
DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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A Cowardly People?

By Professor Johan Malan

An article titled “The Afrikaner are a Cowardly People,” by Prof. Yolanda Dreyer of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria, was published in the newspaper *Beeld* on 26 Nov, 2007. In this article she says:

The nation that crossed the Drakensberg barefoot has become anxious and faint-hearted. And an anxious cat makes anxious leaps.

I sat dumbfounded in a recent church meeting (synod) and beheld the commotion. I listened to my fellow-Afrikaners. They are afraid of fellow-believers. Not those far away – no, those who share the same confession of faith with them. The World League of Reformed Churches wants to “destroy the Afrikaner nation,” they say.

They are afraid of other races, as they also want to “destroy the Afrikaner people.” They are afraid of the international theological science. Rather stay away from universities and provide for your own training. In this way, other “dangerous” voices can be quietened. It will be so much safer if we can only hear ourselves. They are afraid of local theologians and regard the insights of learned people who studied widely as “trash.”

This is quite ironical. When it concerns their body, frightened people look for the best specialists in the country – those who have the highest qualifications and also attend international conferences. But when it comes to their faith, study is dangerous! The less you know and the less you share knowledge internationally, the better and safer.

They are afraid of love. They warn: beware of those who talk too much about love – they want to deceive you. And then, not least of all, my fellow-Afrikaners and fellow-believers are scared of gay people – scared to death. Just listen to their arguments. But God created everything – that also includes the bodies of gay people. God made people as sexual beings – also the gays.

For centuries, sex was regarded as evil and sinful – particularly by the church. Today it is celebrated as “a gift from God.” But beware! This gift is only meant for a specific group of people. Those who abide by the rules of the majority group: you have to be heterosexual. If you are not heterosexual (part of a minority group) you should remain celibate.

How cruel! To deliberately create people for such a double bind! You are not heterosexual – made in that way. You are a sexual being – made in that way. But you are not allowed to express your sexuality. You must suppress and deny it. Sentenced to a lifetime of deprivation. Is God so cruel? No, no. It is again people who do cruel things to one another – particularly when they are frightened. Then they kill, judge, and impose unbearable burdens on one another. Burdens which they are not prepared to carry themselves. As far as they are concerned, heterosexual believers in the Protestant tradition have rejected the celibacy as Roman Catholic. But they impose it on others. Celibacy is enforced upon gay Protestants. Double standards.

Physically sick. Emotionally dejected. Spiritually dark. That was how I felt after the gay fiasco in the meeting. Many of the delegates experienced sadness and sorrow...

The more afraid the Afrikaner people become, the more cruel they use the Bible. Against gays and then against theological professors. But the same Bible also contains the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth and the life – the light of the nations. May this light again shine in the darkened existence of frightened people. May fear and cruel applications of the Bible be expelled by love and be replaced by trust in God... Love is the greatest commandment in God’s law, according to Jesus. Does Jesus still count in “the church of Christ?”

Comments by Professor Malan

Christians should rightly be afraid of the modern breed of liberal theologians. There are many important reasons for questioning their truthfulness to the Bible:

First, the “love of Jesus” which Yolanda Dreyer refers to, is not related to the death of Christ on the cross as she cannot accept the fact that the Father could surrender His Son to so much torture and suffering. In a lecture she said, “I have a problem with the dogmatic construct that Jesus had to pay with His life to satisfy God because of our sin. I can imagine the problems that people would experience who are not theologians.” She completely denies the Biblical doctrine of atonement. Yolanda only proclaims an unconditional and generic love of God for all people – the complete acceptance of everything and everybody without being negative or judgmental.

Evangelical Christians clearly do not fit into her frame of reference because they are the ones who Biblically expose her deceitful theological views. She now describes us as cowards since we don’t have the courage

to accept postmodern, ecumenical ideas that do not comply with fundamental Biblical truths.

Second, the real problem lies with the wayward, liberal theologians who openly question and deny Biblical statements on the devil, sin, the deity and virgin birth of Jesus, His suffering, death on the cross, resurrection, ascension and second coming.

The modern trend among theologians is that they do not commit themselves to the fixed and timeless truths of the Bible. When the Bible states that Jesus is God, that He rose bodily from the grave, and that there is a devil and a hell, they reject these tenets since they have allegedly been derived from an ancient and obsolete worldview. According to them, the truth should be subjectively determined in terms of a postmodern worldview. While doing so, they rely heavily on the natural sciences, philosophy, psychology, as well as the fancy ideas of other theologians – including the aberrant members of the Jesus Seminar.

