

CHRISTIANITY: THEN AND NOW

JOHN WADDEY, EDITOR

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THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF SEPARATION

The wisdom of man seeks to unite all things under one blanket, making no distinction between good and bad, right or wrong. God however, calls for separation in many areas of life.

* **God the Creator is separate from his creation.** Pantheism teaches that the creation is the body of God, that they are inseparable. Following Hinduism, New Age cults espouse this view. But God existed before the cosmos. Moses wrote, "Before...thou hast formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2). The creation will eventually be destroyed (II Pet. 3:7) and God will continue to exist. When the first heavens and earth are passed away, the saints will dwell with God in his eternal home (Rev. 21:1-3).

* **When God chose Abraham to be the father of the Hebrew race, he separated him** from his pagan surroundings in Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 12:1). Later, when he brought the Hebrews into Canaan he told them, "I am Jehovah...who hath separated you from the peoples" (Lev. 20:22-24). Most of their national troubles resulted from their forgetting this fact!

* When **Jesus came into the world, he was "separate from sinners"** (Heb. 7:26). He did not align himself with the any of the religious sects of Judaism. Apart from all others, He set about to establish his kingdom on this earth.

* **Christianity is separate from all other religions.** Christ made it clear that he alone is "the way, the truth and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by (him)" (John 14:6). Liberal scholars pretend that all the great religions are of equal value. The **atheistic type** pronounce them all equally worthless, the **religious type** see all leading to God. But such "pluralism" is unknown to the Lord. Paul wrote that it

was God's plan to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to himself "in one body" (Eph. 2:16). The same could be said for the Buddhist, Hindoo, Muslim and Taoist.

* **Jesus is separate from and superior to all other founders and leaders of the various world religions.** He was God's only begotten son (John 3:16). He is God incarnate (John 1:1-3,14). The others are all sinners like us. They died and are unable to escape death's grip. His way is that of truth and righteousness theirs are ways of confusion and error.

* **Christ's church is separate from all churches founded by men.** It is heavenly in origin and design (Eph. 3:9-10). It was founded by the Son of God (Matt. 16:18). It is prior to and superior to all other churches created by men. Christ will save *his* church (Eph. 5:23). The difference is that of the genuine and the counterfeit. The church of Christ is not part of the ecumenical movement. We cannot be, for it seeks to unite Christ's church with those founded by men. We do not unite our efforts to evangelize the world with other religious organizations. They have neither part nor lot in what we are commission to do (Mk. 16:15).

* **Christians must be separate from the sinful world.** Paul instructed the Corinthian saints, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity?...Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (II Cor. 6:14-18). Jesus reminds us that while we live in the world, we "are not of the world" (John 17:14,16). Followers of Christ are to separate themselves from sinful thoughts and deeds of the world (Jas. 1:21).

* **Truth is separate from error.** Only truth can set us free (John 8:32). Error enslaves. Enemies of Christ will separate (isolate) us from their society. Jesus

predicted, "...men shall hate you, and ... they shall separate you from their company..." (Luke 6:22). There are times when we ourselves have to do the separating. When the Jews became hardened and disobedient, Paul "departed from them, and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus" (Acts 19:9).

* **The church must separate herself from those who are unfaithful disciples.** When men depart from the teaching of Christ we are not to receive them or encourage them (II John 9-11). We must turn away from those who cause divisions in the church (Rom. 16:17-18). Impenitent sinners are to be separated from the church (I Cor. 5:13) as are those who are disorderly in conduct (II Thess. 3:6).

* **There are some areas in which Christ brings us together.** All Christians are united with him when baptized (Rom.6:5). In Christ we are no longer alienated from God, but reconciled (Col. 1:21-22). All faithful disciples are united with each other in Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). Paul assures us that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ (Rom. 8:35, 39).

* **There is yet to be one great and final separation.** On the day of judgement, Jesus will separate humanity as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and those who are righteous will go away into eternal life, but the wicked into eternal punishment (Matt. 25:32, 46). **JHW**

DESTRUCTIVE EPIDEMICS

Our generation is keenly aware of the meaning of "epidemic." The destructive power of epidemics has been demonstrated by the AIDS virus which has brought death to hundreds of thousands. As this epidemic has swept around the world, all have become familiar with the causes, progress and end results of such plagues.

First there is the infection and incubation. Then the Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection appears, followed by the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. There is the fitful struggle of the body to escape the clutches of the disease. Then comes death. Hundreds of thousands of graves proclaim the importance of understanding this plague and the need to avoid situations where it might be contracted.

This sad story is remarkably similar to an epidemic now sweeping through the church of Christ. It has been given the label of "Change Movement." Certain identifiable factors leave people vulnerable to this virus of change. Most prominent among them are man's ancient and universal tendency toward pride,

arrogance and rebellion against the authority of God and the standards set by Him.

