THE EVANGELICAL ERODING of the DEITY of CHRIST

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Eroding of the Deity of Christ.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, without question, evangelicalism has taken on a new meaning. American evangelicalism, developing out of the post war era held to three crucial affirmations: 1) the Bible is the final authority on spiritual and doctrinal matters; 2) the proclamation of the gospel as set forth in Scripture; and 3) a commitment to doctrine and the historical creeds.

Today, evangelicals virtually revel in terms such as dysfunctional, co-dependent, victimization, self-affirming, and the like; but most haven't a clue about the meaning of God's given words such as propitiation and justification.[1] George Barna writes, "We must be wise regarding our assumptions about who truly understands the gospel. Many who call themselves Christians have no clue as to the truth about sin and salvation, about resurrection and redemption."[2]

In the words of John Armstrong:

> What will evangelicalism look like if it continues on the course it has followed for the last twenty-five years or so? Will the term *evangelical* even have significance, especially when the name has virtually become an adjective that is used to describe sociologically oriented, contemporary religious persons or movements (e.g., "evangelical" radical/activist, homosexual/lesbian, antifeminist/feminist, Democrat/Republican, businessman/entrepreneur)? . . .
>
> An early-warning detection system needs to be employed so that church leaders and faithful believers might "discern the times." Pastors need to know what they are up against if they will not go with the flow. Men and women who faithfully serve on church boards, who teach Sunday school classes and children's clubs, and who give countless hours to the service of Christ in the local church need to understand just what is happening. Their historically conservative denominations, mission agencies, and burgeoning parachurch ministries are changing as post-modern influences shape them more and more.[3]

A far more important question than who is an evangelical is the question – who is Jesus Christ? When the gospel, sound doctrine, and absolute truth are eroded, so will be the deity of Christ. Either Jesus Christ is very God; the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature; the purifier of sins; the One who tasted death for everyone; and the One who rendered powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; or man must find an alternative outside of Scripture for salvation!

Today, the gospel of evangelicalism revolves around "asking Jesus into your heart" and a Christian is anyone who says he "loves Jesus." Men cheerfully abandon the whole substance of Christianity, but they will hardly be persuaded to surrender the name.[4] Laying aside the true gospel, absolute truth, and doctrinal

distinctives, ignorance centered in subjectivism has become the mother of a man-centered religion.

The Barna Research Group reported that 49 percent of professing born-again Christians believe: "All good people, whether they consider Jesus Christ to be their Savior or not, will live in heaven after they die."[5] They also reported that 43 percent of born-again Christians agree: "It does not matter what religious faith you follow because all faiths teach similar lessons about life."[6] They also stated: "71 percent of American adults believe there is no such thing as absolute truth, a view shared by 64 percent of born-again Christians and 40 percent of evangelical Christians."[7]

Along with biblical ignorance, there is a dangerous tendency to sacrifice and compromise God's truth for the sake of unity. For example, for the sake of unity with people who do not hold to the true gospel necessary for salvation, some have gone so far as to say that those people are to be regarded as true Christians, and no attempt should be made to evangelize them. This tendency stands in stark contrast with the examples of Christ, who refused to sacrifice God's truth for the sake of unity with the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:5-12; 23); and Paul, who would not compromise the true gospel for the sake of unity with the Judaizers (Galatians 1:6-12).[8] One high profile evangelical calls for the diversity of the gospel to intellectually convert the Western world.[9] The church would do well to heed the words of the hymnwriter:

I need no other argument
I need no other plea
It is enough that Jesus died
And that He died for me.

If one would systematically work his way through the New Testament and categorize every area of truth, he would discover the New Testament warns against false doctrine more than it instructs on any other teaching – even more than love, unity, and experience.