A theologian such as Sakkie Spangenberg of the University of South Africa even goes as far as to state that the heretics of modern times are those people who think that the truth is fixed and should be believed exactly as it has been revealed in the historical books of the Bible which, according to him, have been conceptualized and written in terms of an ancient worldview. But how does he account for the fact that modern man's integral worldview also accommodates other religions (some of them very ancient and primitive), as well as the agnostic theory of evolution, mystical New Age practices such as meditation, hypnotic therapy and other holistic practices?

Liberal theologians say that we should only experience God as a source of love and then find our way through life by using modern science and constructing a Jesus who fits into our own worldview. In African cultures He can even become an ancestral spirit!

Not A New Problem

It is conspicuous that the scribes (theologians) of the first century experienced similar problems of accepting the Messiahship of Jesus and understanding His exposition of Biblical truths. In spite of their knowledge of the Scriptures, Christ's deity was an unacceptable dogmatic construct to them, simply because they did not have any spiritual discernment (John 8:24; 10:33). Their theological traditions and humanistic reasoning about the Messiah and the doctrine of salvation led them to conclusions which are contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture.

This typical approach of the scribes has been, to a lesser or greater degree, perpetuated throughout the centuries. Today, it is still with us. The Lord Jesus warned against

the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:6,12). The biggest error of these two groups of believers was that they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. The Sadducees also denied the resurrection of the dead. Doesn't that sound familiar?

All these "scribes" rejected the Lord Jesus and also denied the deep spiritual significance of His crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. They alleged that His disciples have stolen His body from the grave. These lies are still proclaimed by modern "scribes." It is obvious that those who deny these basic truths are not born again since they do not believe in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross for the atonement of our sins. They also deny His deity and virgin birth.

Instead of the Biblical doctrine on atonement they only proclaim a vaguely defined form of generic love which demands that no judging of people or their lifestyles should be done in terms of Biblical norms. According to them, it is wrong to be negative and critical. The reason for their disposition is that they have become victims of a humanistic form of positive thinking in which hardly anything is regarded as sin. They only regard the rigid insistence on observing Biblical values as sinful or evil, as it is perceived to be divisive and devoid of tolerance and true love.

Their intellectual rationalizing of religion does not lead them to discovering the deep spiritual truths of the Bible. These truths are foolishness to them because they are spiritually discerned (Luke 10:21; 1 Cor. 1:19; 2:14).

Yolanda is right in one instance: evangelical Christians are scared of following the wrong ways on which deceived theologians want to lead them astray. We fear the consequences of their teachings and practices, as "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 16:25; cf. Matt. 23:13).

Theological training

Every effort of returning to fundamental, evangelical standards and the recognition of the authority of Scripture is determinedly opposed by the New Reformers and their accomplices. The Dutch Reformed Theological Seminary in Pretoria persists with their postmodern reinterpretation of the Bible. Many articles to this effect have been posted to their website www.teo.co.za

One of the recent articles written by James Kirkpatrick, is titled "Does the devil exist?" In it, he says:

Prof. Yolanda Dreyer gave a few good reasons why a discussion of this nature should rather be avoided. One runs the risk of being ridiculed as a fool or a heretic... The gospel, as I understand it, is in its deepest essence a positive message. Those who have listened to a talk by Rodney Seale or Kobus Jonker [on Satanism] would know how scary it is to talk about the devil. It is almost

like the pastor in my childhood days who preached on the second coming of Christ in such a way that you became terrified with cold sweat on your hands. I understand the gospel as a message of peace and not of fear...

*I considered acting in the same way as the group that were strongly opposed to infant baptism. They produced a booklet with the title: *What the Bible Teaches on Infant Baptism*. When the booklet was opened it only contained a few blank pages. Something similar would be very fitting as a form of protest against the emphasis that is placed upon the devil in certain circles...*

I do not believe in the existence of a personal being with the name devil.

James Kirkpatrick only believes in an impersonal element of evil.

