of Israel and No Other.

The main argument used by inclusivists is that in the OT, people received forgiveness of sins apart from specific faith in Jesus Christ. They believed in God, but did not even know about Jesus. Since people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were saved, yet did not call upon the name of Jesus Christ, there must be salvation available without specific faith in Christ. As long as someone has faith, his sins are forgiven. It makes no difference which so-called god one's faith is in, as long as he has faith.

In response, we should note that OT believers had to believe in a certain God, not in any one of the many false gods worshipped at the time. They were required to trust in the Creator God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses. It's true that the OT saints did not trust in Jesus Christ *per se*, although they did look forward to the coming of the Messiah. There were many other religions and gods worshipped in the Ancient Near East during the OT period, but we are told repeatedly that Israel's God was the only true and living God, and that all other gods were false and non-existent.

De 4:28 There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.

Is 42:17 They shall be turned back, They shall be greatly ashamed, Who trust in carved images, Who say to the molded images, 'You *are* our gods.'

Is 54:5 For your Maker *is* your husband, The LORD of hosts *is* His name; And your Redeemer *is* the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.

What message did the OT saint believe in order to have his sins forgiven? He believed in the God of Israel who created all things and who promised that he would send a Messiah some day.

Gen 15:6 And [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Rom 4:9 For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.

The Bible is clear: faith in any god except the true God is false and empty. There is only one God, and those who do not exercise faith in him will not be saved.

3. The Saving Benefits of Christ's Death Extend Only to Believers.

Jn 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Jn 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Jn 5:24 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

1 Jn 5:12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Salvation extends only to believers in Christ and not to anyone else.¹⁴ Although it is true that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” he takes away the sin of believers only. Repentance and faith trigger God’s forgiveness. The death of Christ was sufficient for all, but efficient only for believers. To suggest otherwise directly contradicts the Bible.

4. Inclusivism and Pluralism Are Logically Absurd.

Basic logic shows us that two contradictory claims cannot both be true in the same sense and at the same time. Two contradictory claims may both be false, but they cannot both be true. Inclusivism asserts that Christianity is true and so are other faiths that directly contradict Christianity. It’s impossible that contradictory systems are equally true. Yet this is exactly what inclusivism and pluralism claim.

5. Pluralism Is A Modern Phenomenon And Was Not Characteristic Of The Early Years Of Christianity.

The great confessions and creeds of the early church clearly declare that salvation is available only through Christ and through no other means.

The Athanasian Creed¹⁵ states:

Whoever wills to be in a state of salvation, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith, which except everyone shall have kept whole and undefiled without doubt he will perish eternally.

The Westminster Confession of Faith¹⁶, chapter 33, states:

The wicked who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Such was the common belief of Christians for two millennia. Christianity has never been an inclusivist or pluralistic faith. Christians have always asserted that salvation was available only through faith in Christ. It was the refusal to compromise that led to the persecution of the believers in the first century. So it is absolutely crucial that we now do what they and others throughout history have done. We must be prepared to honestly declare, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

¹⁴ Although salvation likely does extend to infants, the retarded, and others who don’t have the intellectual capacity for faith, this does not suggest that salvation is open to non-believers of other religions.

¹⁵ The Athanasian Creed is attributed to Athanasius, the fourth century bishop of Alexandria who was the strongest defender at that time of the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. The present form of the creed likely dates back to the ninth century. By the “catholic” faith, he means the universally-held, orthodox Christian truth claims.

¹⁶ The Westminster Confession was produced by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, which had been created by the English Parliament in 1643 to settle various theological and ecclesiastical issues in the British Isles.

This is the message that cuts and offends. The apostles faced death for insisting that “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). This may never meet the standards of polite conversation, but it is this Gospel we are called to preach, and “not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1 Cor 1:17).¹⁷

6. Inclusivism and Pluralism Eliminate Missions.

If people of other religions are really saved, or if it doesn't really matter what one believes, then mission work is a colossal waste of time, money, and energy. Jesus obviously did not believe such was the case when he commanded his disciples to preach the gospel locally and around the world (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Paul clearly believed that preaching the gospel was necessary for salvation.

Rom 10:14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?
And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Conclusion:

Inclusivists teach that faith in Christ is one way of salvation, but that faith in other gods will also bring the forgiveness of sins. The Bible consistently refutes that idea. Faith in anyone other than Jesus Christ will insure only eternal damnation. There is no hope for eternal salvation outside of Christianity.

The challenge and danger of Pluralism is found in its subtle and tolerant claims. Pluralism states that while Christianity is *true*, it is not the *truth*. Pluralism's claim is not that Christianity is a false religion, but that it is *a* religion. This subtle teaching may be the church's greatest apologetic challenge yet.¹⁸

Discussion:

1. Why are Inclusivism and Pluralism logically absurd? *Because they claim that contradictory statements/doctrines are equally true and valid. Two contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense.*
2. Why are Inclusivism and Pluralism so popular in our society? *Because everyone is taught to be open and tolerant of different ideas. We value freedom of speech and conscience. Further, we are taught that there is no God, and hence no ultimate truth, just opinion. And one opinion is just as good as another.*
3. How does Inclusivism destroy missions? *If those of other faiths are really saved, or if they'll have a chance after they die, then missions work is a waste of time.*

¹⁷ Alistair Begg, “Reflections on The Presidential Prayer Breakfast” *Viewpoint Magazine*: April-June 1999

¹⁸ Samples, p. 39.



Let's Get Together: Ecumenism

Christianity, especially in the west, is fractured into thousands of separate organizations, each attempting to fulfill its own goals, often in competition among themselves. One must admit that if all true Christians were part of the same united organization, the ministry of the church would be greatly enhanced and strengthened. It would be a wonderful thing if all genuine believers could enjoy true unity.

Unity within Christianity is a commendable goal with a biblical basis. The concern which Jesus felt over unity within his church is noted in his prayer just before entering the Garden of Gethsemane on the last day of his life: “that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). Paul frequently states his desire for unity within the church (Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:3-6; Phil 2:1-4, 4:2). Unfortunately, disunity and division have been common within churches and among believers since the beginning of the church.

A movement exists within Christianity to unite or associate all professing Christians, no matter what their theological differences. This movement is often called “the ecumenical movement” or “ecumenism.”¹⁹ A primary leader of ecumenism is the World Council of Churches (WCC), which seeks to bring visible unity to the church. Unfortunately, organizations like the WCC seek unity at the expense of doctrinal purity.

Definition of Ecumenism: the organized attempt to bring about cooperation and visible unity among all believers in Christ. While Inclusivism and Religious Pluralism seek to break down the barriers between different religions, Ecumenism seeks to break down barriers between professing Christians.²⁰

One must not overlook the deep, long standing disagreements that exist between groups of professing believers. Unity of conflicting groups generally requires doctrinal compromise, as we've seen in our study of Inclusivism and Religious Pluralism. Many groups are committed to their traditional doctrinal distinctives and are thus not willing to seek unity at the expense of doctrinal purity. Nor should they.

Are evangelicals involved in ecumenism? Yes, increasingly so. Examples abound.

- Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT): Many well-known evangelical preachers signed a document emphasizing common beliefs and reducing disagreements between Catholics and Protestants.
- Movements like Promise Keepers and preachers like Billy Graham downplay or ignore significant disagreements among Christian groups.
- The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) represents over 60 denominations and 45,000 churches, organizations, schools, and individuals (about 30 million people total).

¹⁹ The word “ecumenical” is based on the Greek word for “world, mankind, inhabited earth.”

²⁰ While ecumenism can be applied more broadly as attempting to unify divergent religions, for the purposes of this lesson ecumenism refers to the push for unity among all professing Christians.

While Christian unity is a commendable goal, we must reject the ecumenical movement for a number of reasons.

1. Bible Doctrine Is Not An Optional Part of Christianity—It Is the Heart of It.

Christianity is an organized, cohesive system of beliefs centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The reason that there are so many different traditions within Christianity is that people disagree about doctrine and practice. Many of these disagreements are significant enough to prevent professing Christians from cooperating. Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Evangelicals all claim the name “Christian,” and all embrace many of the same beliefs. Yet there are serious areas of disagreement among these groups. Ecumenism seeks to eliminate or ignore such differences by emphasizing the points of agreement while de-emphasizing doctrinal distinctions.

2. Any Genuine Unity Must Be Doctrinally Based

A common set of beliefs is the only basis for true unity and harmony. A unity of belief and practice is the glue that holds any Christian organization together. True Christian unity is unity of purpose, unity of belief, and unity of goal. If people can’t agree as to the purpose, beliefs, and goals of Christianity, there can be no unity. Thus, only those of like faith and practice should link up to work together. As we’ve seen, modern ecumenism is not interested in doctrinal agreement. They seek agreement and cooperation on other grounds.

3. Division Over Biblical Doctrine Is Often Necessary.

Believers should expose and rebuke professing believers or false teachers who teach unbiblical doctrine.

Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

Rom 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

2 Cor 6:14-17 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “*I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.*” Therefore “*Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.*”

Eph 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.

Titus 1:9-14 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole

households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. ... Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.

Titus 3:10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition.

2 Jn 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him.

The Bible calls for separation from unbelievers and false teachers, not unity with them. Biblical Christianity has nothing in common with unbelief or with false belief. The Bible calls believers to refute and challenge false teaching and put false teachers out of the church. Ecumenism urges the opposite.

How should we respond to false teachers who deceive and subvert Christian households? We are commanded to do all we can to shut their mouths and prevent them from influencing the church. God does not want us to aid or cooperate with false teachers in any way. Preachers should expose false teachers for what they are and teach people to avoid such false doctrine. Churches should not seek unity with false teachers. They should separate from them.

Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2:11-17 shows us that doctrine is more important than unity.

4. Ecumenism Overemphasizes "Love" at the Expense of Purity.

A flawed concept of Biblical love is the central motivation behind the unscriptural unity that ecumenism seeks. Ecumenism urges professing believers to love one another by overlooking the doctrinal distinctives that divide them. But Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Love for God and loyalty to his Word should exceed any desire for unity, especially with those who deny the central truths of Christianity. The question is not whether or how much one loves others; the question is whether and how much one loves God, his Word, and pure doctrine.

Jn 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.

5. Ecumenism Ignores the True Unity of All Genuine Believers.

1 Cor 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

All true believers are part of the universal church, the body of Christ. This true spiritual unity crosses all denominational and traditional lines. Members of the body of Christ are united whether they know it or not. There may be no organizational unity, but there is a spiritual unity of all genuine believers.

6. Ecumenism Destroys Missions

The ecumenical movement would have us believe the same lie that Pluralism teaches, namely, that unbiblical religious traditions are valid and true. If ecumenism is correct, then much mission effort is a needless waste of time and money. A great deal of current mission work is attempting to reach those who profess to be Christians, especially within lands that are predominantly Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox. Many such people know nothing of true biblical salvation. If they are already saved as ecumenism teaches, then there is no need to reach them.

Since ecumenism is not interested in doctrine or in the conversion of souls, the goal of missions becomes social justice and/or economic reform. The mission of the church becomes political rather than spiritual. This is the case in most liberal churches today—they preach the social gospel, not the Christian gospel. The mission of the church becomes liberating those under oppression rather than preaching the gospel of Christ. However, Christ commissioned the church to preach the gospel and organize churches, not to change political systems or initiate economic reform.

7. Modern Ecumenism is Rooted in Liberalism

Liberalism attempts to retain aspects of biblical morality while rejecting the “offensive” parts of the Bible, like the virgin birth and the resurrection. Liberalism teaches that the Bible is like any other book—not inspired, prone to errors, and historically unreliable. The miracles of the Bible are mere myths and not to be taken literally. Jesus, they suggest, came to bring equality and social justice, not reconciliation with God. The main problem with people is their lack of education and economic opportunities, not lack of holiness.

Liberal theologians of the 19th century invented a sentimental Jesus who came to bring peace and harmony and social justice. Such a Jesus, who proclaims the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, poses little threat to the average unbeliever.²¹ It’s within this context that ecumenism thrives. Liberals care little for doctrinal distinctions. Ecumenism has been directly linked with liberalism for over a century. It has no place within biblical Christianity.

Conclusion: Unity among believers is a commendable goal. It would be wonderful if all genuine Christians were of like faith and practice. Unfortunately, such is not the case. The ecumenical movement, which attempts to bring believers into unity with unbelievers and false teachers, is unbiblical and dangerous. Christians must avoid any movement that seeks unity at the expense of doctrine. Genuine Christians must reject ecumenical movement.

Note: Separation from unbelief and unbelievers does not require isolation. We must never participate in church or religious activities with unbelievers or false teachers. However, such separation does not require that we isolate ourselves from unbelievers around us. The Great Commission requires that we spend time with unbelievers. Both ecumenism and isolationism are sin.

²¹ Alistair Begg.

Discussion:

1. What is the central goal of the ecumenical movement? *Unification of all professing Christians.*
2. Why must doctrine be the basis of unity? *1) Biblically speaking, the unity God wants is a unity of belief and practice; 2) Practically speaking, there has to be an underlying common set of beliefs that supports everything else. If people can't agree about what they believe, then there is no true unity.*
3. How is ecumenism different from inclusivism or pluralism? *It seeks unity among professing Christians, not among between Christians and non-Christians. However, there is a strain of ecumenism that is pluralistic, seeking unity among all groups. E.g. the WCC.*
4. How can ecumenism lead to religious pluralism? *Ecumenical unity generally requires the downplaying of doctrine. Groups begin recognizing different groups as legitimate. Soon all distinctives are removed and any group is valid, even those that contradict one another.*
5. What's the difference between separation and isolation? *Separation is concerned with preventing ungodly influences, yet still engaging in the world—"in the world but not of the world." Isolation is a fortress mentality that retreats from the world to avoid any contact with it. Isolation is unbiblical; separation is not.*



Absolutely No Absolutes: Postmodernism

Historians use certain labels to describe various time periods in history. The Prehistoric Age, the Ancient Era, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment are terms describing certain periods of history.