Another is the acceptance of a new world-view as a basis for life's decisions and a new way of interpreting the Word of God. This world-view is called **Postmodernism**. While only recently has it come to dominate our society, many of its integral parts have been around a century or more. Among its fatal factors is its teaching that all truth is relative, that there is no absolute moral or spiritual truths, and that decisions are best made subjectively rather than by some objective standard. Thus per this doctrine man, not God, is the final determiner of truth. This false system now dominates secular schools of higher learning and in some of the seminaries where preachers seek higher education. Like a vile disease, this system has spread into some of our schools and congregations; brought back by preachers who were infected in their pursuit of advanced education.

When the deadly virus of change sets in, it breaks down and destroys respect for the standards set forth by the founder of the church. The boundaries he set for his people are trampled down as the people rush toward forbidden pastures.

Symptoms of those infected with the change virus are loss of humility and worldly pride. Victims find it difficult to process and understand simple instructions. They have trouble obeying rules. Victims eventually come to despise Christ's church. They no longer want to wear his name or be identified with his people. They seek aid, comfort and pleasure with other religious bodies. They depart from the faith (I Tim. 4:1-4). They turn away from the holy commandments delivered unto them (II Pet. 2:21). With spirits wasted by their destructive disease, they wander off and eventually die spiritually.

Some of the victims of this infection, (primarily preachers and professors), have knowingly embraced it and have only themselves to blame for their condition. However many others, namely students in Christian Schools and members of congregations where such carriers preach, are unaware of the danger they are exposed to. They suffer because of the deceitful work of their spiritual teachers (Rom. 16:17-18). It is for them that we pursue this **Christianity: Then and Now** project. Hopefully we can immunize many before they are exposed to this disease and save them from the deadly infection. **JHW**

ELDERS IMMUNIZE YOUR FLOCK

Because of the ever present danger of communicable diseases every school child must be inoculated against them. Heresy operates much like a communicable disease and the consequences are equally deadly to spiritual life. One such disease has now reached epidemic proportions in the body of Christ. In every state of the union and in numerous foreign mission outposts we hear of churches infected with the virus of change. Symptoms are easily identifiable: Preachers who begin promoting changes to worship and question fundamentals of the faith; Elders who are compliant to these innovations and younger members who are pushing for more and quicker changes; Older members who are distressed by such unscriptural changes are ignored and even told to leave if they cannot accept the changes. The time to deal with the problem is before it makes its appearance in your congregation. The following is a workable plan that will help inoculate your flock.

Bro. V. Glenn McCoy of Yorba Linda, California has written an excellent series of tracts that can help you fortify the faith of your members. Of his many titles, the following will fulfill the needs of this program. * **What is the Church of Christ?** * **What is Our Authority in Religion?** * **What Must I Do to Be Saved?** * **Can One Be Saved by Faith Alone?** * **Baptism: What? Why? Who?** * **The Lord's Supper: When Should We Observe It?** * **Why Doesn't the Church of Christ Use Instrumental Music in Worship?** * **The Role of Women in the Church?** * **The Gift of Tongues: Ecstatic Utterance or Actual Languages?** * **Christ's Second Coming.**

* Order a copy of each of these tracts for each family unit in the congregation.

* Plan a ten week series of class studies based on these tracts. All students from junior high through adults will participate in the study.

* Announce in your bulletin and from the pulpit the study plan you have scheduled.

* Give each family a copy of the first tract with the exhortation that each member read it before the next Lord's Day as it will be the topic for discussion in Bible Class.

* Appoint your most mature and capable teachers to lead the discussions. Be doubly sure those who teach are sound in their understanding of these topics and that they will teach them effectively.

* Each succeeding Sunday pass out the tracts for the

next week's study.

* You might even wish to prepare thought questions to accompany the tracts so folks can ponder them ahead of time.

* You might want to add additional tracts on related themes to round out a 13 week quarter of study.

* It would be profitable if your minister would prepare a series of sermons that would compliment each of these topics. People learn best by repeated exposure to an idea or concept.

* A similar program should be provided every two years, perhaps more often.