There are also various articles by Prof. Julian Müller on the DRC [Dutch Reformed Church] website. He promotes a pantheistic worldview in which theism (a transcendent God who is elevated above His creation) and pantheism (an immanent, impersonal God who is present everywhere in His creation) are reconciled to become *pan-en-theism*. This doctrine supports an integral worldview. Müller says that God is present everywhere in nature and also in human beings. He shares our fate and saves humanity “from inside.” God’s world and our world converges, and for that reason he does not see Jesus as a kind of an astronaut who travels between different worlds – neither as a half-god who bodily rose from the dead.

The integral worldview provides for syncretism and a multi-religious orientation. In an article “Panentheism: a new perception of God,” Prof. Müller says: “*This worldview is supported from different sources: the new physics, new developments in theology, the process philosophers, the Eastern and African worldviews, and others.*”

The Bible is no longer recognized or accepted as a fixed source of revelation of God.

Prof. Müller is sincere enough to admit that much speculation lies at the heart of his theories. They have been conceived in ignorance: “*We ultimately have to accept that all our efforts to talk about God and explain the relationship between God and His creation are defaulting. Everything is tentative.*”

One of his colleagues said in a class: “*The Bible is the product of wangling by people.*” Another one said: “*All those who belong to the Lord see only in a mirror, dimly.*”

This is the inevitable consequence when the Word of God, which reveals the knowledge of God, is not

accepted as the beginning of wisdom by us (cf. Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Col. 2:2-3). Then, we will not understand anything in the proper way, even though we may be very learned and clever in our own eyes (1 Cor. 3:19-20). Theological knowledge is of absolutely no use if we do not unconditionally accept the Bible as God’s inspired Word. We must also have enlightened eyes of the mind through the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:18). Without that, we cannot understand the Bible.

A former postgraduate student in theology at the University of Pretoria, Ferdie Mulder, submitted a comprehensive document on deception in the training courses of pastors to the management of the DRC Seminary in Pretoria. He also sent copies to various DRC pastors in South Africa. In it, he systematically exposed all the false teachings which are in conflict with the Bible and also with the formal creeds of the church.

All his arguments and objections were discounted and the door was slammed in his face to become a DRC pastor. He is presently in England where his wife obtained employment. If that is how the truth is suppressed and resisted in this country and its “reformed” churches, unchallenged spiritual deception will be imposed upon millions of church goers.

Professor Malan’s website: www.Bibleguidance.co.za

The Ancient Bible Still Alive and “Ancient Mystics” Dead

by Dwayna Litz

There seems to be a growing fascination with the study of “ancient mystics” in seminaries and Christian academia today. These mystics such as Julian of Norwich, who taught to call God “mother”, are lauded as if they hold the key to spiritual understanding, as if quickening by the Holy Spirit is lacking today. They speak as if the merit of the blood of Jesus has grown insufficient over time, and now we must resort to anti-biblical, extra-biblical and even occult prayer practices for a close walk with *God*. It is as if God has changed somehow and a humble walk of obedience and trust in Him is no longer enough. Despite the fact that the Bible does not teach practices such as “breath prayers” or Labyrinth walking, pantheism (worship of nature) or panentheism (worship of a “god force” higher than nature, as well as the worship of nature, animals, and humans as “divine”), acts of penance all meritorious by pious works of the flesh apart from the blood of Christ (such as spending time in silence, not talking for days at retreats, or sleeping on a rock in quest of a newly defined “suffering for righteousness sake”), these beliefs and practices are seemingly being promoted by Christian authors at apologetics seminars and conferences without question.

As the proliferation of global unity at the compromise of Scripture continues via apostasy in the American churches and seminaries in the 21st Century. Popular Christian apologists, once thought of as sound teachers, are disingenuously double minded as they encourage the average Christian to make a stand for Truth while they are exchanging the Truth about God for a lie.

The “Ancient” Bible Still More Reliable and Alive Than “Ancient Mystics” J.P. Moreland writes in his book, *The Kingdom Triangle*, p. 155, “Renovation of the Soul”; section “Cultivating Emotional Sensitivity to the Movement within Your Soul”:

“Since her beginning, one of the greatest contributions and achievements of the church is the history, literature, and people at the core of Christian spiritual formation. There is simply nothing like this tradition anywhere else, and the profundity of the development of Christian spirituality is unrivaled. Grounded in Scripture, from the Desert Fathers to Henri Nouwen and Richard Foster, we have available to us a deep, rich knowledge of the soul and its proper functioning before God.”

