

The Temporal Delusion - Part 3

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The Berean Call

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip [away] (*Hebrews 2:1*).

The importance of knowing what the Bible teaches and making sure that our thoughts and actions conform to God's Word is underscored by warnings given throughout the New Testament. Consider *2 Timothy 4:3-5*:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

The Apostle Paul's prophetic exhortation speaks of a time when those who profess to be Christians will not "endure sound doctrine." Incredibly, they will actually refuse to regard the teachings of Scripture as their authority. They will "turn away their ears from the truth" of the Bible and look to the perspective, opinions, and speculations of men. Not only has the Bible ceased to be their authority, but they are denying its sufficiency as well. Has that time come upon us?

Although some teach that we are in the Millennium, that Satan has been bound, Christ is ruling mankind from heaven, and things are getting better and better daily, neither the Scriptures nor experience confirm this Amillennial temporal delusion. There is, however, much evidence to support the belief that we are in the "time" of Paul's warning to the church. These are days of increasing apostasy, a stunning abandonment of "the faith" (*Jude*).

Over the last two decades, "the Church Growth Movement" has had an enormous influence in leading the evangelical church into apostasy. For centuries, "evangelical" described the conservative part of Christianity that believed the Bible to be inerrant and the sole authority in matters of faith and practice. "Evangelical" Christians regarded the Bible as sufficient in all things that pertain to life and godliness. Though many evangelicals still claim to hold to those beliefs, their numbers are decreasing drastically due to recent trends in Christendom.

The Church Growth Movement (CGM) in particular has been a major catalyst in the demise of biblical faith among evangelicals today. In its attempt to attract non-Christians and nominal Christians to its churches, the CGM has implemented worldly concepts and methods to achieve its goal--primarily by employing marketing techniques. Central to this approach has been the development of "seeker-friendly," "seeker-sensitive," or "purpose-driven" churches. We have

written about this movement extensively (See TBC, 2/05, 3/05, 9/08, 4/09, etc.), so we will only address here the devastating effect that it has had on "sound doctrine."

Marketing has its place in the business world. When applied to the church, however, it is terribly destructive to biblical teaching. The obvious problem is that the chief focus of marketing is on the customer, or consumer: he or she must always be pleased with what is being offered. This has caused thousands of "evangelical" churches that have subscribed to the seeker-sensitive approach to filter out those things from the Bible that are offensive to the unsaved people who have been attracted to their churches. From a marketing standpoint, certain teachings found in the Bible (even though they constitute sound doctrine and include conviction of sin--not to mention the gospel itself) may offend the consumer. Thus, they must be disregarded in order to ensure that "the customer" will keep coming back.

The CGM has infected thousands of churches around the world and has contributed greatly to the fulfillment of *2 Timothy 4:3-5*. The result is an "evangelical" church that has been weaned away from the Word of God. Such a spiritually anemic condition has created hundreds of thousands of weak and biblically shallow Christians who, like dumb sheep, have been relegated to being spoon-fed by marketing-oriented shepherds. Not only will they not "endure sound doctrine," but they will no longer be capable of discerning biblical truth from error. Moreover, the call to be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures to see if what one is being taught by Christian leaders is biblically true (*Acts 17:10-11*) has been functionally silenced for multitudes of evangelicals.

The CGM is just one of the religious trends in our day that has caused the church to "slip away" from the Scriptures. The drifting away process itself is Satan's primary strategy of turning humanity away from the Word of God, which he effectively accomplished right from the beginning in his seduction of Eve in the Garden of Eden: "Yea, hath God said...?" Planting seeds of doubt and using deceit are obviously his means, but what is his goal and where is all of this heading?

According to the Scriptures, the world is moving toward a one-world religion headed by Satan's man of lawlessness, the Antichrist (*2 Thessalonians 2:3-4*). His religion will be an apostate Christianity that will be a great distortion of what the Bible teaches yet will maintain a "positive" Christian veneer. Although the Antichrist will not be revealed nor will his apostate church be officially recognized until after true believers have been removed from the earth in the Rapture (*1 Thessalonians 4:16-18*), his religion and church have been developing for millennia. It doesn't take great insight to see it taking shape before our eyes.