Modernism was a term coined in 1907, but the word refers to the period from the 1700s to the end of the 1900s. Modernism is an optimistic cultural outlook that put its faith in progress, the pursuit of objective knowledge, and scientific investigation. Modernists have faith in logic, in empiricism (the belief that knowledge can be gained through our senses) and in science. J.I. Packer says, “Modernism . . . assumed that it was in the power of reason to solve all the world’s problems and to determine what anybody needed to know.”²² Nothing is true until science proves it to be true. Modernism gave us the scientific method (hypothesis, experimentation, observation and conclusion). Modernism teaches that human beings have within their own power the ability to rationally discover all truth and to apply these truths to moral and ethical situations. *E.g., the Star Trek series is very modernistic—man’s conquest of space and time thru science and technology.*

The *postmodern* era began somewhere between 1950 and 1980. Postmodernism is a reaction against modernism, a turn away from objective truth and science toward personal, subjective “truth.” Evidence of postmodernism is very common. We see it on TV, in the movies, in children’s classrooms, in song lyrics and on the news. Postmodernism teaches that:

- Reality is in the mind of the thinker, not external to him. One does not discover truth; one makes his own.
- Science and technology is not able to answer all questions or fix all problems.
- There is no such thing as universal, absolute, or ultimate truth. Truth is personal and subjective. Our view of truth and our understanding of knowledge is conditioned by what we are, which is conditioned by the society and culture within which we have grown up and lived.²³
- It is impossible to know anything for certain.
- Religion is fine and good as long as one does not make any claims to universal truth.

²² David L. Goetz, “The Riddle of Our Postmodern Culture,” *Leadership Journal*, Winter 1997.

²³ Graeme Codrington “Postmodernism - The Future’s Not What It Used To Be,” 1998

- Religion should reject rationalism in favor of a mystical, non-doctrinal experience of whatever deity one chooses to recognize. One must set aside logic before attempting to experience spiritual things. Spirituality need not be rational or logical.
- Theological differences are unimportant. Take what you like from different religions and/or philosophies to make your own belief system. Nobody really knows the truth anyway.
- Judgment and intolerance are the ultimate evils. No one can say that anyone else's behavior, philosophy, or religion is wrong. To suggest that anyone is wrong is insulting and the height of arrogance.
- Morality is up to the individual. Develop your own morality based on discussion and investigation, rather than simply accepting the morality of our society. Reject religious heritage and tradition.
- The most dangerous people are those who assert that their ideas are better than other ideas. Those who make exclusive claims are the enemy.
- Cultures tend to influence each other. No single culture is any better than any other. Oppressed tribal cultures are more pure than western culture. We can learn much from other cultures, especially third-world and non-civilized ones.
- Seek alternatives in all things—reject traditional approaches to society, organization, interaction and belief.
- The planet is in trouble. Life is senseless and incoherent. Nobody knows exactly what is happening and nobody is in control.

Postmodernism doesn't put much stock in the progress of humankind, that things will be getting better anytime soon. Postmodernism asserts that all truth, even to some extent scientific knowledge, is biased and socially influenced. Truths are relative and depend on what one's culture regards as truth. Everything is a matter of perspective and personal opinion. All truth is like Play-Doh; you can make anything you want with it.

Postmodernism is anti-foundational, opposed to definitions and categorizations. Thus, a truly postmodern person cannot define or defend postmodernism. Definitions don't matter because everyone sees things differently, according to his own truth.

The last two decades, this outlook, or intellectual mood, has become very common in our culture. However, there are several reasons why postmodernism is hostile to biblical Christianity.

1. The Bible is Absolute Truth

By “absolute” truth, we mean truth that is applicable to all people in all situations. Truth is not a matter of opinion or personal experience. Absolute truth is true always, no matter what. There is no higher truth than biblical truth.

Postmodernists say “It may be true for you, but it’s not true for me.” Truth applies to one’s self, not to everyone. Opinion and personal taste bias all statements. No one should force his opinion on anyone else.

Such sentiments obviously contradict biblical Christianity. The Bible claims absolute truth for itself. Scripture is inspired by God, and thus authoritative, definitive, and objective. Everyone is entitled to his opinion, but God’s opinion outweighs everyone else’s. There are objective standards of right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and not acceptable. These standards do not change because they are rooted in the changeless character of God.

2. Christianity Rises or Falls on the Historicity of Jesus Christ.

Postmodernism implies that it’s impossible to truly know history. All historical accounts are the product of subjective, error-prone historians. It’s impossible to get a true account of what really happened. Even if one were available, one’s reading of it is subject to personal interpretation. So any historical account is at best a fuzzy estimate of what really happened.

If the postmodern assertion is true, we have no true knowledge of God, Jesus, or of any events described in the Bible. The Bible is at best a faulty attempt to describe what happened, a hazy reflection of events that no one should take literally. Nobody knows what, if anything, really happened. Postmodernism destroys any claims to truth that Christianity makes because it calls into question all biblical statements.

The Bible is historically accurate and reliable. The statements we find in it are a faithful reflection of the actual state of affairs. There is good evidence to believe that the Bible comes from God, that Jesus rose from the dead, and that other assertions the Bible makes are true and trustworthy. Although we believe the Bible by faith, it is not a blind faith. One need not take an irrational “leap of faith” to believe the teachings of Christianity.

3. Judgment and Discernment are Valuable Skills

Postmodernists don’t mind accepting contradictory statements; they can live with irrationalism. Two contradictory statements can both be true, in their minds. But this is logical absurdity. As we saw in Lesson 3, two contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. But to the postmodern mind, that doesn’t matter.

Postmodernism is full of logical absurdities. It states that there is no truth and that one should be tolerant, and then asserts what it considers to be a true statement and is intolerant of those who disagree. It states absolutely that there is no absolute truth. Postmodernism is self-contradictory and illogical.

The greatest evil, according to postmodernism, is intolerance. Intolerance used to refer to bigotry or irrational prejudice. That is, judging people or excluding them because of who they are, what color they are, where they come from, etc. In this sense, intolerance is offensive. But now, intolerance means simply disagreeing about beliefs. If you think you are right and someone else is wrong, you are intolerant.

Christianity *is* intolerant, using the above postmodern definition of the term. Christianity boldly suggests that one's religious beliefs could be wrong.

Jesus said, "Judge righteous judgment." Paul said, "Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good." He told Timothy to reprove and rebuke those who strayed from orthodox belief. Christians must exercise their powers of judgment and discernment.

Christianity is based on certain statements that are true—there is a God, Jesus is the Savior, Jesus rose from the dead, salvation is by grace through faith. If these statements are untrue or unreliable, Christianity is finished.

Challenging the statements of those who oppose Christianity does not devalue or insult anyone. Holding up one's ideas to critical scrutiny is valuable. If one's ideas cannot stand before the close examination of critics, then those ideas must be weak. One should not confuse a person with his ideas. All people are valuable, but some ideas are not. If you point out a false or irrational idea that your friend holds, you are doing him a service.

Christianity is a rational faith—it makes sense, it's logical and reasonable. It requires that one be able to reason and understand, to use logic and communication skills. Christianity depends on propositional truth, i.e., the idea that certain statements are true and others are false. Postmodernism is irrational and self-contradictory.

4. Reality is External and Objective, Not Primarily Internal and Subjective.

Postmodern thinkers assert that one creates his own reality. That is, they say that all sensations are influenced by one's own perception of those sensations. Each person feels things differently from every other person. Hence, all reality is subject to the person sensing the reality. Truth is therefore a product of one's own sensations, feelings, and thoughts. Truth cannot be shared because it is internal and subjective.

Although there is some truth to the fact that every person senses reality in his own way, it is nevertheless also true that reality is essentially objective (not dependent upon personal perceptions) and external (not manufactured within a person). All things external to oneself do truly exist and are not dependent upon anyone's sensation of them to give them existence. Many people may share the same reality, i.e., they can sense the same sensations and understand the same truths.

If postmodernism is correct, Christianity (or any religious system) could never be a shared reality. Everyone would sense it differently. One could never make any

specific claims about what the normal Christian life should be like because there is no such thing as “normal.” In postmodern thought, everyone creates his own idea of “normal.”

5. Postmodernism is Influenced by Anti-Christian Religion.

Mystical traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism embrace many postmodern ideas. These religions teach that everything is part of one essence (monism). All these traditions not only reject reason as tool for discovering truth, but they even utilize contradiction to drive learners to a deeper or higher plane of understanding. For instance, Buddhism describes the Tao as the sound of one hand clapping. The Hindu Brahman is “always and never.” Also, neither eastern religion nor postmodernism accept the reality of the world we observe in an objective sense. In Hinduism, the material world is merely an illusion. (Why isn’t that statement an illusion?) Such illogical thinking, with its rejection of rationality, is naturally compatible with postmodernism.

Postmodernism also blends in native spiritualities and New Age consciousness. Tribal nature religions make no use of reason in their paths to knowledge of the world. These religions rely on tradition and intuition to know spiritual things, none of which can be tested in any way by reason.²⁴

Note: As always, there are those within Christianity who, in their desire to make the faith more attractive to the world, attempt to re-format it. They suggest that the church should reach the postmodern world in a postmodern way. For example, rather than making exclusive statement about Christianity, the church should present the faith as one means of personal growth and satisfaction that some people may enjoy. They stress the inner, personal aspects of Christianity rather than the doctrinal, rational side of the faith. Postmodern people are looking for spiritual expression, and the church can provide that.

However, a reformatted, postmodern Christianity is not biblical, historic Christianity. We cannot downplay Jesus’ exclusive claims to be the one and only Savior, the historical reality of biblical events, or Bible doctrine.

Conclusion: There are a few beneficial elements within Postmodernism. Postmodernism has rightly pointed out many of the weaknesses of Enlightenment/Modernistic thinking. Science and technology cannot solve all of mankind’s problems. Man still can’t control nature or even control himself. Scientific investigation does not answer man’s basic questions about himself or about the universe.

In the postmodern world, the church may be the only place left where truth is proclaimed confidently. And it’s certainly the only place where those seeking something more than the cold, rational world of modernism can explore the deep mysteries of God.

²⁴ Jim Leffel and Dennis McCallum, *Crossroads Online Journal*

William Willimon, professor of Christian ministry at Duke University, said, “The good news is, we are entering a period in which the old, modern world view is losing its grip. . . . Secularity, our old enemy, is in big trouble.” Postmodernism, for all its confusion, seems just one more opportunity for the church to do what it does best—be the church.²⁵

Discussion:

1. Why is this movement called *Postmodernism*? *Because it follows modernism and is a reaction against modernism.*
2. What are the essential characteristics of Modernism? *Belief in science and rationalism, optimism about the future, and man’s ability to solve problems.*
3. What are the essential characteristics of Postmodernism? *Lack of trust in science and technology, emphasis on the personal and subjective, rejection of all that modernism stood for.*
4. What are the primary challenges Postmodernism has for Christianity? *Rejection of absolute truth, rejection of accurate historical accounts, personal and irrational nature of spirituality.*
5. Why would our postmodern culture be hostile to the claims of Christianity? *Because Christianity is intolerant, judgmental, and exclusive—all the things that the postmodern world despises.*
6. Are there any beneficial aspects of Postmodernism? *People are no longer as loyal to science and technology as they once were. They may be more open to spirituality.*

²⁵ Goetz.



A Little Respect: Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism is a movement and attitude among Christian churches and organizations that presents some unique challenges for those who desire to remain faithful to biblical Christianity. In order to understand more fully how this movement came about, we need to understand a couple of other movements: Liberalism and Fundamentalism.

 Liberalism was the result of enlightenment/modernistic thinking (see Lesson Five) and anti-Christianity. Anti-Christian intellectuals such as Darwin, Hegel, and Marx led the movement to dethrone God and replace him with man. As western culture became more permeated by science and technology, the Bible became the subject of ridicule and criticism. Science left no room for God, especially the God of the Bible. Science “proved” that the world was the product of random evolution, not divine creation. Liberals attempted to “rescue” Christianity by removing from it what the critics attacked—miracles, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the deity of Christ, etc. Liberalism taught that the Bible is not inspired, is full of errors, and should not be taken literally. Jesus Christ was considered a mere man, good and helpful, perhaps, but a mere man nonetheless. Liberal thought took over many Protestant denominations and institutions by the early 1900s. *Note: Liberals are unbelievers/apostates. Thus one should not use the term “liberal” to describe those genuine believers. The fact that someone is worldly or permissive does not mean that he is a theological liberal. In a theological discussion, a liberal is an unbeliever.*

Fundamentalism retained its belief in the Bible. “The essence of Fundamentalism . . . is the unqualified acceptance of and obedience to the Scriptures.”²⁶ Fundamentalists believe the Bible is inspired, that it is an accurate, error-free record of events, and that believers must follow it. Fundamentalists emphasize the truth of the essentials of the faith, such as the inspiration of the Bible, justification by faith, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ. Fundamentalists tend to be aggressive in their opposition to false teaching and urge separation from, rather than cooperation with, unbelievers and erring brethren. Fundamentalists and Liberals battled each other in the early decades of the 1900s. Fundamentalists left Liberal denominations and formed new churches, denominations, and organizations. *For some years prior to the rise of NE, the words “evangelical” and “fundamental” were mostly synonymous. But not anymore.*

Evangelicalism arose in the 1940’s as a group within Fundamentalism became dissatisfied with some aspects of the movement. New (or neo) Evangelicalism is a term coined by the late Harold J. Ockenga (ok-en-gay), former pastor of Park Street Church of Boston and President of Gordon College and Seminary. He advocated a new movement that stressed social action, education, political involvement, and infiltration into the main-line denominations. Unlike Liberals, many of the Evangelicals are Christians, believing the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith.

²⁶ David Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850*, Bob Jones University Press, 1986, p. 5.

The chief difference between Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism is their position on separation from the world. Fundamentalists believe that Christians should distance themselves from unbelievers, false doctrine, and the ungodly elements of culture. Evangelicals embrace modern culture and seek to use it for Christian purposes. They don't separate from false doctrine; instead, they seek to downplay doctrinal differences and use their influence to correct false teaching. Evangelicals yearn for respect and acknowledgement from society. They want to be taken seriously, not to be thought of as extremists or radicals. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, see many wicked elements of modern society that Christians should reject. The following table may help you understand the differences between the three movements.