In truth, Henri Nouwen and Richard Foster are not “grounded in Scripture.” See Ray Yungen’s book *A Time of Departing* (available from *Discernment Ministry*), Al Dager’s “Media Spotlight” on Richard Foster and Renovare, “Taking Leave of One’s Senses” <http://mediaspotlight.org/>, as well as the following links for beliefs and teachings of such “Christian mystics” from Crossroad www.crossroad.to compiled and posted at: <http://lightingtheway.blogspot.com/2007/12/research-on-henri-nouwen-popular.html> and <http://lightingtheway.blogspot.com/2007/12/christian-mystics-richard-foster-and.html>.

Impressionable students of apologetics are being drawn to intellectual contemplative prayer practices as speakers such as J.P. Moreland entice listeners with anecdotes of visions, dreams... and the experience of something “more”.... More? As if the Bible is not enough, as if child-like indebtedness for the biblical Jesus has grown stale. Where is a life “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3) with subjective experience taking front stage?

Dr. Walter Martin, founder of the Christian Research Institute said, “We must submit our intellect to the authority of God’s Word. There will always be someone smarter,” We must not trust in our own intellect for guidance but bring our offenses and thoughts under the submission of the Bible.

J.P. Moreland continues on p. 155: “Of central concern to this literature is the development of sensitivity to the inner affective movements of the soul.”

Where is this found in the Bible? In the Bible we are warned that “he who trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:26).

J.P. Moreland goes on to write on the same page: “...we Evangelicals have much in common with our Catholic friends, and central concerns and insights about spiritual formation are among them.” [Emphasis added]

Go to <http://www.bereanbeacon.org> and <http://www.pro-gospel.org> to peruse the great divide the monastic works of righteousness pose to salvation by grace. I have Catholic friends, and I appreciate their friendship very much, but when it comes to salvific doctrine the Catholic Church’s official teaching is left wanting biblically. Now, due to such a revival of ancient mysticism amongst reformed denominations promoting “listening prayer” and the study of “ancient mystics” over the Bible, seekers are not learning how to even be saved in Protestant churches. People pack auditoriums in seeker-friendly venues Sunday after Sunday only to assume that a work such as “going to church” makes them a “Christian”. Churches are growing, but the members don’t know how to articulate what it means to be saved according to the Bible, and they have no understanding of the role of God in salvation. They are left to “*imagine*” that salvation comes without repentance of sin (since repentance is not mentioned in most contemplative, seeker-friendly “listening prayer sessions”). They are left to “*assume*” a relationship with God is based on works, such as walking through a Labyrinth (or slowly meandering, as if a slower paced stroll is more righteous to God). None of this is found in Scripture and rarely tested biblically in comparison to the rate it is being propagated by “contemplative Christians”. The Bible says, “Suffer hardship...as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3). The Apostle Paul never mentions a retreat center in his admonishment to us to be more like Christ.

Running a Race With Aim

“...I run in such a way as not without aim...” (1 Cor. 9:26).

Though contemplative spirituality may be based on how much a person speaks or does not speak on a given day, how slowly he or she walks, how much time is spent in silence...these practices have no biblical basis. We are commanded to “*examine all things carefully*” in 1 Thess. 5:21. The Bible teaches we have been made free in Christ in passages such as Romans 14. One is challenged to find any mention of being persecution for righteousness sake in the contemplative arenas or repentance from sin, when we are given the certainty of suffering in Philipians 1:29, and we are warned in the Bible that without repentance we will perish (Luke 13:3).

Greg Koukl, president of Stand to Reason, references J.P. Moreland in his July/August 2007 issue of the STR newsletter, “Solid Ground,” ending his letter by quoting Moreland, stating that Moreland is one of his mentors. That compliment is disconcerting, given the fact that Greg Koukl has influence over many Christians in his STR ministry. Even with Moreland announcing himself as a “mystic”, Stand to Reason continues to promote his work via their web

site:
http://www.str.org/site/PageServer?pagename=search_iframe&cx=012394203280333296866%3Anuevnlzgw&cof=FORID%3A11&q=ip+moreland&sa=Search#912

They also featured his book *Kingdom Triangle* in their 2007 fall mail-out advertising, “STR Helps You Step Up Your Study this Fall.” But how can teachings such as those documented in *Kingdom Triangle* “build the confidence of Christians” as STR solicits?