The role of the critic is a difficult and unpopular position although deemed necessary by God. The one who exposes error becomes the divisive brother, while the one who endorses the counterfeit movement becomes the loving, caring brother. Thus has it always been, and thus shall it always be here on earth in the battle for truth.[10]

My purpose in writing is to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, the whole, living, victorious Lord, who as God and Man – fought our fight and won it; accepted our debt as His own and paid it; took our sins and died under them; rose again to set us free.[11]

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Are we coming to the end?

As we approach a new millennium, this question will often be asked. There will be rising expectations around the world over the next few years. Although most of these expectations will be either unscriptural or unrealistic, a U.S. News and World Report points out that they are already here:

> Although Jesus is quoted in the Gospel of Matthew as saying no one will know "the day nor the hour" of His return, the approach of a new millennium in the year 2000 is unleashing a flood of doomsday prophecies, not only from zealous Christians who are convinced that Christ's return is imminent but also from those in cultural and religious settings far removed from Christian belief. There is broad expectation that "when the world's odometer ticks over to three zeros, it will have cosmic significance."

The article goes on to report that:

> Belief in an apocalyptic end to history is by no means limited to the religious fringe. A new U.S. News poll has found that nearly 60 percent of Americans think the world will end sometime in the future; almost a third of those think it will end within a few decades. And more than 61 percent say they believe in the Second Coming of Christ. [12]

A WORLD COMMUNITY

It is certainly unscriptural to set dates and predict the Second Coming of Christ, but it is just as wrong to ignore that which is going on in the world that may indicate we are entering the final years before our Lord comes.

One major biblical prophecy is the rise of a world leader who unites the world into a one-world government. One of the amazing things about this prophecy is

that he will not only control the world politically and economically, but all the world will worship him in a one-world religious system:

Political Authority: "*. . .and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations . . .* " (Rev. 13:7).

Ecclesiastical Authority: "*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life. . .* " (Rev. 13:8).

Economic Authority: "*. . . no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name*" (Rev. 13:17).[13]

The cry of the world today is for oneness, tolerance, and unity as we are now all members of a global community. This "new world order" calls for oneness politically, economically, and religiously. Although we seem to be far from it, the cry for this oneness – and the openness to it – is everywhere. Every week you can read articles calling for a leadership that can pull us all together:

> We need a leadership that knows how to transcend mankind's divisions, to diminish our most primitive instincts and to enhance our nobler ones. It must have the power of personality that inspires the best of us and takes us onward and beyond what we do now so often unsatisfactorily and insufficiently to what we could do if human energies were liberated from the confines of too simple and too narrow a perspective.[14]

Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, speaking before the United Nations in September of 1995, condemned the privatizing of life which inspires resistance to the United Nations concept of a global neighborhood. She condemned those preoccupied with "my family, my property, my children" and said such "selfishness calls us away from building a world community."[15]

In Nelson Mandela's last visit to the United States, he called several times for "a new world order" and advocated a combined religion consisting of "Christians, Jews, Moslems, Hindus and even Animists."[16]

In her recent book Servants of Love, Mother Teresa reveals her belief that all religions will be united in heaven. She wrote, "We may not preach Christ as we would like to, because we receive help from the government and from various agencies." She "sees God active in these people (of all religions) as He prepares them for an eternity of happiness with Him." During a picture taking session, she asked "the Lord to deliver a soul from purgatory for every picture taken." The archbishop gave her permission to pray "with the Jews, Armenians, the Anglicans,

the Jains, the Sikhs, the Buddhists, the Hindus. It was extraordinary. All hearts united in prayer to the one true God." According to a poll of 10,000 readers of Good Housekeeping magazine, Mother Teresa is the most admired woman in the world.[17]

After Pope John Paul was named man of the year by Time magazine, the Vatican Information Service released a follow-up statement saying:

> While the story also looks at those who might one day succeed Pope John Paul, it stresses his belief that he will personally usher in the year 2000 "which has immeasurable symbolic importance for him. . . John Paul's ambitions for the millennial year are vast" and include "having a summit of all monotheistic religions on Mount Sinai."
>
> The Pope has always taken a very positive attitude to other religions, especially in his visits and various initiatives of dialogue and collaboration for Peace with them. He has often promoted ecumenical gatherings with leaders of other religious faiths and participated personally . . .[18]

Probably the most significant prophecy to us, who are part of the church, is that in the final days we will see the building of a one-world, ecumenical religious body that will be untrue to the Lord.