Liberalism	Evangelicalism	Fundamentalism
Denies the Bible, rejects the fundamentals of the faith	Accepts the Bible, accepts the fundamentals of the faith	Accepts the Bible, accepts the fundamentals of the faith
Unbelievers	Believers (<u>many</u>)	Believers (<u>mostly</u>)
Trusts science and human reason	<u>Limited</u> trust in science and human reason	<u>Skeptical</u> about scientific claims where they contradict the Bible
<u>Social</u> gospel – Jesus came to liberate the poor and oppressed	Social <u>conscience</u> – Jesus came to save from sin, but also to help the poor and oppressed	<u>Gospel</u> conscious – Jesus came to provide salvation, not to solve social problems
Embrace culture; church is irrelevant	Embrace culture; adapt the church to fit the culture	<u>Reject</u> wicked elements of modern culture; adapt the church to fit the Bible
Ecumenical/pluralistic Cooperates with anyone	Ecumenical/non-separatist Cooperates with any “Christian”	Separatist/anti-ecumenical Cooperates only with other Fundamentalists
Pluralistic	Diplomatic/positive	<u>Militant</u>
<u>Few</u> standards of behavior	<u>Loose</u> standards of behavior	<u>Strict</u> standards of behavior
Theological dialogue	Theological dialogue	No dialogue with false theology

Unfortunately, Evangelicalism is moving more toward Liberalism than toward Fundamentalism. Evangelical writers, teachers, and publishers are more commonly criticizing the Bible, opening salvation to non-Christians, downplaying doctrine, and embracing popular culture. The name *Evangelical* has become almost too broad to define.

Note: Don't confuse Evangelicalism with evangelism. The two are not the same. Also, one can be evangelical without being part of Evangelicalism.

Why is Evangelicalism dangerous?²⁷

1. Evangelicalism Rejects the Doctrine of Separation.

As we noted above, Evangelicals reject what the Bible teaches on the issue of separation. The Bible clearly and repeatedly urges genuine believers to separate themselves from unbelievers, false teachers, and erring brethren. This lack of separation has caused most of the problems within Evangelicalism.

Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

2 Cor 6:14-17 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: *"I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."* Therefore *"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."*

Titus 3:10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,

Evangelicalism takes none of these commands seriously. They don't rebuke or expose error, nor do they separate themselves from those who produce such error. Instead, they seek dialogue, compromise, and cooperation with false teachers and unorthodox brethren. Error and false teaching have infiltrated the movement to an alarming degree.

Note the Quote: The New Evangelicalism is a theological and moral compromise of the deadliest sort. It is an insidious attack upon the Word of God. . . . The New Evangelicalism advocates toleration of error. It is following the downward path of accommodation to error, cooperation with error, contamination by error, and ultimate capitulation [giving in] to error!²⁸

It is always God's will for the faithful believer to withdraw from any fellowship that has departed from sound doctrine and practice. Unfortunately, Evangelicals refuse to do so.

2. Evangelicalism Compromises Doctrine

Ro 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

Ga 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Col 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

²⁷ Some of this material based on David Cloud's observations in "Fundamentalism, Modernism, and New-Evangelicalism" *O Timothy Magazine* Volume 12, Issue 1, 1995.

²⁸ Charles Woodbridge, *The New Evangelicalism*, pp. 9, 15

2 Th 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

Rather than standing firmly for sound doctrine and against false doctrine, Evangelicals commonly avoid the traditional creeds and statements of faith as sources of division and discord rather than bases of unity. The result is a movement that is very broad and shallow, willing to embrace anyone and anything that claims to be Christian. Because of its unwillingness to stand against error, Evangelicalism is vulnerable to much false doctrine infiltrating the movement.

Note the quote: Evangelicalism in the 1990s is [a mixture] of diverse and often theologically ill-defined groups, institutions, and traditions. . . . The theological unity that once marked the movement has given way to a theological pluralism that was precisely what many of the founders of modern evangelicalism had rejected in mainline Protestantism. . . . Evangelicalism is not healthy in conviction or spiritual discipline.²⁹

3. Evangelicalism Questions the Inerrancy and Authority of Scripture.

Is 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."

Inerrancy is the biblical teaching that the Word of God is without error in the original manuscripts, and thus totally reliable and accurate. *Infallible* is a similar descriptive term, meaning that the Scriptures are true and unable to lead one astray. Inerrancy and infallibility are based on inspiration. Since the Bible is God's Word, it must be both without error and true. Historically, Christians have held that the Bible was both inerrant and infallible. However, many Evangelicals now question or disown inerrancy. It's not uncommon for Evangelical scholars to criticize the Bible just like the Liberals were so fond of doing. They suggest that the Bible is trustworthy when it comes to matters of faith and doctrine, but may be in error on other matters, such as history and geography. For them, the Bible *contains* the Word of God, but it is not completely the Word of God.

In 1984, well-known Evangelical leader Francis Schaeffer published a book entitled *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. Schaeffer exposes the rise of compromise and accommodation, and the tragic consequences of this, within the evangelical church. He writes, "Within evangelicalism there are a growing number who are modifying their views on the inerrancy of the Bible so that the full authority of Scripture is completely undercut" (44). Evangelicals have proven Schaeffer to be accurate in his analysis.

4. Evangelicalism Cooperates with Unbelievers and False Teachers

2 Ch 19:2 And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you.

²⁹ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Evangelical What's in a Name?" *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 1996, pp. 32,33,36).

2 Jn 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;

Evangelicals have no qualms about cooperating with those who deny or criticize the Bible or with those who are disorderly in their practice. Evangelical leaders have forged ties with Roman Catholics as well as other organizations which are in direct opposition to the doctrines evangelicals have historically stood for. Evangelicals are committed to the idea of dialogue with secular education, Liberals, other religions, and anyone else who cares to contribute. For example, in 1994, 38 Evangelical and Catholic leaders signed a document entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT), which seeks to bring the two groups together in pursuit of common goals. Evangelicals claim that Rome has changed for the better, that Roman Catholicism is not opposed to biblical Christianity. Bible believers have historically claimed just the opposite.

Love and unity are commendable goals, but placing love above sound doctrine as a basis for Christian fellowship is unbiblical. We should not cooperate with those who “hate the LORD.” Instead, we should rebuke them and separate from them.

5. Evangelicalism Refuses to Be Negative

Ps 119:128 Therefore all *Your* precepts *concerning* all *things* I consider *to be* right; I hate every false way.

Eph 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.

Evangelicals consciously reject the negatives of biblical Christianity and attempt to put a positive spin on everything. They avoid criticizing or disagreeing with those who teach false doctrine. They seek to be diplomatic and non-offensive rather than aggressive as they pursue unity at the expense of truth.

Evangelicals typically do not preach plainly against sin or identify and expose false teachers. They avoid topics like hell, judgment, separation, sin, error, false teachers, and self-denial. They speak more about positive topics like self-esteem and successful living than holiness and repentance. E.g., Robert Schuller.

6. Evangelicalism Adopts a Man-Centered, Pragmatic View of the Church.

Evangelicalism has given us the mega-church and the church-growth movement. As we learned in Lesson Two, the church-growth movement emphasizes human logic and a “give the customer what he wants” mentality. Evangelicals have accepted the idea that whatever works to reach the largest audience is acceptable. Rather than following biblical guidelines for how to conduct church, Evangelicals commonly poll the unsaved world to see what it wants from church. This “use whatever works” idea is called *pragmatism*, and it is inconsistent with biblical Christianity. Christians should be far more concerned with what the Scripture teaches about church than what the unsaved world would like from church.

7. Evangelicalism Rejects Traditional Christian Ideas of Holiness

2 Co 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Evangelicals seems to repudiate biblical holiness by redefining the limits of appropriate Christian behavior. For example, ungodly movies and music are given positive reviews in Evangelical publications. Evangelical music groups look and sound exactly like the world. Many Evangelical Bible college campuses have the look and feel of secular colleges. The students wear the same clothes (or lack of clothes) as the world; they drink the same liquor; they dance to the same music; they celebrate the same worldly events; they care about the same worldly concerns. Many Evangelicals no longer subscribe to a high moral code of conduct. They tend to focus on the freedom and liberty that believers may enjoy at the expense of holiness.

Note: Evangelicalism covers a broad spectrum of belief and practice. Conservative Evangelicals may have much in common with Fundamentalists (e.g., John MacArthur, John Piper, R.C. Sproul). Some of the more mainstream Evangelicals provide a mixture of good and bad (e.g., Graham, Dobson, Warren, Hybels). “Progressive” Evangelicals are on the fringe of the movement and sound much like Liberals (e.g., Jim Wallis, Brian McLaren, the “emergent” church). The movement at a whole seems to be moving away from its Fundamentalist roots.

Discussion:

1. What’s the primary factor that distinguishes an Evangelical from a Fundamentalist? *Separation, or lack thereof. Evangelicals don’t separate; Fundamentalists do.*
2. What is a Liberal? *One who denies the Bible, criticizes the Bible, but still claims to be a Christian.*
3. What are the primary dangers of Evangelicalism? *Doctrinal compromise, cooperation with and toleration of error, and toleration of sin.*



What an Experience: The Charismatic Movement

The Book of Acts gives an account of many miracles that the apostles accomplished at the beginning of the Church Age. The church begins with the appearance of tongues of fire and the ability of the apostles to be heard in languages they did not learn. Miracles, healings, visions, and tongues seemed to be the normal state of affairs for the early church. The question is, should the church of today experience the same kind of phenomena? That is, should believers expect to speak in unknown languages, to heal the sick, to experience visions, or to accomplish other miraculous signs and wonders?

One group of believers teaches that the experience of the apostles should be normal for the church in all ages. The modern church should encounter the same kind of phenomena that the early church did. Those who suggest this are called Charismatics or Pentecostals.

The term *charismatic* comes from the Greek word *charismata*, which means *gifts of grace*. Charismatics and Pentecostals are generally characterized by an emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit and belief in the operation of miraculous gifts of the Spirit (as experienced on the Day of Pentecost [Acts 2]; hence, “Pentecostal”). They also evidence a desire for spiritual renewal and a commitment to operate like the early church did.

Pentecostals and Charismatics generally teach that the Holy Spirit still grants supernatural, extraordinary gifts and powers to believers, such as faith to perform miracles, the power to heal, to prophesy and interpret prophecy, and to speak in tongues (glossolalia).

The Pentecostal movement has its roots in John Wesley, an eighteenth-century revival preacher, and the Methodist movement he founded.³⁰ The modern Pentecostal movement in the U.S. began in 1901 at Charles Parham’s Bethel Bible College, Topeka, Kansas, when an eighteen-year-old girl named Agnes Ozman received what she called the baptism of the Spirit and spoke in “tongues” (Chinese, supposedly) when hands were laid on her. Soon, many others at the school were speaking and singing in tongues. In 1906, tongues were spoken at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California.

David du Plessis, converted in a South African Pentecostal church known as the Apostolic Faith Mission, became a leader and spokesman for the new Pentecostalism in the mid 1900s. He was instrumental in spreading the Pentecostal movement to traditional churches.

Aimee Semple McPherson in the 1920s and 1930s led many people in main-line denominational churches into the Pentecostal experience. In 1923 she organized the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. Jack Hayford is a leading spokesman for the Foursquare Church today.

In 1960, in Van Nuys, California, the modern Charismatic movement (or neo-Pentecostalism) began in an Episcopal Church. After that, the movement spread

³⁰ Aspects of Charismatic-style doctrine and behavior is found at several points in church history. Montanus, George Fox, and Ann Lee (who founded the Shaker sect) embraced many Charismatic practices and beliefs. Even Mormons claim to have experienced some of the same phenomena.

within the mainline Protestant denominations (e.g., Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist) and even to the Roman Catholic Church. Charismatics today come from many religious backgrounds, and often fit their practices into preexisting religious traditions. Unlike the older Pentecostals, Charismatics do not demand that speaking in tongues is an essential proof of being saved.

Charismatics trace their movement through three “waves”: 1) Old or Classic Pentecostalism, which began in 1901; 2) New Pentecostalism or Charismatic Renewal, beginning in 1960; and 3) The Signs and Wonders Movement, a name coined in 1983. The third wave stresses “power evangelism” whereby the gospel is explained and demonstrated by way of supernatural signs and wonders. The “revivals” experienced in Toronto, Ontario; Pensacola, Florida; and Brownsville, Texas, are examples of the third wave.

Many hundreds of millions of professing Christians around the world are affiliated with the Charismatic movement. Charismatic Christians are found on every continent and probably in every country of the world. Many believers in third-world nations could be categorized as Charismatic.

The primary characteristics of the Charismatic movement are as follows:³¹

- Spiritual gifts—speaking in tongues, healings, prophecy
- Emphasis on Holy Spirit—freedom of the Spirit, presence of spiritual gifts
- Extra-biblical revelation—”Word of God for you,” prophecy, word of knowledge, word of wisdom
- Emotional, subjective, free-flowing worship—hostile to tradition and formality
- Relational, communal—stressing involvement, fellowship, love, family
- Theologically weak—emphasis on experience over orthodox doctrine; hostile to intellectual analysis; driven by experience, not theology
- Supernaturalism—emphasis on supernatural, miraculous activity; demonstrations of God’s power that transcend the rational
- Spontaneous expression—enthusiasm, excitement; worship experience includes raising hands, clapping, swaying, and shouting

There are many within Charismatic churches who disavow much of the wild behavior and heretical beliefs of some Charismatics. In general, Charismatics are godly, sincere Christians with whom we would agree on many points. Some of the more conservative

³¹ James A. Fowler, 1999.

Charismatics are “open” to the gifts but quite reserved in their use of them. But a significant portion of the Charismatic movement accepts extremism as normal.

Note several problems associated with the Charismatic movement:

1. Charismatics Misunderstand the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

For Charismatics, baptism in the Holy Spirit is an intense, spiritual “breakthrough,” an experience second only to conversion, signaling one’s transition into the charismatic faith. This experience is often called a “second blessing.” The baptism is often accompanied by the laying on of hands and/ or speaking in tongues. Tongues speaking is supposed to occur when the Holy Spirit transcends the boundaries of human speech in order to provide the worshipper with a new language of celebration and praise. Those who have experienced the “second blessing” are supposedly closer to God and more in tune with the Holy Spirit; those who have not are missing out on God’s blessing.

However, the Bible teaches that every believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (1 Cor 12:13). Further, this baptism is non-experiential, i.e., one does not feel it or sense it. One’s baptism by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ is a positional, judicial act, not an sensational one. That is, the believer’s standing before God changes, but one need not sense any particular feelings or emotions as a result.

Charismatics confuse the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the filling of the Holy Spirit. Scripture commands believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). The primary idea of filling is being controlled by something. Just as wine controls one who is drunk, so the Holy Spirit must control the believer. One is filled with the Holy Spirit when he yields his own will to the principles of Scripture. Hence, the filling of the Spirit is not some ecstatic experience, but simple obedience to the Bible. Charismatics typically misunderstand the nature of Holy Spirit filling.

The evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit is: a) exhibiting the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22, 23) – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance; b) walking worthy of the Lord. Ephesians 4-6 describe qualities that will be true of those who are filled with the Spirit, and it does not mention the presence of the sign gifts as an evidence of filling.