A friend donated a CD series a few years back to my ministry LTW (www.lightingtheworldwide.org) of taped sessions of an apologetics conference at Biola University. I listened to Moreland call himself a “mystic” in his lecture and contemplate the navel (I am not exaggerating; he discussed the anatomical navel in his lecture), and I realized that there was far too little, if any, Bible mentioned for Biola to wet my appetite for learning at this point. Surprisingly, the acronym, B.I.O.L.A., still supposedly stands for *Bible Institute of Los Angeles*.

In his book, *Love Your God with all Your Mind*, p. 164 Moreland teaches (emphasis added): “*There is too little concentration of will and intelligence in our public (not to mention) private prayers.*”

Occult followers of the spirit of a Lord Maitreya “christ - consciousness” would also agree: <http://www.maitreyasangha.org/MaitreyaSangha.htm> and <http://lightingtheway.blogspot.com/2007/12/christ-consciousness-emerging-in.html>:

The title, Maitreya, means “Loving One,” from the Sanskrit, maitri, meaning radiant kindness and love. The same great Initiate Who is adorned with this title is the same great “Teacher alike of angels and men” Whom Christians call the Christ. However, His radiant love is not that of the meek and mild kindness portrayed by the theologians and ecclesiastical minds, but an inclusive energy of exceeding potency and radiatory power, a solar energy which He can focus through His all-inclusive radiatory Will as a center of magnetic power so great that it can “draw all men and women unto Him.”

Do not learn the way of the nations. (Jeremiah 10:2)

J.P. Moreland is scheduled to speak at the National Pastors Convention in San Diego in February, 2008, along with Emergent Church speakers. No Bible verse is found in the advertisement for the NPC, but we are told there will be *entertainment provided* for the pastors. “Conversation” now seems to be Zondervan Publishing’s marketing emphasis—*conversation about the Bibles they publish*. Here is an excerpt from the web site details for the convention: “...An excellent roster of speakers, comedians, and musicians are lined up for you to enjoy. Choose from critical concern courses, seven general sessions, and over 60 seminars. Or, you can just kick back poolside in the warmth of the sun. Whether you need new ministry ideas, rest, or time with your spouse, NPC is the place to be for people in ministry.”

http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/NPC/NationalConvention/Speakers/?j=13610654&e=k6hwd@arrl.net&l=1952809_HTML&u=161209468&mid=2902&jb=0

Compare such a comfortable snippet to my favorite quote by Charles Spurgeon: “*It is a very ill omen to hear a wicked world clap its hands and shout ‘well done’ to the Christian man.*”

Making Time to Focus on Yourself?

Having trouble with your prayer life? Focus on the Family “TrueU” offers tips for Christians for a richer *prayer* time. Here are meditation tips from “How Spiritual Disciplines Work: Solitude and Silence” by J.P. Moreland. (Bolded emphasis and brackets mine):

Once or twice a year, go on a solitude retreat from 9:00 a.m. one day until 5 p.m. the next day...In my experience, Catholic retreat centers are usually ideal for solitude retreats...For your retreat, take a Bible, a notebook, and hymnal...I also recommend that you take pictures of your loved ones as well as an object or image that reminds you of Jesus. By focusing on these things, your loved ones and the Lord Jesus can become steady objects of focus and love.

After checking in, stay in your room, get on your knees for around 15 to 30 minutes, and dedicate the next 32 hours to God. When you kneel, be sure it is in a comfortable place. If you kneel at your bedside, open the Bible to a favorite passage, read it a few times and pray it to Jesus. Then get up and go for a long, slow, quiet walk. If possible, walk where there are beautiful sounds and sights, for example, near fountains, flowers or beautiful statues...

As you quiet down, most likely, anxious thoughts, worries about things you need to get done, tensions with work, family or responsibilities, will surface. Don’t fight them. Like an ocean wave, if you fight against them, they will overwhelm you and you will become fixated on them. Just let them roll through your body, mind and emotions. Pray about your concerns and, after awhile, stop to look at a flower or to listen to a fountain. Or gaze at a statue of Jesus. [Exodus 20:4 commands us to not make for ourselves any “likeness of what is in heaven”, which would include Jesus since He is seated at the right hand of God as we are told in Hebrews 1:3, 12:2, and 1 Peter 3:22.] Or let some pleasant thought, feeling, or memory run through your mind over and over again.