Ecumenism, which originally meant a process of unifying Christian denominations, aberrant groups, and "Christian" cults, has been expanded today to include "people of faith" (i.e., any and all faiths). This is the chief means of developing a one-world religion and church. Since most biblical doctrines are a stumbling block to ecumenical accord, they are dismissed in the interest of harmony. As indicated above, the prophesied rejection of sound doctrine has paved the way for ecumenical unity. With the doctrine of Christ and of God distorted or negated, God himself

has been effectively abandoned: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

For those who profess to follow Christ, the void left by removing sound biblical doctrine as the discerners of God's instructions has been seductively filled by ways that seem "right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (*Proverbs 14:12*). Death involves separation. In physical death, this means the separation of the soul and spirit from the body. Yet it also refers to the separation of oneself from the truth by turning to man's ways. This condition is rampant in Christendom and has fostered agendas that indeed seem right but will have dire consequences in their advancement of apostasy.

In *Parts 1 and 2* of this series, we presented examples from church history of various attempts to set up the Kingdom of God or Christian utopias, or to impose a Christian dominionism upon the earth. The fact that all have failed in fulfilling their unbiblical agenda has not deterred further efforts, which seem to be all the more zealous in our day. What is even more striking about such efforts, as we've noted in Part 2 (See TBC 11/10), is how separate movements that claim to be Christian have come together in support of the "fix," "restore," "redeem," "take dominion of," or "solve the problems of" the world prior to the return of Jesus. Some declare that Christ cannot return until His servants (i.e., Christians) have fulfilled the "Great Commission" of restoring and establishing God's Kingdom on the earth.

As we've seen, much of what has been proposed above is taught by widely diverse Christian groups and movements that nevertheless claim to adhere to the Bible: the Latter Rain/Manifest Sons of God and the Kingdom Dominionism of Pentecostals and Charismatics, the Amillennialism of Roman Catholics and Lutherans, the Reconstructionists and Preterists of Calvinism and Reformed theology, the global P.E.A.C.E agenda and the Green and Environmental movements of neo-evangelicals, and the earth-bound promotions of the Emerging Church movement. Not coincidentally, Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses have related eschatological views. What, then, of the liberal and left-leaning "social gospel"-oriented Christians who show little interest in biblical truth but are a very large and vocal part of Christendom? Amazingly, they too fit comfortably into this unbiblical "fix the earth" religious unity.

A recent book that demonstrates this clear connection is titled *The Hole in Our Gospel*, authored by Richard Stearns (Thomas Nelson, pub., 2010), president of World Vision U.S. (see p. 8 for a review). Bill Hybels's Willow Creek Church purchased 10,000 copies, and churches that are part of the Willow Creek Association have likewise ordered thousands of the books. Five pages of endorsements include Chuck Colson, Kay Warren, Bono, Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, Max Lucado, Ron Sider, Eugene Peterson, Alec Hill, and Leighton Ford, among others. This volume (on which we are planning an extensive critique) is sprinkled with quotes from Catholic saints and mystics along with Nobel Laureate Mother Teresa (the "poster child" for Stearns's message). An alleged quote from St. Francis of Assisi sets the theme of the book: "Preach the gospel always; when necessary use words" (p. 23).