2. Charismatics Undermine the Sufficiency of Scripture.

Most Charismatics believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. However, they also believe that God is still directly revealing his will to believers. Charismatics believe that it is possible to have the gift of prophecy and some say they receive “words of knowledge” or “words of wisdom.” That is, they think they are recipients of God’s direct revelation. They hear God’s voice, either audibly or silently. They claim to see visions and experience dreams sent from God. While they don’t add

these revelations to the Bible, they do see such revelation as directly from God. Scripture has primacy, but direct revelation still occurs, they say.³²

A key principle in Protestant orthodoxy is that the canon of Scripture is closed. If this is true, direct revelation and inspiration from God are also no longer occurring. Believers do not hear the voice of God, either audibly or silently. Believers do not receive inspired visions and dreams. Everything God wants believers to know about the Christian life is contained in Scripture. Biblical principles are perfectly sufficient to meet the spiritual needs of any believer.

2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Pet 1:3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,

The idea that someone receives communication personally, directly from God is called mysticism. We'll get to that in the next lesson.

God commissioned the prophets (OT) and apostles (NT) to receive and record direct revelation from God. After the apostles passed from the scene, direct revelation from God stopped. Christians should not expect or seek to be inspired by God to write or say anything.

3. Charismatics are Often Faulty in their Interpretation of Scripture.

The Charismatic movement is based on the faulty idea that the miraculous events that occurred on the Day of Pentecost and throughout the Bible are repeatable and even normal. They claim that believers should expect to experience healings, speak in unknown languages, see visions, dream inspired dreams, and even the raise the dead. However, the fact that a miraculous event occurred once does not guarantee or even suggest that the event should happen again. A quick glance through the Bible will prove that miracles were not common occurrences. In fact, miracles were very rare—the Bible records fewer than twenty people ever doing a miracle. Average Christians did not commonly perform miracles in the Bible.

Many of the events recorded in the Book of Acts are not the normal experience of believers or churches. The Day of Pentecost was as much an unrepeatable event as was Christ's birth, death, or resurrection. The Book of Acts records the transition from the OT Law to the NT Church. Thus, much of what is described there was unique and not repeatable.

As is normally the case in theological movements, some Charismatics are closer to biblical orthodoxy than others. Some who endorse the Charismatic movement are very good scholars (e.g., Gordon Fee, Wayne Grudem). Unfortunately, many of the most popular leaders of the movement are genuine false prophets, leading their people into error and away from truth (e.g., Word-Faith leaders like Benny Hinn,

³² Some Charismatics would not hold that modern prophecy is necessarily authoritative or inspired. E.g., Wayne Grudem.

Kenneth Copeland, Paul Crouch, Rod Parsley, Fred Price, etc.). Even some of the more mainstream, respectable proponents of the Charismatic movement are seriously faulty in their interpretation and application of Scripture (e.g., Jack Hayford's book on Nehemiah).

4. Charismatics Misunderstand and Misuse the Spiritual Gifts

The Bible lists various spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6f; 1 Cor 12:8f) – prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, mercy, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, healing, miracles, discerning of spirits, helps, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Charismatics believe that all these gifts are still in operation. However, it is clear that some gifts were given only to certain types of people. Paul stated that he performed the signs of a true apostle among believers as a seal of his apostleship (2 Cor 12:12). It was this God-given ability that proved to the church that Paul was in fact an apostle. Non-apostles could not do the things apostles did.

Certain gifts of the Holy Spirit were employed in the earliest stage of Christianity to authenticate that God was doing something new. These “sign gifts”—such as the gifts of healing, tongues, miracles—ceased with the death of the last apostle. They were temporary. Among the temporary sign gifts were tongues and the gift of healing. The gift of healing is not active in the churches today in the same sense in which it was evident in the ministry of the apostles. God still heals the sick, although not typically through faith healers.

Charismatics misunderstand and abuse tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:20-22 plainly says tongues were a sign to the unbelieving Jews. This was clearly the purpose for tongues when the phenomena first appeared on the Day of Pentecost. Further, Charismatics generally do not follow the biblical limitations on tongues found in 1 Corinthians 14.

5. The Charismatic Movement Emphasizes Experience over Doctrine

The Charismatic Movement is broad enough to find a home in many different kinds of churches—Protestant and Roman Catholic, orthodox and liberal, traditional and cutting edge. If the presence of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by speaking in tongues, then anyone who speaks in tongues must be a genuine believer. Thus, common experience tends to overshadow differences in doctrine.

6. Female Leadership within the Charismatic Movement is Alarming.

The pervasiveness of female leadership is surprising within a group that claims allegiance to the Scripture. Paul's command that women “keep silence in the church” (1 Cor 14:34) and not be allowed to “usurp” male authority by authoritative teaching (1 Tim 2:12) seems abundantly clear. Pentecostals commonly emphasize the idea that all Christians are ministers and everyone is to be a preacher. Lay-ministry has been a large factor in Pentecostal growth, and many leaders in the movement have been female.

Women can serve in many capacities in a church, but they should not fulfill the pastoral role (or any capacity where they are the official, authoritative teaching voice of the church). The biblical pattern calls for male leadership in the church.

7. Many Charismatic Practices are Suspicious and Unbiblical.

Charismatic and Pentecostal meetings are often filled with outrageous behaviors such as uncontrolled sobbing and shaking, being “drunk in the spirit,” uncontrollable bodily jerks and spasms, loud shouting, falling into trances, roaring like a lion, barking like a dog, fits of uncontrollable laughter, wild dancing, staggering, throwing furniture, rolling on the floor, and collapsing and remaining unconscious. Charismatic leaders admit there is often genuine pandemonium in their services. Obviously, such chaotic, disorderly, erratic behavior is inappropriate, especially in a church setting.

1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Charismatic claims are often fanciful, unbelievable, and lack any kind of biblical support. A few examples: Kenneth Hagin, father of the Word of Faith Movement, says he went to hell three times as a boy and was born again during his third trip down to hell. He claims to have had at least eight personal face-to-face visits with Jesus Christ. William Branham taught that a pillar of fire came to his meetings, circled around folks and revealed to him their thoughts. Benny Hinn “throws” the anointing to the audience. Rodney Howard-Browne of South Africa travels the world preaching the blessings of “holy laughter.”

Conclusion: We should be careful not to characterize a movement by its most glaring failures, problems, and extremes. Many Charismatics are sincere, godly believers who serve God with great zeal and commitment. Pentecostals are to be commended for their desire to emulate NT patterns. Many are genuine believers who display a warmhearted devotion to Christ. However, the movement as a whole is prone to extremism and does not seem capable of employing biblical discernment.

Discussion:

1. Does the presence of extraordinary behaviors like speaking in tongues or going into a trance prove that one is under the influence of the Holy Spirit? *No. People do all sorts of weird things for different reasons. Usually such behavior is purely psychological. Demonic influences may also be present.*
2. What was the original purpose for tongues? *As a sign to unbelieving Jews on the Day of Pentecost.*
3. What’s the difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit? *Baptism is a one-time event that occurs at the point of salvation. The filling should be an ongoing experience as one yields to God.*

4. Are Charismatics genuinely saved? *Many are, some are not. Many Charismatic churches preach the gospel. However, Charismatics assume that anyone with a Charismatic experience is saved. That's not true.*



Faith Misguided: Mysticism

Mysticism, while it may sound spooky or mysterious, has nothing to do with ghosts, phantoms, or magic. Mysticism is a significant aspect of many religions. Even Fundamentalists are involved in mysticism. What is it?

Mysticism is hard to define. We are not talking about the occult or cultic false religions. Nor are we talking about oriental religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Taoism. Further, mysticism is not the same as a mystery. Mysticism generally contains two elements: 1) a personal experience; 2) some kind of knowledge that arises from the experience.

A personal, inner, subjective experience is the primary aspect of mysticism. A mystical experience is primarily emotional, not intellectual; feeling rather than knowing.

E.g., Andrea Yates drowned her children because she thought she heard the voice of God telling her to do it.

Such experiences give the person some form of knowledge. As a result of the experience, the person understands or knows something he did not know prior to it. The force of such an experience may be so overwhelming that the person's entire life is changed by it. However, one may not be able to put such an experience into words. It's too personal and emotional for others to understand.

Summary: Mysticism has a deep trust in psychological, inner, emotional, life-changing, intense feelings, experiences, and impressions. These experiences provide knowledge. One is a mystic if he has such experiences and gains knowledge through them. This lesson will examine how mysticism is expressed within Christianity.

How does mysticism work? The following points are typical.³³

- God communicates to man directly, not through logical concepts, but through one "knowing" or "seeing" God. Mystics may practice "deep prayer," in which they wait for God to "break through" and "speak" to them.
- The mystic is open to new revelation to be received internally, through feelings and impressions, rather than by Scripture. The mystic claims that God has revealed information to him. God (the Holy Spirit or Jesus) is the source of the experience.

Illus.: Author and leadership guru John Maxwell tells the story of his Sunday school teacher telling him that God had revealed to him that John and several classmates would be preachers, and it happened that way.

³³ Most of this lesson is based on Arthur L. Johnson's work, *Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism* (Moody, 1988). Some of it is from Dr. Kevin Bauder, Central Baptist Seminary, Minneapolis, MN.

- “Being spiritual” equals having inner impressions and feelings, and obeying them.
- The mystic makes decisions based in inner feelings and impressions that he interprets to be the voice or leading of God.
- The mystic claims to gain insight and knowledge through the experience that is unavailable through Scripture alone.
- Mystics find their experience so compelling that they are confident that what they learn through the experience is true. They “just know” without being able to say why and without being willing to discuss or defend their knowledge. Mystical experiences tend to be authoritative and not open to judgment or evaluation. The mystical experience convinces the mystic in such a way and to such a degree that he simply cannot doubt its value and the correctness of what he believes the experience “says.”
- Religion is a matter of the feelings, not first of the mind, and faith is an emotional state.

Unfortunately, mysticism is alive and well within the ranks of Christianity. All theological positions within Christianity (i.e., Catholic, Orthodox, liberal, evangelical, fundamental) include mystics within them. What drives mysticism within Christianity? Why is it appealing? Many Christians are tired of stale, dry, unemotional worship. They long for a dynamic, exciting, personal, intimate relationship with God. They long to know that God is with them, that he cares for them, and that he has a message for them. They also desire an inner sense of peace and assurance that often accompanies mystical experiences. They want to be sure that God is really there—they want to feel God, to sense his presence in a tangible way. Mysticism gives them that assurance.

While mysticism may be appealing to some, there are many dangerous and unbiblical aspects of mysticism.

The Dangers of Mysticism:

1. Mystics Test Truth by Inner, Subjective Impressions Rather than by Scripture, Logic, or Common Sense.

Perhaps the greatest danger mysticism presents for Christians lies in the way mystics approach the Scriptures. For the mystic, one’s own inner emotional experiences become the test of truth rather than the Bible. Scriptures take a back seat to feelings and impressions. Further, those who believe they are receiving new revelation directly from God seldom expend the effort to properly interpret and apply biblical truth. In their hunger for powerful personal experiences, mystics are in peril of neglecting the proper use and interpretation of the Bible.

What standard do we use to measure truth, an experience or the Word of God? The standard must be the Scriptures. How do we determine the content of our faith and the way that we practice our faith? Through experiences? No, through obedience to the

Bible. The Bible is the final criterion of truth and the standard by which truth-claims are tested in all areas.

If the Scriptures are complete, then the mystic's claim to new revelation is invalid. All we need to know is already directly contained in the Word, is implied by what the Word says, or is revealed through general revelation. To claim further revelation is to deny the sufficiency and completeness of what has been given.

Believing something to be so does not make it so. One does not mentally create truth. Truth is not private and subjective. Christians must bow to the truth contained in Scriptures, not the "truth" of an experience.

Mystics are often beyond the reach of reason because they are convinced that their experiences are legitimate. Mystical claims are impossible to evaluate. Mystics often make claims but refuse to defend them or even entertain the notion that their experience was not what they think it was.

Christianity is a rational, logical faith. We are to love God with our minds (Mt 22:37). By revealing himself through the written Word, God has committed himself to using rational concepts as a tool for revelation, thereby making human reason absolutely necessary. God speaks to man's mind through the Bible, not to his emotions and feelings. Understanding God's Word may stimulate emotions and feelings, but God never bypasses the intellect to stimulate the emotions. Mysticism downplays rational thought and substitutes experiences and feelings as a tool for gaining knowledge.

2. The Christian Faith Becomes the Pursuit of New and Exciting Experiences.

How one feels becomes more important than what he believes or what he does. The goal becomes experiencing an emotional feeling rather than obedience or maturity. The "high" of an emotional experience is temporary, leaving the individual longing for another experience.

As we've previously seen, the Charismatic movement is highly mystical in nature. The practice of speaking in tongues is the means they use to enter into a supernatural experience with God.

Mystical experiences can be manufactured and manipulated. Skilled speakers can influence a crowd to be receptive to various suggestions. If the crowd is expecting a certain experience, one can employ various methods to make it happen. Such experiences are actually just psychological mind games, not true supernatural events.

3. Mysticism Creates a False "Head-Verses-Heart" Distinction

Mysticism draws a distinction between two kinds of knowledge: "head knowledge" (intellectual) and "heart knowledge" (spiritual). Spiritual knowing bypasses the mind and "speaks" to the heart, that is, of the emotions or intuition.

The Bible, however, knows nothing of this kind of non-intellectual knowing. When it speaks of knowing information, it means precisely that objective grasping of truth by the mind. Christians must not neglect intellectual knowledge as unimportant or unspiritual. Logic and rational thought is the necessary foundation for faith.³⁴

The Bible does not separate the intellect from the emotions. Man is a unified, integrated creation, the combination of his intellect, emotion, and will. Thus to suggest that one “knows” something emotionally (heart knowledge) without also knowing it intellectually (head knowledge) is unbiblical. The truth of a claim must be settled by the use of rational means, not by considering how we “feel about it.”

4. Mysticism Allows for Logical Absurdity and Theological Error.

Mysticism blurs the line between truth and falsehood. Since experience takes precedence over logic for mystics, they commonly believe two contradictory ideas at the same time.

For example, someone may stand up in a service and proclaim, “The Lord has told me that he wants our church to go forward with a building project.” The next person may stand and say, “The Lord has spoken to me. He does not want us to begin a building project.” The statements are contradictory, yet if each person had a mystical experience, both statements are considered to be valid.

Mysticism makes people much more open to false teaching and error. Because mystics are open to new revelation, they are also open to unorthodox ideas. Doctrine is secondary to experience for mystics.