While focusing on some beautiful object or some pleasant memory, let joy and thanksgiving for the object or memory well up within you. [We are commanded to not worship any graven image. (Exodus 20:4)] Begin to sing a song to God. Take a passage you have memorized and which you dearly love and pray it repeatedly to God. [Yet the Bible warns, “But when ye pray do not use vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” (Matthew 6:7).] Use this as an occasion to pause and give thanks for specific

aspects of your life from the wonderful taste of coffee to more important matters.

As concerns spring up, talk again to Jesus about that. If you can't get worries off your mind, I suggest that you schedule time later your first day, say, one hour before dinner, to do nothing but focus in prayer and meditation on your worries. That way, if a concern threatens to overwhelm you, you can tell yourself you will face it later. [That which proceeds out of the man that is what defiles the man. (Mark 7:20).]

About the author: J.P. Moreland is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology and director of Eldos Christian Center. He has contributed to over 40 books, including *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (NavPress), and over 60 journal articles. Dr. Moreland also co-authored the 2006 release, *The Lost Virtue of Happiness: Discovering the Disciplines of the Good Life* (NavPress 2006). © 2006 J.P. Moreland; Copyright 2006 Focus on the Family -TrueU, TrueU.org, and the TrueU shield are trademarks and "A Place to Discover the Truth" is a service of Focus on the Family... Source: <http://www.trueu.org/Academics/LectureHall/A000000423.cfm>

No Need for Monasteries—We Have a Better “Tabernacle”

- *“And I will set My tabernacle among you...”* (Leviticus 26:11). Our tabernacle is alive in Christ.
- *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14).
- *“...And low I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20).
- *“...where can I flee from Thy presence?”* (Psalm 139:7).
- We are at “rest” in Jesus. (See Hebrews 4:1-9).
- We are His house. (Hebrews 3:6; Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5).
- God dwells in His people, and we don't have to go to a monastery, a “temple made of hands” (Acts 7:48, 17:24) to commune with Him.

God's Word still has the power to refresh us in Him and is sufficient apart from any “work” of human righteousness, including spending time in silence at retreat centers. I do agree with J. P. Moreland in recommending the hymns. I always start my prayer times off by singing hymns as they renew my mind in Jesus and take the focus off of myself and draw me to spend time in God's Word: <http://lightingtheway.blogspot.com/2007/12/beautiful-songs-by-francis-havergal.html>

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits...” (1 John 4:1). See also Hosea 4:12-14 and Amos 5:25-26. *“I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He are we? All things are lawful but not all things are profitable...”* (1 Corinthians 10:20-23).

No statues are needed. Cares dissipate “*fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...*” (Hebrews 12:2).

Dwayna Litz's website: www.lightingthewayworldwide.org

Whatever Happened to the Gospel?

Paul Gowdy

For the past number of years I have noticed some subtle changes in how the evangelical church presents the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I suspect that this has been a case of the frog in the kettle syndrome - slowly increase the heat and little Kermit will just stay there until he has been boiled to death! I am not sure if this is true or not and do not, under any circumstances recommend anyone try!

I suspect that the same slow increase in heat has been applied to the western evangelical Church. About a quarter of a century ago, as a teenage boy, I became a follower of Jesus. Indeed, a truly born again Christian and a committed disciple of Christ. I saw “the light”, got saved and my lifestyle changed. Call my conversion whatever you like, God through the power of the Holy Spirit entered my life and transformed my life completely. I willingly surrendered myself to the Lordship of Jesus whom I confessed to be the Son of God and Lord of all creation.

What brought about this radical transformation? It was the faith released within my heart as a result of the simple proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I was told that: (1) Jesus was the Son of God; (2) that He created everything including me; (3) that He came to earth becoming a man in order to save all men; (4) that He being fully God and fully man gave His life, shedding His precious blood as a ransom for my sin and the sins of humanity by dying upon a cross; (5) that His sacrifice was acceptable to atone for sin and appease the wrath of God the Father; (6) that He rose from the dead and conquered death, proving His divinity and the scriptures, in order that we might have hope who die in the Lord that we also shall have a glorious resurrection; and (7) that for those who trust in Him and confess Him as Lord He grants unto us forgiveness of sins and adoption as sons and eternal life!

As the Scripture says: *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not by works, lest any man should boast.* Eph. 2:8-9

This is the same Gospel that many, but not all, preach today. So what is the difference? There is more to the Gospel than what I have just mentioned above and the subtlety in the change is not necessarily what is proclaimed, rather what is the truth that is omitted.