Dr. Charles C. Ryrie describes the events surrounding the end of the Church Age:

> The term "last days" covers the entire period from the first to the second advents of Christ (Heb. 1:2). Defection and apostasy, among other things, will characterize that entire period (2 Tim. 3:1). So the presence of apostasy is not in itself indicative of the end of the Church Age, but the increase of it is. Apostasy is both present and future when the climactic apostasy will occur which leads to the religious reign of the man of sin during the Tribulation period (2 Thess. 2:3). We may expect apostasy to become increasingly widespread as we draw nearer to the Tribulation days.
>
> ***1. The Doctrinal Characteristics of Apostasy***. These include at least three: (a) a denial of the doctrine of the Trinity (1 John 2:22-23); (b) a denial of the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7). In John's day this took the form of denying the true and real humanity of Christ, though it also takes the form of denying the true deity of Christ. Rejecting either the Trinity or the Incarnation denies the existence of the God-Man which is essential to our salvation. If Jesus Christ were not a man He could not have died; but if He were not also God, that death could not atone for sins; (c) a denial of the doctrine of the return of Christ (2 Peter 3:4).
>
> ***2. The Lifestyle Characteristics of Apostasy.*** Defection in doctrine always brings a decline in morals. Paul lists eighteen characteristics of such declension in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. They are: love of self, love of money, a spirit of pride, blasphemy, disobedience to parents, lack of thankfulness, lack of

> holiness, lack of natural affection, unceasing enmity so that men cannot be persuaded to enter into treaties with each other, slander, lack of self-control, savagery, opposition to goodness, traitors, headiness (rashness or recklessness), high-mindedness, love of pleasure, a pretense of worship without godliness of life.
>
> During the first part of the Tribulation days, organized, ecumenical religion will have its heyday. This apostate religious system is described in Revelation 17 under the label, "Mystery, Babylon." It will be world-wide (v. 15), unfaithful to the truth and to the Lord (the term "harlot" appears in vv. 1, 5, 15-16), have extensive political clout (vv. 12-13), be a "whited sepulcher," that is, be inwardly corrupt while outwardly glorious and splendid (v. 4), and will persecute the saints of the Tribulation days (v. 6).
>
> The groundwork for such a system will apparently have to be laid before the Tribulation begins, that is, during the closing years of the Church Age. The preparation will likely include both organizational moves toward unity in Christendom as well as the ascendance of doctrines to which diverse groups can give support.[19]

The Scripture clearly warns that the organized church is in great danger of apostasy (turning away from doctrinal truth), moral decadence, and ecumenism in the final days.

The Lord has given us adequate warning in His word.

> ***"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons."***
>
> ***I Timothy 4:1***
>
> ***"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:***
>
> ***Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.***
>
> ***For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires;***
>
> ***And will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths."***
>
> ***II Timothy 4:1-4***

It is certainly a concern to me that the Christian community has lost its ability or desire to discern. Popular movements suddenly come upon the church and we only ask one question - "What is its purpose?" Unfortunately, if you asked all the churches (including Protestant, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Catholics) and the parachurch ministries to write their purpose in one paragraph, there would not be any significant differences between them. The greater questions we should ask are: 1) What foundation (doctrine) is this ministry or movement being built upon? and 2) Is their teaching and ministry an affirmation of their statement of faith?