5. Mysticism Redefines Christianity.

For mystics, the spiritual life is seen primarily in subjective, psychological terms rather than objective, intellectual ones. Religion is a feeling rather than a set of beliefs and commitments. Further, the goals of prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, and so forth, are thought to be personal, psychological satisfaction. In other words, the goal of the Christian life for a mystic is self-centered rather than God-centered. The goal is enjoying an experience rather than glorifying God.

However, the Scripture does not place the emphasis on our feelings, but rather on the truth and our recognition of, and assent to, that truth. The attention is not on the amount of faith we have, but on God’s faithfulness. The emphasis is not on our feelings about God but on our obedience to him.

One is not spiritual merely because he has mystical experiences. Spirituality is not emotionalism. Biblical spirituality means to be under the control of the Holy Spirit to such an extent that maturity and holy living is the result. Not only is the spiritual life one of moral purity, but it also exhibits the fruit of the Spirit (Eph 5:9; Gal 5:22-23). To be under God’s control is to act in accord with his direction as given in his Word, all parts of our being functioning as he created them to function. The decisions and

³⁴ This is not to suggest that the validity of the Bible’s truth claims be judged by the mind of man.

judgments of spiritual people will be based on God's Word, not their feelings. Their emotions will respond to the truth, motivating them to carry out the wise decisions that their Spirit-controlled wills have made.

The Antidote to mysticism: biblical rationality

Rationality refers to the ability to understand and think according to the rules of logic. Christianity is based on the position that all knowledge of God begins with God's revelation. The ultimate source of truth is God Himself. Since this is so, the ultimate standard by which truth is judged is Scripture. Therefore, if the result of human reasoning stands in opposition to the Bible, the results of such reasoning must be rejected.

Rationality is not the same as rationalism. Rationalism puts its faith in the mind of man to figure all things out. Anything beyond reason is rejected, including the miraculous events described in the Bible. We're not advocating secular rationalism.

We are not advocating an emotionless, sterile, stale religion. If there is no feeling of joy, no sense of peace, no shame or sorrow for sin, no thankfulness for God's great salvation, no wonder at God's love, no humility and awe at the recognition of who God is, then it is doubtful that we understand God's truths. However, emotion should be the result of understanding the truth of God's Word, not the result of an impression or personal experience. The rejection of mysticism is not the denial of proper emotions. Instead, it is the assertion that reason, not emotion, is the tool for grasping and testing truth.

Valid Forms of Subjective Experience for Christians (Rom 8:14-17)

We should recognize that some forms of personal or subjective communion can and should occur between God and the believing soul. This communion takes different shapes.

- (1) The inner witness of the Spirit: that internal testimony from the Spirit which persuades us of the truth of Scripture. "The Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaim what had been divinely commanded." (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4)
- (2) Illumination: the Spirit's work that enables us to grasp the significance for the Scriptures for our own lives. *Eph 1:18 The **eyes of your understanding being enlightened**; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,*
- (3) Assurance: The Spirit's work within our spirit that produces assurance of salvation. How this is done we cannot fully understand, any more than we can understand the mode in which he produces any other effect in our mind.
- (4) The fruit of the Spirit: Feelings such as love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility and self-control may be the result of the Holy Spirit's operation within the life of the believer.

- (5) Being “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:14): This is essentially yieldedness to the control of the Holy Spirit, which boils down to obedience to the Word of God. It seems to be virtually synonymous with walking/living in the Spirit. There’s nothing in the contexts of being led by the Spirit to suggest any direct revelation, promptings, feelings, etc.
- (6) Comfort: Since the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, we may sense this ministry from time to time.

All of these constitute ways of knowing God personally and experientially, rather than merely abstractly. They do not involve the revelation of new truth in that they do not communicate anything to us that we didn’t know cognitively already. Hence, we would not call this kind of experience mystical.

Conclusion: Mysticism presents many grave dangers to biblical Christianity. It replaces the Bible with personal experience and leaves one open to false teaching and irrational thinking. Christians must maintain their commitment to the Bible as the ultimate source and test of truth. The Christian heart yearns for a close, personal, experiential relationship with God through Christ. But the mysticism as defined above is not the answer.

Discussion:

1. What is mysticism? *A deep trust in psychological, inner, emotional, life-changing, intense feelings, experiences, and impressions.*
2. What are the two primary elements of mysticism? *1) a deep, inner, personal experience, and 2) some knowledge gleaned from the experience. E.g. from PCC magazine.*
3. Why are mystics unwilling to submit their experiences to evaluation? *Because their experience is too personal for others to understand; because the experience is self-validating. If one had an experience, it must be right.*
4. Why is mysticism appealing? *People don’t want a dry, stale, intellectual faith. They want a deep, meaningful, personal, intimate relationship, a feeling, a sense of God’s presence.*
5. How do we understand truth, logically or emotionally? *Logically. Our intellects should control our emotions. We think first and feel second.*
6. What is the primary danger of mysticism? *Exchanging doctrine for experience.*



Battle of the Sexes: Feminism

The woman is “in all things inferior to the man,” said first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.³⁵ Rabbi Judah, a contemporary of Josephus, said “a man must pronounce three blessings each day: ‘Blessed be the Lord who did not make me a heathen...blessed be he who did not make me a woman...blessed be he who did not make me an uneducated person.’”³⁶

In view of this low status of women at that time, it is not surprising that they enjoyed few legal rights in Jewish society. Women were not even allowed to give evidence in a court of law. According to the rabbinic school that followed Rabbi Hillel, a man could legally divorce his wife for virtually any offense or mistake. It was in this oppressive context that Christianity was born. Many people have recognized that Jesus elevated the status of women in a male-dominated society.

Those who work to advance the social, economic, and political status of women are called feminists. The feminist movement in America traces its roots back many years. In the 1830s, the issue of women’s rights was often coupled with the anti-slavery movement. In those days, women could not be a party in a lawsuit, sit on a jury, hold property in her own name, vote, or write a will. In custody disputes, courts routinely granted permanent custody of children to the father.³⁷ In 1920, the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution was ratified, giving women the right to vote. During the two world wars, as women entered the work force, Feminism grew and built momentum. Today, Feminism is well-organized, influential, and is crossing over into the church. Most liberal churches have adopted policies allowing female involvement in ministry. Many evangelical leaders now endorse female ordination, and many evangelical colleges and seminaries include women on their faculty and in their pastoral education programs. Bibles are being published using “inclusive language” that minimizes gender distinctions. Those who stand against such things find themselves branded as chauvinists.³⁸

Within the feminist movement there are several strains:

Secular feminists reject God, revelation, and religion in the discussion of Feminism. They view the Bible as a major source of bigoted ideas and a relic of antiquity that has no relevance to the ongoing debate over the roles of men and women in modern society. Secular feminists are often exceedingly hostile to biblical principles.

New Age feminists are pagans who are typically involved in the worship of a feminine deity or goddess (e.g., Mother Earth).

³⁵ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1974), 622.

³⁶ Ron Rhodes “The Debate Over Feminist Theology: Which View Is Biblical?” *Christian Research Journal* (Summer 1991).

³⁷ “Women’s Rights,” Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

³⁸ *Chauvinism* is prejudiced belief in the superiority of one’s own gender, group, or kind.

Liberal “Christian” feminists operate within a Christian framework but approach Feminism (and theology in general) from an unbelieving perspective. They think the Bible writers were simply men of their times and were limited in their perspectives. They typically reject biblical statements they find offensive to their tastes.

Evangelical feminists are those who generally (not always) hold to conservative views on the Bible and theology but who nevertheless embrace the feminist ideal of abolishing gender-based roles in society, church, and home. They believe the Bible can be interpreted to support their feminist views.

The women’s rights movement in the United States began when Christian women campaigned to abolish alcoholism, slavery, and other social abuses.³⁹ It’s ironic that modern Feminism so aggressively opposes many Christian principles.

Some feminist ideals are clearly positive, such as equal pay for equal work, fair treatment, and freedom from sexual abuse. Furthermore, feminists have called attention to the invaluable role women have played in the church throughout Christian history. Feminist theology has rightly pointed to the failure of many men in fulfilling their God-appointed roles of loving their wives as Christ loved the church. Also, feminists have highlighted the abuse and oppression that women have suffered at the hands of wicked men. These contributions are important and valuable.

However, there are many elements within the modern feminist movement that are anitbiblical or unacceptable to Christians. The following passages are key to gaining a biblical perspective:

Genesis 1:26–27; 2:20 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them ... And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet (i.e., suitable) for him.

1 Corinthians 14:33–35 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

Ephesians 5:21–24 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

1 Timothy 2:11–15 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I [allow] not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in

³⁹“Women’s Rights,” *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

1 Peter 3:1-2 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

The Feminist movement as a whole, whether outside the church or inside it, is in direct contradiction to such passages.

The Dangers of Feminism:

1. Feminism Misinterprets the Bible.

A key text of the Feminist movement within Christianity is Galatians 3:26-28:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Many feminists assert that men and women are created equal and therefore are equal in how they function in society, the church, and home.

Feminists are correct in teaching that men and women are equal in their standing before God. Christian men and women both have the same standing before God and enjoy the same salvation blessings. However, the Bible does not prohibit different responsibilities or roles for men and women. Equal status in the sight of God does not necessarily imply the same responsibilities. Elimination of gender-based roles is therefore not a legitimate inference from this text.

2. Feminism Rejects Biblical Roles for Women and Men.

One of the most common allegations against the traditional role of women in the church and the home is that such roles are sexist or demeaning to women. But gender roles are rooted in biblical teaching and reflect God's ordained order. The Bible teaches that women are not inferior to men, just different. Men and women perform different functions in the church and in the home.

Titus 2:3-5: [Teach] the aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

A. Roles in the church

1. What women can do in the church:

a) Teach

1 Cor 11:5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head.

Paul affirms that women have gifts, and he wants them to exercise those gifts in church, but he does not want them to overturn male leadership.

2 Tim 1:5: When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Also see Titus 2:3-5.

Paul instructed women to teach their children and to teach young women to be good wives and mothers. Timothy apparently learned the Scriptures from his mother and grandmother. There are countless examples of children who have been converted to Christ and discipled both by their own mothers and by other women of the church. Further, many women teach Sunday school, children's clubs, and women's classes. The husband and wife team of Aquila and Priscilla taught Apollos the way of Christ more accurately (Acts 18:26). Thus, if a woman wants an outlet for her teaching and leadership abilities, there are plenty of opportunities available at most churches.

b) Serve

Women are capable and suitable for many ministries within a church. The Bible mentions several: hospitality, mercy, helping, discipleship, and serving. Women do and always have played an important role in the ministry of the church. The fact that women are limited in their role doesn't mean they have no place of service. No woman could possibly say that since there are some restrictions on women in ministry, then there is nothing valuable for her to do.

c) Learn

1 Tim 2:11 A woman should learn in quietness.

That Paul wants Christian women to learn is an important point, for very few encouraged female education at that time. Both men and women should learn all they can, not only for their own benefit, but also for the potential benefit of others with whom they come in contact.

d) Submit

Women, just like all the members of a church, are to submit to church leaders. Submission is the appropriate response of all Christians to those who are in authority over them.

2. What women can't do in the church: Paul prohibits women from pastoring a church. He did not permit any woman to hold a church-recognized teaching authority over men. Eldership and other positions of authority in the church are simply not an option for a Christian woman, nor is any kind of teaching or counseling rolls in which she would have authority over men.⁴⁰

1 Tim 2:11-14: Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I [allow] not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

Until recently, official leadership within the church was male only. Now, women are increasingly attending seminary, entering the ministry, and holding pastoral roles, even in evangelical churches. However, the Bible is clear in its teaching that women are not to hold the office of pastor or do the work of the pastor. They can do many things within the church, but the Bible prohibits them from pastoring.

B. Roles in the home

The Bible teaches that women are to be “keepers at home (Titus 2:5). Their primary responsibility is to their families. They should be the principal caregivers for their children. They should manage their households according to the example of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31. The woman is to minister to the needs of her family.

Feminists teach that female subordination in the home and the church is a result of the Fall. Since Christ has redeemed us from this curse, there is to be no more subordination, they claim. A more thorough look at the biblical evidence reveals, however, that the fall of man has nothing to do with gender roles. Male headship is clearly established in the creation account in Genesis 2 — before the Fall. Man was created first. The woman was created to be his helper (Gen. 2:18). Certainly, both male and female were created in God's image and were granted personal dignity, but God set them in a nonreversible relation to one another, with the male in loving headship over the female.

Feminism teaches that the husband and the wife are on an equal footing in the family. But the Bible teaches the following:

- The wife is commanded to submit to her *own* husband (1 Pet 3:1-2, 5). *The Bible does not teach that every/any woman is to submit to every/any man.*
- The wife is to submit to her husband because this is one way she can submit to, and thus honor the Lord. She is not to view her husband as the Lord, but she is to view her obedience to him as an aspect of her obedience to the Lord. Thus a rebellious wife is dishonoring to the Lord.

⁴⁰ John Piper.

- The wife is to submit as long as her husband's instructions follow the Lord's standards and commands ("as is fit in the Lord" — Col. 3:18). If the husband's desire or command violates God's standards in some way, the wife should submit to God, her greater authority.
- The wife should submit to her husband in every aspect of life (Eph 5:24). As long as the husband is not asking his wife to sin in some way, the wife is obligated to place every part of her life under his guidance.

What Biblical Female Submission Means:

- ✓ Biblical submission is an inner quality of gentleness that affirms the leadership of the husband. The wife's submission in the marriage means that she willingly submits to her husband's authority and leadership in the marriage.
- ✓ Biblical submission acknowledges the husband's authority as the head of the family unit. God holds the husband personally responsible for his wife and children.

What Biblical Female Submission Does Not Mean:

- Biblical submission does not mean that a husband takes the place of Christ. The husband is not the supreme authority in the wife's life. The wife is to obey Christ first.
- Biblical submission does not mean giving up independent thought.
- Biblical submission does not mean a wife should give up efforts to influence and inform her husband.
- Biblical submission does not mean a wife should give in to every demand of her husband. The wife should obey her husband except when it would be sin to obey.
- Biblical submission does not mean being fearful or timid. Wives should genuinely contribute to the marriage relationship and to family life.
- Biblical submission is not based on lesser intelligence, competence, or value.

3. Feminism Often Supports Immoral Forms of "Reproductive Rights."

Most feminists are strongly in favor of granting women the right to choose whether to conceive and to give birth to children. Whatever methods are involved in granting these rights are valid according to feminists. Most feminists are in favor of abortion. Secular feminists typically support organizations like the National Organization of

Women (NOW), Planned Parenthood, and the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), all of which support and defend antibiblical ideas such as abortion and homosexuality.