Stearns's thesis is that Christians have a hole in their gospel if their lives don't demonstrate good works. The "good works" that Stearns has in mind focus mainly on meeting the physical needs of the poor and correcting social injustices throughout the world. Whether or not this is feasible, few could argue with his sincerity - or doubt the nobility of his objective. But is it biblical? From beginning to end, Stearns misuses and abuses Scripture in his attempt to prove his case. For example, he is at the very least confused about the biblical gospel. He erroneously speaks of *Matthew 25:31-46* as the Final Judgment of the saved and the lost: "Those whose lives were characterized by acts of love done to 'the least of these' were blessed and welcomed by Christ into His Father's kingdom. Those who had failed to respond, whose faith found no expression in compassion to the needy, were banished into eternal fire" (p. 53). Although he attempts to qualify his works-gospel by saying, "This does not mean we are saved by piling up enough good works to satisfy God" (p. 59), he tells us elsewhere that in the example of Lazarus and the rich man, "The plain conclusion is that the rich man went to hell because of his appalling apathy and failure to act in the face of the gross disparity between his wealth and Lazarus's poverty" (p. 187).

The entire tenor of the book reinforces a social gospel that exhorts the reader to work at restoring our planet to righteousness: "Jesus seeks a new world order in which this whole gospel, hallmarked by compassion, justice, and proclamation of the good news, becomes a reality, first in our hearts and minds, and then in the wider world through our influence. This is not to be a far-off and distant kingdom to be experienced only in the afterlife. Christ's vision was of a redeemed world order populated by redeemed people--now" (pp. 243-44). He chides Christians for being "so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good," (p. 2) and adds, "if Jesus was willing to die for this troubled planet, maybe I need to care about it too" (p. 2). Scripture indeed teaches that believers are not to abuse this planet, but that's a far cry from the delusion of trying to renovate it morally and physically through one's "good works." The epistle to the Hebrews, honoring the saints of old as models of faith whom we should emulate, tells us that they saw themselves as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" and that their desires were for "a better country," i.e., heaven (*Hebrews 11:13-16*).

Nevertheless, Stearns declares: "The gospel itself was born of God's vision of a changed people, challenging and transforming the prevailing values and practices of our world. Jesus called the resulting new world order the 'kingdom of God'...and said that it would become a reality through the lives and deeds of His followers" (pp. 2-3). In contrast to the title of his book, there is more than a "hole" in the gospel Stearns is fostering. It is clearly "another gospel" (*Galatians 1:6-7*), a "social revolution" (Stearns's term) that will mislead many and save no one, though it shall bring many together. Stearns quotes Rick Warren: "The first Reformation...was about creeds; this one's going to be about our deeds. The first one divided the church; this time it will unify the church" (p. 51).

This book, even more than Warren's immensely popular Purpose Driven Life (which was a platform for solving the world's problems through his Global P.E.A.C.E Plan), will rally professing Christians and the followers of the world's religions, as well as atheists bent on demonstrating their morality sans God--by doing good works. Works-salvation is the faith system for all beliefs

but biblical Christianity. Furthermore, the various programs promoting such a faith and practice are gaining the respect and financial support of the world - as long as it accommodates the social welfare of the masses without proselytizing.

According to the Scriptures, there is something terribly wrong when the world is championing the church and its programs. We have seen examples of this throughout the centuries regarding ministries that had wonderful beginnings but now have drifted away from the faith. When was the last time you were exposed to anything remotely Christian at the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association)? When did you last receive a gospel tract from that Salvation Army "bell-ringer" at the shopping mall? Moreover, try to find the gospel or an exhortation to directly share the gospel in World Vision U.S.'s mission statement. It's simply not there - by design. These organizations have all succumbed to temporal delusions.

These delusions are manifested when the ways of man are implemented in order to satisfy physical needs at the expense of what God desires for us for eternity. Nothing is to take precedence over the proclamation of the biblical gospel, for it is not just mankind's only hope but his eternal hope. Any approach to presenting the gospel that does not clearly and directly reflect the Bible's true content will be a perversion of it, no matter how right or practical it may seem. Any person who participates in programs, practices, or beliefs that dismiss prophetic warnings of the Word of God regarding Last Days events may well become an unwitting contributor to the apostate religion of the Antichrist.

Jesus gives the antidote and the preventive measure that will protect a believer from being influenced and "taken captive" (2 *Timothy* 2:26) by an increasing number of temporally oriented trends and movements today: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (*John* 8:31-32).

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