A Gospel without mention of Hell. Twenty-four years ago when I became a Christian, I did hear the information posted

above but I also heard a little more. I heard that the wages of sin is death! I believe much of the church fails to preach the Gospel by the withholding of primary information. The death that sin brings is not only physical death, for all men die physically, but spiritual death where men are separated from God for eternity and condemned to Hell for ever. The doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked is so horrific that there are few today who actually preach it. Yet Jesus preached about Hell. To fail to warn men of the horrors of Hell is to fail to preach the gospel in its entirety.

Jesus said that a man should do what ever it takes to avoid going to this evil place. He said that it was better to enter Heaven with one eye or one hand than to have both hands and sin with them or both eyes and sin with them. The reason for this is because if we continue sinning with our eyes and hands and do not repent we will end up burning in hell for eternity! Jesus in no way espouses people cutting off hands or poking out eyes. His point is that Hell is so horrific that mankind needs to do what ever it takes to avoid going there.

Thankfully, the vehicle for sinful man to come into relationship with Christ is the gift of repentance. This means that when a person hears the good news about who Jesus is, what He has done on the cross and the gift of forgiveness and eternal life that He offers, that person can turn away from their evil, selfish, sinful lifestyle and turn to the living God by trusting in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour! This is repentance and is considered by the Holy God as a gift, a vehicle to bring us into relationship with God the Father.

Sadly, and to the shame of the church today, a gospel is preached that does not proclaim the sinfulness of man. Men are no longer sinners - but have just made wrong choices! I am convinced that the wicked motive behind this shift is simply that the modern church refuses to carry the shame and stigma associated with standing for the Truth. To proclaim the Truth as the Scriptures teaches it would be the death knell to the seeker-sensitive, packed out auditoriums that have become the *Nirvana* of the modern church growth movement! The modern church refuses to preach the Truth because the fear of man is stronger than the fear of God!

Men are no longer called sinners so they see no reason to have to repent! Alas, repentance is deemed a negative and the church is only obsessed with preaching a positive message! Worst of all, no one preaches about the fires of Hell any longer. The post-modern church does not wish to think about such doctrine. 'Anyway,' they say, 'if we can persuade men to just say a prayer of acceptance, asking Jesus into their hearts and granting them eternal life then they are not going to Hell! So why mention it?'

If any mention of Hell is omitted from the Gospel, lost souls would not understand the results of their continuing in sin. If they do not understand the "wages of sin is death," they can not comprehend that the "gift" of eternal life is only for

those who freely accept what God has offered. In exchange for eternal damnation, He offers us eternity with Him.

The very first thing that Jesus said when he came out of the desert to start His public ministry was "*Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Mt. 4:17

The last thing that Jesus said before His ascension was: *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations..* Lk 24:47

Paul, when speaking to the Greeks on Mars Hill said: *And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* Acts 17:30-31

According to the next verse, some mocked, and others said,: "*We will hear thee again of this matter.*" Where do you stand on this very serious issue as we enter the New Year. The church today needs to wake up! Paul says that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the evidence that there is coming a judgement, therefore all men are commanded to REPENT! The pastor and/or leader who omits this truth is nothing less than a traitor to his Lord!

The watered-down gospel that the church proclaims today does a marvellous job of creating backsliders. Some statistics suggest 19 out of every 20 people who say the 'salvation prayer' (or the sinners prayer) end up backsliding! (I would suggest that is because only 5% of the church are actually preaching the Gospel!)

The answer is very simple. The Gospel is not being proclaimed and men and women are not truly repenting of their sins. When Jesus does not become Lord of a person's life, all that transpires is that more heathen join the ranks of people who confess, "Oh I tried Jesus, It did not work for me!"

When the sinfulness of man, the horrors of Hell and gift of repentance are included in the Gospel we present, men and women are truly saved! It doesn't matter if thousands are packing out huge arenas that give live entertainment and everyone goes home feeling good. What is happening is that the so-called *ministry* is promoted, the pastor has "star" quality and the money is flowing. The truth is - multitudes are not coming to true faith in Christ. No, they are not *really* saved.

If the church fails to preach the once and for all Gospel entrusted to the saints - genuine Christianity could die out with this generation. I pray that God grips your heart Christian! If you are reading this, my prayer is that you may you be one who, without shame or compromise, will carry the Cross and proclaim God's Truth until He comes.

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