You will find this to be a valuable and productive investment in the spiritual growth and maturity of your congregation. Either confront this epidemic now or it will confront your congregation later. Tracts may be ordered from **V. Glenn McCoy, 22470 Mission Hills Lane, Yorba Linda, CA 92887. Cost \$30 per hundred. JHW**

POSTMODERN TIMES

This book is subtitled, **A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture**. The author, Gene E. Veith, Jr. is Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Concordia University, Wisconsin. This volume is an absolute must for Christian leaders who want to understand what is happening in our contemporary culture and especially in the church. Veith reminds us that "the church has always had to confront its culture and to exist in tension with the world. To ignore the culture is to risk irrelevance; to accept the culture uncritically is to risk syncretism and unfaithfulness. Every age has had its eager-to-please liberal theologians who have tried to reinterpret Christianity according to the latest intellectual and cultural fashion" (p. xii). The author discusses Postmodern Thought, Postmodern Art, Postmodern Society and Postmodern Religion. The information and insights he supplies will provide preachers and elders the necessary tools to understand the enemy that surrounds us and enable us to be triumphant in the death struggle now convulsing the church.

Among the tenets of Postmodernism that threaten the church are:

* Rejection of absolutes-whether in history, morals, ethics or religion.

* Rejection of absolute truth and a source of absolute truth. "In the past people argued about what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false. Today

people dismiss the very concepts of morality and truth” (p. 226).

* Rejection of the Christian world view. There was a time when most people in Western society acknowledged the Bible as God’s Word and recognized Christian standards, even if they did not confess Christ personally or live up to those standards. Such is no longer the case with Postmoderns.

* Rejection of the notion that life has objective meaning. To them life has value only if it is wanted by others, if it is in large measure whole and if it can be productive.

Part One of the book “Describes the new paradigm that characterizes Postmodern thinking” and the consequences of such thinking.

Part Two examines the arts through which Postmodernism expresses itself and which it uses as powerful, evangelistic tools to win converts.

Part Three considers Postmodern society, noting how it is “splintering into various factions and subcultures in competition and conflict with each other.

Part Four “shows how postmodernism reduces all social relationships to questions of power, threatening freedom and democracy.”

Part Five “shows how the postmodern world view manifests itself not only in New Age religions, but—even within the evangelical church” (pp. 23-24).

Veith shows how Postmodernism has found its way into most religious bodies impacting their thinking about the principles of Christianity as well as their conduct in the practice of the faith. Leading voices of the Church Growth Movement are using Postmodern principles in the programs they are promoting. He rightly says, “True church growth -whether quantitative or qualitative- will come not through social science research and marketing techniques, but through revival and reformation” (p. 228). “The desire to be a ‘mega-church’ often leads to ‘mega shift’ theology. Changes in style tend, often inadvertently, to produce changes in content” (p. 228).

The change agents who are creating havoc throughout our brotherhood have embrace some aspects of Postmodernism. Their literature is full of references to it. They are seeking to mold the church into an acceptable form for Postmodern people. Without an understanding of the Postmodern philosophy that drives the promoters of change, church leaders can only react to the symptoms they see in their membership. To effectively overcome the infection we must understand the nature of the disease that causes the symptoms.

The author concludes with this valuable truth: “Throughout its history the church has always had two options--to go along with the times or to counter them. One could argue that the most vital theological movements in church history have been those which went against the trends of their time” (p. 230). It is a fact that in general our society has embraced the false world-view of Postmodernism. We Christians must never forget that though we live in the midst of this world with its defective thinking, we must not allow ourselves to be captivated by it (John 17:14,16). If we faithfully stand with Christ and his gospel we will of necessity stand against this and all other systems that challenge his authority and deny his word. **JHW**

* Books reviewed may be ordered from the **Gospel Advocate Co., 1006 Elm Hill Pike, Nashville, TN 37210. Ph. 1-800-251-8446. *****

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Your gift of \$25 per month will enable us to:

* Send bundles of 25 copies of CTN to five schools where preachers are trained, or

* Send two copies of the paper to the leaders of 50 congregations, or.

* Send CTN to 26 foreign missionaries, or.

* Send complimentary copies of **Surviving the Storms of Change and Books About the Change Movement** to the library of a different Christian school each month. **JHW**

A USEFUL TEACHING TOOL

Bro. Alvin Jennings has issued a new tract entitled, **“Why It Would Be A Sin For Me To Worship With Mechanical Instruments.”** Because most of those

promoting the agenda of change for the church teach that our acappella music is only our tradition and not a matter of God’s will, this tract fills a vital need. With over 50 years experience as a gospel preacher, Bro. Jennings effectively addresses the subject from a Biblical perspective. Cost is .35 per hundred. Elders are encouraged to order quantities for their congregations. It will fortify their faith. Order from **Star Bible Publications, Box 821220, Ft. Worth, TX 76182.**

“Postmodernists... seek to dissolve history. They no longer see it as a record of objective facts... Since there is no objective truth, history may be rewritten according to the needs of a particular group” (G. Veith).

“Postmodernists employ techniques of literary criticism to dissect laws, institutions, and moral traditions...” (Ibid.).