4. Feminism Tends to be Anti-Male.

Influential leaders within Feminism proclaim a message of open hostility against the entire male sex. Such feminists tend to focus on the abuse and mistreatment women have suffered at the hands of evil men. Some feminists see men as the primary evil influence in the world. They assert that women can get along fine without men. They further suggest that men ought to adopt more typically feminine qualities like kindness and tenderness, and that the world would be a better place if women were in charge.

While it is certainly true that women have suffered much at the hands of evil men, it is unbiblical and irrational to blame all males for this misfortune. Women do not suffer at the hands of godly Christian men. In fact, they are treated with respect, honor, and dignity. Obedience to biblical principles prevents men from abusing women. As we've already seen, Christian principles were the driving force of the women's rights movement in the early years. A return to such principles would be in the best interests of women everywhere.

Conclusion: Feminism is very influential in the world today. Unfortunately, much of what is being done in the name of equality is violating God's Word. Feminists are correct in teaching that there is no spiritual difference between men and women—they are equal in essence and value. However, God has also established an authority structure for the human race. Within that structure, men have authority over women in the home and in the church. Too often, Christian women focus on what they cannot (and should not) do in the church and home rather than on what they can (and should) do. This is unfortunate, for God has uniquely endowed women with the ability to perform many important tasks in both the church and the home.

It is deplorable that many men throughout history have abused God's ordained authority structure by oppressing women, sometimes justifying their actions by misapplications of the passages discussed in this lesson. Such misapplications must be condemned as a gross (and sinful) distortion of God's original design for man and woman. However, the Feminist movement is not a proper response to such abuses. The proper response is a commitment to biblical principles of manhood and womanhood.

Discussion:

1. Does the Bible teach that men are better than women? *No.*
2. Do different roles for men and women suggest that men are better than women? *No.*
3. Are women supposed to submit to men? *No, the Bible teaches submission only in the context of the church and the home. There are specific times and places for women to submit to male leadership.*

4. Does Feminism contradict Christianity? *Many elements of the modern Feminist movement do, but some aspects of feminism do not. As a movement, Christians should not support it.*
5. How is Feminism having an impact on the church? *Women being ordained as pastors and teachers; taking gender-based language out of the Bible and hymnal.*



It's Not Easy Being Green: Environmentalism

On December 10th, 1997, 23 year old Julia “Butterfly” Hill climbed 180 feet up an ancient redwood tree she called Luna. Hill lived in the tree until December 18, 1999. “Here I can be the voice and face of this tree, and for the whole forest that can’t speak for itself,” Julia said. Hill and several earlier Luna tree sitters occupied the old-growth giant to keep it and nearby trees from being cut down by the landowner, the Pacific Lumber Company, which agreed to save the area in exchange for her exit from the tree and \$50,000 – which will go towards university science research. While the international media spotlight shines on her and Luna, Julia emphasizes the importance of all life, the power of love, and how individuals can and need to make a difference.⁴¹

While most people wonder why anyone would live up a tree for two years, one must admit that “Butterfly” Hill exemplifies commitment to the environment. She was willing to give up comfort and safety in order to publicize environmental concerns.

God created the world, holds everything together, and reconciles all things through Jesus Christ. Since the days of the early church, followers of Jesus Christ have known this remarkable teaching of Colossians 1:15-20, and for centuries prior to the Incarnation, God’s people affirmed the fact that “the earth is the Lord’s.” Humanity’s responsibility to serve and keep God’s creation had been part of the belief and action of God’s people for millennia (Ps 19:1; Gen 2:15).⁴² Unfortunately, people have not done a very good job in managing the earth’s resources. Pollution, waste, neglect, and abuse are very common. There are many areas in the US that are so polluted that no one can live there. Many animals have been driven to extinction by over harvesting or by destruction of habitat. The US government has had to set aside billions of dollars to clean up polluted sites. The fact that people have destroyed and are in the process of destroying great sections of natural habitat is beyond dispute.

Some people have tried to prevent such devastation and abuse of the earth’s resources. Such folks are called *environmentalists*. For them, protecting the planet is the “greatest moral issue of our time.”⁴³ Environmentalism, like most other movements, includes both extreme and conservative elements. Some environmentalists simply want to preserve wild habitat and insure that animals and plants survive. Many outdoor sportsmen are environmentalists. On the other side of the spectrum are those who consider plant and animal life equally as valuable as human life. The radical end of the environmental movement commonly asserts that humans are a blight on the earth and that humans should not kill animals for any reason. Concerns about global warming and overpopulation of the earth drive some environmentalists to embrace radical solutions.

⁴¹ ottermedia.com/LunaJulia.html

⁴² Calvin B. DeWitt, “Caring For Creation On Biblical Grounds: An Apologetic For Stewardship of God’s Earth” *Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1997.

⁴³ “Evangelical Environmentalism,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2007.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/10/opinion/10sat4.html>

The environmental movement has been beneficial in several ways. Legislation such as the Clean Water Act and other laws designed to clean up the environment have been very successful. Both government and private companies have seen the need to prevent pollution and to clean it up when it happens. We live in a far cleaner environment than we did just a few decades ago.

In the last few years, evangelicals have become more active in promoting environmentalism. For example, in 2006, 86 evangelical leaders signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative, a statement affirming that global warming is a legitimate concern. Some today believe that stewardship of the earth is a moral issue on the same level as the other great moral struggles of our day. Christians must be concerned about policies and practices that affect the environment.

While environmentalism has some value, there are some aspects of the movement that contradict biblical principles.

Problems with Environmentalism:

1. Environmentalists Wrongly Blame Christianity for Environmental Destruction.

Some environmentalists assert that the Judeo-Christian tradition is responsible for the ecological damage done around the world. They suggest that since God commissioned man to “subdue” the earth and have dominion over it (Gen 1:28), Christians have been responsible for the destruction and exploitation of the earth’s resources.

It is unfortunately true that some Christians put so much emphasis on heaven that they truly don’t care for the earth. Some have even taught that all physical things are evil or of less value than spiritual realities. This is inconsistent with the Bible. Part of man’s stewardship is the earth. He must take care of it. Christians, of all people, should be concerned with the protection and preservation of the resources God has entrusted to them. They should not be guilty of pollution or irrational exploitation of the earth. Responsible stewardship is a continuing privilege and responsibility for all Christians.

Christianity is not to blame for the mismanagement of the earth. As far back as 1554, John Calvin had interpreted *dominion* to mean a responsible care and keeping that does not neglect, injure, abuse, degrade, dissipate, corrupt, mar, or ruin the earth. Evangelical leader Francis Schaeffer said, “The Christian is called upon to exhibit this dominion, but exhibit it rightly; treating the thing as having value in itself, exercising dominion without being destructive.”⁴⁴ Serving and keeping creation, not oppressive domination, is the biblical idea of stewardship. The earth and everything in it is the Lord’s and the earth has other purposes than merely serving human needs.

Christianity and environmentalism are not contradictory ideologies. Many Christians are involved in organizations designed to protect and preserve the earth’s natural resources. However, Christianity is at odds with the radical end of the environmental movement, as we shall see.

⁴⁴ Quoted in DeWitt.

2. Environmentalism Tends Toward Pantheism and Socialism.

Extremists within the environmental movement are often motivated by hidden religious and political agendas having nothing to do with environmental issues. Radical environmentalism is not about good stewardship or conservation; it's about using the environment issue for hidden religious or political reasons.

Some within the environmental movement teach concepts in direct contradiction to the Bible. Pantheism says that the world or the universe is god. We should protect and respect the earth because it is part of god, as is everything. Such an idea is common in pagan and New Age religions.

The Green movement has become the new home for hard-line socialists who want governments to end private property rights. This may explain why members of this group are sometimes called “the watermelon environmentalists” – green on the outside, but red (communist) on the inside.

Environmentalists sometimes employ violent and illegal tactics to advertise their message and pursue their goals. Groups such as Green Peace commonly engage in illegal activities to prevent what they see as “sins” against the environment. Environmentalists at times seem to have more regard for plants and animals than they do for human life.

“Spiritual” Greens tell us that Earth can save herself—she has the wisdom and power; humans don't. But we can help her by becoming conscious of the oneness and sacredness of all her parts. The Sierra Club Environmental Health Sourcebook, *Well Body, Well Earth*, tells us to “turn to the traditions of ancient cultures” such as Buddhist meditations and Native American Hopi rituals in order to “reaffirm our bond with the spirit of the living earth. . . . The more you contact the voice of the living Earth and evaluate what it says, the easier it will become for you to contact it and trust what it provides.”⁴⁵ Ecologists often advocate for pantheism with New Age, Hindu, or Buddhist overtones. Such organizations as Greenpeace and Earth First represent this philosophy. Such thinking is obviously hostile to Christian principles.

It's ironic that many environmentalists seek government involvement in ecological problems, yet big government is one of the most aggressive polluters. Especially in socialist states, like the former Soviet Union, pollution will take decades and trillions of dollars to clean up. Military bases in the US have been some of the top polluters. Government bureaucracy is not the only answer to the problem. It's part of the problem.

Environmentalists exploit ecological crises for their own ends, namely, to reduce private property rights and give more power to government bureaucracies. The imposition of government power and regulation is a common tactic the environmental movement employs to achieve its goals.

⁴⁵ Jeremiah Project, “The False Green Gospel”

3. Environmentalism Minimizes the Distinction Between Humans and Animals.

Environmentalists commonly teach “that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere . . . are equal in intrinsic worth.” As one proponent says, “Unless the need were urgent, I could no more sink the blade of an ax into the tissues of a living tree than I could drive it into the flesh of a fellow human.” According to David Foreman, “A human life has no more intrinsic value than an individual grizzly bear life. If it came down to a confrontation between a grizzly and a friend, I’m not sure whose side I would be on. But I do know humans are a disease, a cancer on nature.” Such an opinion is clearly based on an evolutionary viewpoint that makes no distinction between the value of one “animal” and another.

The animal rights movement also includes pantheistic elements, believing all of life is one, indivisible whole. No form of life is more valuable than another. One of its favorite terms is “speciesism,” which it defines as a bias for one’s own species against others. Humans are the only creatures who can be guilty of speciesism, which makes it the radical environmentalist’s corollary to racism and sexism. The best-known organization representing this movement is People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).⁴⁶

The Bible makes a clear distinction between human life and all other forms of life. Man is not an animal. God created man after creating the animals. No animal was found to be a suitable mate for man (Gen 2:20). In the OT Law, the punishments for mistreating a human are far worse than those for mistreating an animal. The Bible does teach that animal life is valuable and should not be abused and mistreated (Prov 12:10). However, plants and animals are not as valuable as humans. God created nature for the benefit of mankind.

4. Environmentalists Exaggerate the Nature of the Environmental Crises

There is no doubt that human pollution, exploitation, abuse, and development have ruined vast sections of the earth. Humans are directly responsible for the pollution and destruction of the environment. However, studies show that the environment in America is cleaner today than many would have us think. Thanks to the efforts of people who care about the environment, Americans today enjoy the benefits of an environment that is cleaner than at any time in the past 50 years.⁴⁷ Formerly polluted waters are now full of fish. Air that was formerly smoggy is now easy to breathe. Many environmental disaster areas have been cleaned up or are scheduled to be cleaned up. The environment is far cleaner than it used to be.

Economist Peter Hill uses the term “ecological hysteria” to refer to a common technique of the environmental extremists. As Hill explains, “The news is continually filled with stories of . . . how we are on the brink of destruction from one catastrophic event or another. Pesticide poisoning, global warming, acid rain, asbestos, radon and electromagnetic radiation are among the many dangers that are about to overtake us. . . . American citizens have been only too ready to accept the worst-case scenarios

⁴⁶ Ronald Nash “The Case Against Radical Environmentalism” *Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1997.

⁴⁷ Nash.

and many regard careful scientific inquiry into the extent of these dangers as irrelevant.” Many such supposed environmental crises have been disproved, solved, or decreased, at least in the West.⁴⁸

Since the start of the Industrial Revolution, humans have produced far less air pollution than that produced by just three volcanic eruptions: Krakatoa in Indonesia (1883), Katmai in Alaska (1912), and Hekla in Iceland (1947). When Mt. St. Helens exploded in 1980, it poured 910,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. When Mexico’s El Chicon erupted in 1982, it released 100,000,000 tons of sulfur. It is true that humans produce forms of pollution that are unnatural and far more destructive than what occurs naturally. But humans are not responsible for all the pollution of the earth; some of it is natural.

It is true that environmental disasters and exploitation continue in many areas of the world, especially in third-world nations and in former Soviet nations. Yet many are working to prevent or reverse ecological damage in those places. Ecological damage and disaster certainly has occurred, but environmentalists tend to overstate the case and ignore positive developments.

Conclusion: Nobody wants people to drink polluted water, breathe polluted air, or eat carcinogens for supper. No thoughtful Christian can support contempt or disregard for God’s creation. Wise Christians will practice stewardship with regard to God’s creation. The concept of stewardship allows us to use nature, but not to abuse it. Wise Christians will therefore respect a prudent environmentalism but will oppose those extremists who seek to exploit concern for the environment for the sake of their own hidden religious and political agendas. Christians should act prudently to stop pollution and other forms of environmental harm, but avoid environmental extremism that does little but fill the coffers of extremist environmental groups and expand the size and power of a government that’s already too big.⁴⁹

Discussion:

1. Why should Christians care about the earth? *Because God commissioned them to take care of the earth. Christians should be good stewards of the resources of the earth.*
2. Why are some environmental groups so dangerous? *They are hostile to biblical principles, they tend to be socialist or communist, they seek greater government involvement in life.*
3. Can a person be both a Christian and an environmentalist? *Yes, although the extreme end of the movement is clearly hostile to Christianity. True conservationism is not hostile to Christianity. One should be very careful what groups he supports.*

⁴⁸ Nash.

⁴⁹ Nash.



Psychobabble: Pop Psychology

If you step into any bookstore or library these days, you'll find a whole section of books described as "self-help."⁵⁰ You'll see titles like *Breaking the Chain of Low Self-Esteem*, *Hope and Help for Your Nerves*, *The 10-Minute Stress Manager*, and *A 10-Week Recovery Program for Overcoming Panic, Anxiety, & Phobias*. Such books are so popular because people have problems that they want to overcome.

Psychology is that branch of science that deals with problems of the mind. The word *psychology* is based on the Greek word *psuche*, "soul." So psychology is the study of the soul, or the mind. It is an attempt to define and explain the inner workings of the mind. Psychotherapy deals with the social, mental, and emotional aspects of an individual. Psychotherapists attempt to alleviate or cure emotional, mental, and even spiritual suffering and to establish new patterns of social behavior. Psychology deals with the activity of the mind and the social behavior of the individual.

Within the last 150 years, many scholars have suggested theories that supposedly explain how the mind works and how to fix problems associated with the mind. Below are several of the most influential psychologists.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939): Freud is the father of psychoanalysis (lying on a couch and free-associating to reveal unconscious motivations). Freudian concepts and terms have so permeated our society that they are generally treated as facts about human nature. Freud was vehemently opposed to Christianity. He believed that religious doctrines are all illusions and that religion is "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity."

Freud is largely responsible for the collapse of personal responsibility in modern culture. By placing the responsibility for their behavior on their parents, environment, childhood trauma, the unconscious, or "primitive urges," patients are permitted—even encouraged—to assume a victim mentality.⁵¹

Carl Jung (1875-1961): Jung was Freud's most influential disciple. Jung taught that humans possess in their unconscious a deeply buried collective history, a shared knowledge which is the seat of one's identity. Human behavior is driven by things hidden in the unconscious mind. When a patient explores and understands the elements of his unconscious mind, healing and health result. We understand the unconscious mind through symbolism, mythology, and folklore. Jesus was nothing more than a symbol or archetype of sacrifice and sonship. Jung believed the main task of life was to discover and fulfill one's innate potential.

B. F. Skinner (1904-90): Skinner became the foremost proponent in the U.S. of the behaviorist school of psychology, in which human behavior is explained in terms of physiological responses to external stimuli.⁵² In other words, behaviorists teach that

⁵⁰ A recent search of online bookstore Amazon.com yielded 30,442 books that are of the self-help variety.

⁵¹ Richard Ganz, *Psychobabble* (Crossway, 1993), 32.

⁵² "Skinner, B(urrrhus) F(rederic)," Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

human life is little more than responses to stimuli. The brain is little more than a “black box” or set of computer-like circuits. Given the right training, one may condition individuals to respond in a desired way (positive reinforcement). Man is like a robot—he simply follows the program given to him. Human personhood has no real meaning.

Abraham Maslow (1908-70): Maslow is famous for concocting his “hierarchy of needs.” Maslow held that if one has his basic needs met, such as food and shelter, he can then focus on other needs, like learning and showing compassion. At the top of the list is “self-actualizing,” that is, self-fulfillment, a state of confidence and contentment. One can self-actualize only when his needs for security and significance are met. Those who don’t have their lower needs met cannot be expected to behave in a socially acceptable way. One’s behavior is thus based on his environment. Maslow is largely responsible for the current emphasis on self-esteem.

Carl Rogers (1902-87): Rogers is known for non-directive, “reflective” counseling. The psychologist does not give advice to the client; he simply helps the client find the solution within himself. Every person has the resources within himself to solve his problems. This is the essence of liberal, humanistic thought. The worst thing one can do is criticize or judge. The counselor should never give advice or suggest what is proper or improper behavior. Rogers also developed the encounter group, in which the psychologist helps a group of people explore their feelings, values and beliefs. Rogers’s techniques are very common in modern psychotherapy.

You may think that none of the preceding has any bearing on the Christian life. However, Christians have soul-problems, too. In seeking to solve their problems, they often go to Christian psychologists or counselors. Some Christian counselors attempt to integrate Christian principles with the above ideas (integrationists). Others suggest that there can be no mixture of Christianity with such concepts (non-integrationists).

The Bible claims that God has provided all the resources Christians need for living in a way that pleases God.

2 Peter 1:3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.

Since that is the case, there is no need for Christians to seek solutions to their problems from modern psychology, which is at many points hostile to biblical principles. Neither is there any need to integrate secular psychology with the Bible. The Bible has the solution to every problem of the soul.

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Elements of pop (short for “popular”) psychology:

- Self-esteem: loving your self, thinking highly of yourself—everyone should feel accepted, understood, and valued.

- Self-help advice counselors: Dr. Phil, Dear Abby, Dr. Laura
- Visualization/guided imagery: what you think is what will be, visualize what you want
- Positive Mental Attitude: thinking positive thoughts, avoiding the negative
- Unconditional acceptance: accepting any behavior no matter how sinful or destructive it may be for the individual
- Tolerance: every opinion is valuable, avoid judgment and criticism
- Catharsis: purging your emotions, letting your feelings out
- Others: inner child, left brain/right brain, emotional intelligence, freudian slip, fight-or-flight response

Errors of Modern Psychology and Integrationist Christian Psychology

1. Modern Psychology Eliminates Human Responsibility.

“Pass the buck” seems to be a constant in human history. Nobody wants to take responsibility for his own actions. Adam blamed Eve (and God) for his sin. Eve blamed the serpent. People still want to blame others for their problems.

Freud validated blame shifting by giving it a scientific cover. One’s parents, his circumstances, his boss, his wife, or any number of external causes are to blame for his misbehavior. Maslow taught that one cannot behave properly unless he feels secure and significant. Skinner taught that one’s behavior is simply a result of how the individual was programmed. External forces are to blame, not the individual himself. Is it any wonder that we live in a society in which lawsuits are so common? Nobody wants to take personal responsibility.

The Bible clearly teaches that God holds each person responsible for his own sins.

Deuteronomy 24:16 The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

Ezekiel 18:20 The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

2 Kings 14:6 [T]he LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

Jeremiah 31:30 But every one shall die for his own iniquity.

Rogers taught that the worst thing a counselor can do is give advice. But the Bible commands Christian counselors to rebuke people when they sin and call them to repentance and accountability. Jesus gives the procedure to follow when confronting a fellow believer about sin (Mt 18:15f). Paul commends the Roman believers for their

ability to admonish one another (Rom 15:14). The word *admonish* means “to warn, exhort, or counsel.” Pastors are responsible to “reprove, rebuke and exhort” their

SOMEONE ELSE'S FAULT

I went to my psychiatrist to be psychoanalyzed
To find out why I killed my cat and blackened my wife's eyes.

He put me on a downy couch to see what he could find
And this is what he dredged up from my subconscious mind.

When I was one, my Mommy hid my dolly in the trunk
And so it follows naturally that I am always drunk.

When I was two, I saw my father kiss the maid one day
And that is why I suffer now from kleptomania.

When I was three, I suffered from ambivalence toward my
brothers
And so it follows naturally I poisoned all my lovers.

I'm so glad that I have learned the lesson this has taught
That everything I do that's wrong is someone else's fault.

congregations (2 Tim 4:2). Paul urged Timothy to rebuke sinners publicly so others would fear (1 Tim 5:20). Believers are called upon to watch out for each other and warn those who sin to repent. The Bible is clear in its emphasis on personal responsibility.

2. Modern Psychology is a Self-Contradictory Failure.

Freudian psychoanalysis is a total failure. Research has proven that many of those with “mental illness” are not helped in the least by psychoanalysis. Many who experience mental problems recover with no help from anyone. Others who seek help from secular psychology end up spending years in therapy and spending thousands of dollars without making much improvement. Even those in the counseling business admit that they are often powerless to help people overcome their problems. There’s even evidence that psychotherapy actually creates more problems than it solves. Psychotherapy is a “pseudo-science riddled with contradiction and confusion.”⁵³

Much of modern psychology has more in common with pagan religious rituals than it does with science. Psychologists suggest that one creates his own reality with his mind. One must visualize and imagine what he wants. Many modern psychological practices are nothing more than New Age mysticism in “scientific” costume.

⁵³ Hunt and McMahan, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Harvest House, 1985), p. 205.

3. Modern Psychology is Hostile to Biblical Christianity.

Psychology is a very deceptive and dangerous theory conceived in the mind of unredeemed man in his state of rebellion against God as the answer to his problems. Common to all psychological teaching is a biblically defective view of the nature of man. Secular psychology asserts that man is basically good and able to solve his problems (when properly “enlightened”).⁵⁴ Note the following differences between secular psychology and biblical Christianity:

Psychology	Christianity
Behavior is motivated by the subconscious.	Little or no evidence of the subconscious.
Childhood experiences and external circumstances motivate behavior.	Present moral choices motivate behavior.
One is not responsible for his immoral behavior.	Each individual is personally responsible for his own behavior.
Religion is an illusion.	Genuine faith is based on the Bible, which is accurate and reliable.
Modern psychology, not the Bible, has the answers to man’s problems. The Bible is a source of problems, not the solution.	The Bible is sufficient to address any problem that man has. The Bible presents the solutions to all of man’s problems.
The key to mental health lies within one’s self.	The key to mental health lies in obedience to God’s commands.
A high sense of self-esteem is necessary for good mental health.	People usually think too highly of themselves. High self-esteem is part of the problem.
Man is basically good, or at least neutral.	Man is basically evil.
Sinful behavior is called a disease.	Sinful behavior is sin.

Probably the greatest myth that psychology has foisted upon our culture is the necessity of high self-esteem. Psychologists tell us that one must think highly of himself in order to be a valuable member of society. Low self-esteem is the root of most psychological problems, they suggest. Even “Christian” psychologists teach the importance of self-love. They commonly misinterpret Jesus’ statement to “love your neighbor as yourself” as a command to love yourself. If you don’t love yourself, you can’t love your neighbor, they say. However, Jesus’ point was that people normally do love themselves. To the extent that they care about themselves, they should care for their neighbors. Jesus is not encouraging us to love ourselves; he’s assuming we do that normally. The Bible teaches that believers ought not to think too highly of

⁵⁴ Mel and Gloria Blowers, *Psychology: A Biblical Analysis*. PsychoHeresy Awareness Ministries, 4137 Primavera Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93110. www.psychoheresy-aware.org.

themselves (Rom 12:3). The Bible emphasizes the need for humility, not self-esteem (Phil 2:3-8).

4. Many “Psychological” Problems are Really Spiritual Problems.⁵⁵

Low self-esteem is not the real cause of mental illness. Sin and guilt are. Unresolved sin, and the guilt that accompanies it, are the underlying causes of many so-called psychological problems. God has created the conscience of man to react to sin. Although the conscience may be seared to the point that nothing bothers it, most people have a conscience that bothers them when they do evil. Unresolved anger, hatred, bitterness, and jealousy may result in outbursts of violence. Pride and self-love make a person self-centered and arrogant. All forms of immorality cause personal problems and guilt. If one continues in sin without repentance, his troubled conscience may cause him any number of apparently psychological problems—insomnia, stress, lethargy, panic, moodiness, anger, etc. Modern psychology seeks to minimize, or rejects altogether, the reality of sin. People will do virtually anything to avoid facing up to their sin and its consequences. Rather than repentance, psychologists suggest denying one’s guilt and/or shifting the blame for sin to someone else. The biblical method for dealing with sin is confession, repentance and restitution (Prov 28:13; Luke 19:8; 1 John 1:9).

Many mental problems are just attempts to hide one’s sinful behavior. Perhaps someone got away with a sin in the past by acting in an erratic or bizarre way, thus diverting attention from his sin. A pattern is established—whenever one wants to deflect attention from his immoral behavior, he simply acts in an eccentric, bizarre way, thus preventing anyone from noticing his sinful behavior, and often achieving his goals at the same time. The biblical counselor will not be fooled by such camouflage.

The Error of Integration

It should be obvious by now that trying to integrate secular psychological ideas with Christianity is bound to fail. Secular psychology and biblical Christianity are contradictory at many points. Yet integrating secular psychology with biblical principles is exactly what thousands of Christian counselors are attempting to do. Asserting that “all truth is God’s truth,” they seek to combine the supposedly scientific results of psychological research with Christian principles. The results are alarming—so-called “Christian” counselors advocate anti-Christian ideas like self-love, blame shifting, and calling sin a disease. One should not try to integrate contradictory ideas.

Unfortunately, many elements of pop psychology have infiltrated the church. “Christian” visualization is becoming more popular. Believers are led through a process whereby they imagine Jesus or God telling them something, usually a message of comfort and commendation. Creative visualization is the key to healing, spiritual power and prosperity, they claim. The error of self-love is rampant within Christianity. Preachers and teachers commonly tell their audiences that they cannot serve God or love their neighbors without high self-esteem. Sermons then focus on how to achieve and maintain a high

⁵⁵ Organic malfunctions affecting the brain such as brain damage, tumors, genetic defects, glandular or chemical disorders, or other medical conditions may cause psychological problems. Neither secular psychology nor Christian counseling can solve such problems. A medical doctor should address these issues.

sense of self-esteem. Positive mental attitude proponents abound within evangelical Christianity. One of the most popular TV evangelists preaches a steady stream of the “power of positive thinking” rather than the true gospel. The encounter group has replaced the Bible study in many churches. Rather than getting to know God, the faithful are urged to get to know themselves. Words like *opening up*, *mutual trust*, *affirmation*, *feedback*, *feelings* and *experience* have replaced *repentance*, *sin*, and *forgiveness*. Rather than learning the Bible, students are taught to be non-judgmental and accepting of all opinions. None of these psychological practices have any support in the Bible. In fact, such concepts are clearly anti-biblical.⁵⁶

Conclusion: Some of those who originally developed the psychological ideas discussed in this lesson retracted their theories after they were proven to be failures. It’s unfortunate that their concepts are still popular in society and are infiltrating the church. True Christianity does not mix well with secular psychology.

Discussion:

1. Why would anyone seek to mix secular psychology and biblical principles? *Mostly because they think the Bible is not sufficient to meet the need of people.*
2. At what points does secular psychology contradict biblical Christianity? *The nature of man, the reality of sin, the existence of the soul, etc.*
3. How well does modern psychology work to solve people’s problems? *Very poorly.*

⁵⁶ There may be some methods advocated by modern psychology that are useful, such as methods for better learning, memory enhancement, stress reduction, and the like. However, believers must reject any unbiblical principles advocated by secular psychology.



Every Jot and Tittle:

Use of the Old Testament Law for Christians

One of the longest-running controversies in the church concerns the significance and application of the OT Law for Christians. We find discussions regarding this issue several times within the pages of the NT. As early as Acts 15, evidence of this controversy surfaces. “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). Paul wrote the book of Galatians to counteract the same teaching.

Today this issue is expressed in various ways. Some insist that Christians are still bound by certain parts of the OT law, such as dietary regulations and observing the Sabbath. Others suggest that, while obeying the OT regulations is not mandatory, Christians seeking higher levels of spirituality and maturity ought to observe them.

What is the Christian’s relationship to the OT? What parts of the OT Law still apply to believers? Is it OK to eat pork or shellfish? Do we still keep the Sabbath? Should baby boys be circumcised? Is it wrong to wear clothing made of different types of fabric? How one interprets and applies the OT will in large part determine how he answers these questions.

I. Meaning of the word “law”

Part of the confusion on this issue stems from the multiple uses of the word “law” in the NT. Some of the uses of the term:

- A. God’s general moral will expressed throughout the Bible (OT and NT); divine commands in the widest sense (Rom 7:25).
The moral principles of the Ten Commandments did not begin with Sinai; they are as eternal and immutable as the very holy character of God Himself (1 Pet 1:16).⁵⁷
- B. The OT Mosaic code (including or especially the 10 Commandments): the set of rules and regulations that God gave Moses for Israel. (Rom 2:14a; 2:17; 3:21, 28; 7:12; Gal 4:21, 5:3)
- C. The “law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2) refers to Jesus’ teaching or NT truth in general. James called this the “royal law” (Jam 2:8) and the “perfect law of liberty” (Jam 1:25, cf. 2:12).
- D. Scripture in general (especially the OT). Thus: “the law” (Matt 5:18; 12:5; Lk 2:27; 10:26; 16:17; Rom 3:19); “the law and the prophets” (Matt 5:17); “the law of the Lord” (Lk 2:23, 24, 39); “the law of Moses” (Lk 2:22; cf. also Acts 28:23); “Moses and the prophets” (Lk 24:27). The threefold formula “Moses and the prophets and the psalms” also occurs (Lk 24:44).
- E. A rule, principle, or force (Rom 2:14b, 7:2, 21, 23, 8:2)

⁵⁷J. Hampton Keathley III, “The Mosaic Law: Its Function and Purpose in the New Testament”
www.Bible.net

- F. Various forms of human laws, those prescribed by man through human government or custom (Luke 20:22; Acts 19:38).
 - G. Law in general (Rom 3:27 and possibly Rom 5:13b).
- II. NT teaching about the OT Law
- A. The Law extended “until John” the Baptist (Mt 11:13); after that comes the gospel of Christ. The Gospel supersedes the OT Law.
 - B. Christ did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17). It is impossible that any part of the Law would disappear (Mt 5:18-19). Jesus expected his audience to keep the Law.

It’s important to remember that Jesus lived and ministered under the Law. The end of the Law came with the death of Christ, the torn veil symbolizing the ending of the Levitical system (Mk 15:38; Heb 6:19, 9:3, 10:20). Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law set the stage for the church age. Read John 1:17.
 - C. The Law can be summarized by these two commands: Love God and love your neighbor (Mt 22:34-40). Paul states that love fulfills the Law (Rom 13:10).
 - D. Christians are not under the OT Law. NT authors, especially Paul, states this truth in no uncertain terms and in various ways:

Ac 15:10, 19 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ... Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God...

Ro 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Ro 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Ro 7:1-6 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. ... Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. ... But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

(Note: the entire book of Galatians is a response to the idea that we are saved through the keeping of the Law.)

Ga 3:10-13 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all

things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”)...

Ga 3:24-25 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Ga 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Eph 2:15 having abolished [to destroy, do away with; to render idle, inactivate, inoperative: to deprive of force, influence, power; to cause to cease, put an end to, do away with, annul; to pass away, be done away] in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.

Col 2:14 having wiped out [to eliminate, cancel, erase, blot out⁵⁸] the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

1. What does it mean to be “under” the Law? *It means to be subject to its rules and regulations, to be accountable to it, to be liable to its penalties, and to be bound to obey it.*
2. The Israelites were “under” the Law in the sense that it applied directly to them; God expected them to apply it and obey it. He blessed obedience and punished disobedience.
3. At the Jerusalem council (read Acts 15:5-11, 19-21, 29), the disciples specifically rejected the idea that Gentile believers need to observe the OT Law.
4. Some Jews, like Paul (1 Cor 9:19-23), determined to observe the rituals of the OT Law at times, simply to be non-offensive to those they were trying to reach. At other times, Paul exercised his freedom from those same rituals and restrictions (see 1 Cor 9:20-21; Gal 2:11-21).
5. The Law of Moses is a unit, an indivisible, all-or-nothing proposition. The Bible never makes a distinction between parts of the Law. People typically recognize the different civil, ceremonial and moral aspects of the Law, but these categories do not stand individually; they are parts of the whole. You can’t just pick and choose the parts that you like and ignore the rest. This is precisely Paul’s point in Galatians 5:3-4—if you agree to be circumcised,

⁵⁸Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek* (New Testament) (electronic ed.) (GGK1981). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

you are agreeing to obey the whole Law, which means that you are rejecting salvation by faith in Christ.

Breakdown of the OT Law:

Ceremonial: deals with sacrifices, rituals, purifications, and other religious things fulfilled in Christ.

Civil: rules dealing with the government regulations, the Theocracy; governed national Israel.

Moral: deals with timeless moral principles like the 10 Commandments.

Quote: “God did away with the Mosaic Law completely, both the [civil,] ceremonial and the moral parts. He terminated it *as a code* and has replaced it with a new code, “the Law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). Some commandments in the Law of Christ are the same as those in the Law of Moses (e.g., nine of the Ten Commandments, excluding the command to observe the Sabbath day).”⁵⁹

The Law applies only to those who are under it. Christians are not under the law. It is not a means of salvation nor is it a means of sanctification. The Mosaic Code has been abolished and done away with (2 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:15; Col 2:14). “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4). Since the death and resurrection of Christ, the believer is not under the jurisdiction of the OT Law. We are now under the jurisdiction of the law of Christ, life in the Spirit and the institution of the church.

E. Christians are under the law of Christ

Ro 8:2 *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*

1Co 9:21 *to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;*

Ga 6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

What is the law of Christ? It's the set of regulations and commitments taught by Jesus and expanded by the NT authors. It's the Christian rule of life. In contrast to the Mosaic code, which emphasized rituals and works, the law of Christ emphasizes grace and love (cf. John 1:17, 13:34; 1 Jn 2:3-6). We serve “in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:6). The law of Christ covers all areas of the believer's life just as the Mosaic code did for the OT believer.

⁵⁹Tom Constable. (2003; 2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ga 5:1). Galaxie Software.

III. Interpreting the OT Law

While we should not import NT ideas into the OT in our interpretation, we do consider NT teaching when considering application of OT principles. Our application of the OT should be read thru NT lenses. What principles still apply in NT times? What parts has Christ fulfilled or accomplished? What parts are mere shadows and symbols?

IV. Values of the OT Law

- A. The Law is “holy and good” (Rom 7:12), one of God’s gifts to Israel (Rom 9:4).
- B. The Law provided a standard of righteousness (Deut 4:8; Psalm 19:7-9). The Law revealed the righteousness, holiness, and goodness of God (Deut 4:8; Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; Rom 7:12-14).
- C. The Law entered “that the offense might abound” (Rom 5:20; cf. 7:8-13; 1 Cor 15:56b), and in order to “confine” men under Law and sin, with no prospect of escape until Christ should come (Gal 3:22f.). The Law produces the startling realization of sin which does not save (Rom 3:20; 7:7); but it calls forth a cry for help in one’s lost condition (Rom 7:24), a cry which can be answered effectively only by Jesus Christ (Rom 7:25).⁶⁰

Ro 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Ro 7:13 Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

1Ti 1:9 knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,...

Note: In an evangelistic appeal, one must emphasize the sinner’s sinfulness. A comparison of the person’s lifestyle to the requirements of the 10 Commandments and to Jesus’ teaching on the Sermon on the Mount is often helpful in revealing the sinner’s total depravity.

Luther: “The Law must be laid upon those that are to be justified, that they may be shut up in the prison thereof, until the righteousness of faith comes—that, when they are cast down and humbled by the Law, they should fly to Christ. The Law humbles them, not to their destruction, but to their salvation. For God woundeth that He may heal again. He killeth that he may quicken again.”⁶¹

⁶⁰NIDNTT.

⁶¹Quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), 95.

- D. Perhaps the most significant purpose of the Law is to lead men to Christ. The Law is a     , “schoolmaster, tutor, custodian” (Gal 3:24-25). The      was usually a slave whose duty it was to take the pupil to school and supervise his conduct generally. The OT Law served this purpose—it held authority until the coming of Christ. Paul states clearly that after faith comes, “we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal 3:25).
- E. 2 Tim 3:16 All of the OT is still revelation, still profitable material, still contains doctrine and instruction in righteousness.
- F. 1Co 10:11 *Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition.*

Good quote: “It is possible to conclude that since it is unnecessary to keep the Law to be saved, it is unnecessary to pay attention to the Law for any reason. However, Paul was not urging his converts to burn their Old Testaments. The Law has values, as he previously pointed out, ... Under grace we are free to fulfill the Law by loving one another. [Cf. Ro 13:10.] For the Christian the Mosaic Law has *revelatory* value (2 Tim 3:16–17) even though it does not have *regulatory* value, controlling our behavior.”⁶²

V. Weaknesses of the Law

- A. The Law cannot save. Salvation was never based on obedience to the Law, but on God’s grace and man’s faith in God’s promises (Rom 4:1-3). There is no truth to the assertion that under the OT system, people were saved by works (Gal 2:16).
- B. The fundamental weakness of the Law is that its only answer to sin is to forbid it and condemn it. Law cannot overcome sin, because it depends on the cooperation of the flesh (i.e., autonomous human nature), which is weak (Rom 8:3), incapable of obedience.
- C. What the Law demands can be gained only by the Spirit on the basis of the work of Christ (Rom 8:4). The Law is essentially a letter that kills; the life of the new covenant is the Spirit who makes alive (Rom 7:6; 2 Cor 3:6).
- D. The book of Hebrews demonstrates that the old covenant of the Mosaic Law was only temporary and has been replaced by the coming of Christ whose ministry is based on (1) a better priesthood, one after the order of Melchizedek which is superior to Aaron’s, and (2) a better covenant with better promises (see Heb 7-10). The old covenant was only a shadow of heavenly things, and if it had been able to make men perfect before God there would have been no occasion for a second or new covenant (see Heb 7:11-12; 8:1-13).⁶³

Heb 7:19 *For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.*

⁶²Constable.

⁶³Keathley.

VI. Why not place yourself under the Law?

Many today advocate observing some of the rules and regulations from the OT. They assert that Christians should observe OT moral stipulations whenever possible. They are not trying to add the Law to salvation; they recognize that salvation is by faith without the deeds of the law. Nevertheless, they assert that a godly, mature believer seeks to keep those elements of the OT Law that are still possible to keep. We are under the OT Law as a rule of life, but not as a means of salvation. Law-keeping is a means of sanctification, not of justification, they claim. *Warning about Bill Gothard—major proponent of this error.*

Examples: dietary regulations, clothing guidelines, infant circumcision, observation of the Saturday Sabbath, farming guidelines.

What is true of those seeking to place themselves under the OT Law?

- A. They are violating the proper use of the Law (read 1 Tim 1:9).
- B. They ignore the fact that the Law demands entire obedience (Gal 3:10, quoting Deut 27:26). It's illegitimate to pick and choose those aspects of it that seem "applicable."
- C. Paul says that if one has been delivered from the Law through faith in Christ, to deliberately place oneself under its control results in "falling from grace" (Gal 5:4). In other words, to go back to the Law amounts to a rejection of Christ.
- D. To go back to the Law as a way of life puts one under the control of the flesh; it nullifies true spirituality by faith in the Holy Spirit and defeats the believer. It results domination by the sin nature or the flesh (Gal 5:1-5; Col 2:14f).⁶⁴

VII. Is the Christian without law (i.e., lawless, antinomian)? *No.*

Gal 6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Heb 1:9 *[Christ] loved righteousness and hated lawlessness...*

1Jo 3:4 *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.*

Discussion questions:

1. Jesus said (Mt 5:18f) that not even the smallest part of the Law would pass away until all is fulfilled. Doesn't that mean that the Law must still be in force? *No, because Jesus fulfilled the Law. Mt 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Ro 10:4 For Christ is the end (telos) of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*
2. Why not just cut the OT out of our Bibles if we are not under the Law? *The OT still has revelatory value, just not regulatory value. It's profitable (2 Tim 3:16) and gives us many examples to follow or to shun (1 Cor 10:11).*

⁶⁴Keathley.

3. How do we know what parts or principles from the OT we can apply? *Generally, by how they correspond to NT principles.*
4. If the OT is not the Christian's rule of life, what is? *The NT, the Law of Christ, grace. "The believer is now to live in the liberty and power of God's grace by the Spirit, not the rule of Law. This new liberty must never be used as an occasion to indulge the flesh or sinful appetites (Gal 5:13) nor does it mean the Christian has no moral Law or imperatives on his life, but simply that he or she is to live righteously by a new source of life."*⁶⁵
5. Why don't we keep the Saturday Sabbath? *1) We are not under the OT Law; 2) There is no particular virtue in recognizing one day over another (Col 2:16); 3) Saturday Sabbath keeping is a command not repeated in the NT. However, observing a day of rest is biblical. Observing the Lord's Day (Sunday) as a day dedicated to worship is proper. A "soft" or "modified" form of Sabbath observance allows other activities on the Lord's Day that focus one's attention on God or on the good things God provides. Various forms of recreation, if pursued with a thoughtful attitude, need not be prohibited on Sunday afternoons.*
6. Wasn't the Mosaic Code supposed to apply to all people, including Israel's neighbors? And if the Law applied to Gentiles then, shouldn't it still apply to us today? *The answer is No, God did not expect or require the heathen nations surrounding Israel to observe the Mosaic Code. There were certain provisions for Gentiles, like Ruth, Rahab and any other "stranger" or "sojourner" so inclined, to bring themselves under God's covenant with Israel. God expected the heathen nations to obey his general moral will, and he judged them for their failure to do so. But the Law of Moses was given specifically to Israel and to no other nation. At the Acts 15 church council, the church specifically decided not to require Gentiles to keep the OT Law.*

Deuteronomy 4:8 What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?
7. How does one know what parts of the Law still pertain? *This is one of the serious weaknesses of trying to apply the Mosaic Code to NT believers. Who is to say what parts of the OT Law still apply, and how does one go about picking those that do? Usually whatever rules a particular teacher thinks still apply are the ones imposed. Someone else might find a whole different set of rules to apply. Additionally, the fact that the rules have to be updated for the current situation adds a whole extra layer of subjectivity to the process.*

⁶⁵Keathley.

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