> "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Christ Jesus."
>
> I Corinthians 3:11

The difficulty is that many teachers on the contemporary scene seem to affirm a biblically sound doctrinal statement (i.e., the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture; the Trinity; the full deity and humanity of Christ; etc.). They seem to affirm the gospel and speak often about evangelism and bringing the lost to Christ. Often, their teaching is replete with Scripture references and is sometimes couched in very scholarly terms, giving the appearance of a well thought through biblical position. However, more in-depth analysis often reveals that, in practice, they depart from their orthodox position. What they say they believe and what they actually teach are often miles apart.[20]

Currently the evangelical community is moving away from doctrinal distinctives, which opens the floodgates to ecumenism. In America it is due in part to the popularity of Christianity that goes back into the late '60s and early '70s. Such things as the "Jesus Movement," Charismatic "Renewal," and the media's play on the phrase "born again" – coming out of the presidency of Jimmy Carter – brought renewed interest in America concerning "spiritual" things.

REVIVAL WITHOUT REALITY

Concerning this popularity, R.C. Sproul writes that the results are both terrifying and revealing:

> In the decade of the 1980s, a massive and comprehensive study of religion in American life was undertaken by the Gallup organization. Though the sharpest trends and indicators of the study were published and evaluated in various magazines, the mountain of data collected was generally not made public. George Gallup then submitted the data to *Christianity Today*, who in turn, selected a few theologians to examine and evaluate the significance of the information. I was among the group who had the privilege of analyzing the complete data.

> The results of the study were as terrifying as they were revealing. Among the more noteworthy elements were the following: (1) more than sixty million Americans claim to have had a personal conversion experience, and (2) an extraordinarily high percentage of Americans said they believed the Bible to be the Word of God.
>
> Counterbalancing these affirmations, however, was the clear revelation that Americans, even *evangelical* Americans, are woefully ignorant of the content of Scripture and even more ignorant of the history of Christianity and classical Christian theology. Perhaps most alarming was the realization that the mass of people who claim to have biblical faith have had little or no impact on the structures and values of American culture. For example, some recent studies concerning sexual ethics and the question of abortion suggest that the difference in behavior between evangelical Christians and secularists is negligible. In other words, the clear message of these studies is this: Christian "faith" is making little or no difference in people's lives and in American culture. How accurate these studies are is a matter of debate. How can this be? One possibility quickly comes to mind. Perhaps many of those who claim to have had a conversion experience are mistaken or lying about their conversion. However, if only half of those who claim to be born again are in fact regenerate, we must conclude that America has experienced a revival more widespread than the Great Awakening.
>
> If such a revival has happened, then we must ask why there is so little evidence of its impact on culture. We seem to have had a huge revival with little or no reformation. Indeed, the discrepancy between revival and reformation would be the greatest ever to occur in the history of Christianity. Such a revival is mere fiction. It is spurious. It is not true biblical faith that has been revived. [21]

The Lord's answer to the above is even more terrifying:

> ***"Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven.***
>
> ***Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'***
>
> ***And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' "***
>
> ***Matthew 7:21-23***

Two crucial issues in this passage are being ignored by the evangelical church today. One issue has to do with the nature of true evangelism, which is not the same as getting people through the doors of the church by the current church

growth movement. The other crucial issue involves the reality of genuine conversion, which does not include a life of lawlessness in opposition to the will of God.

The moral will of the Father is very clear in Scripture concerning salvation: God is: "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9a KJV).

A scriptural definition of "lawlessness" is also very clear – "everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (I John 3:4). Over the past several years, evangelicalism has reduced repentance to a change of mind about Christ, so we say one is a Christian if he is willing to name the name of the Lord. Jesus would say "that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). Remember these people (scribes and Pharisees) professed the right God, had the Holy Scriptures, and even practiced a religious system ordained by Him. John would add, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that every one who practices righteousness is born of Him" (I John 2:29). How can you change your mind about Christ and not change your mind about your sinful self? How can we render grace so ineffective?

No wonder survey after survey tells us there is no significant difference between those who claim to be evangelicals and their secular counterparts. David Wells rightly discerns that in the evangelical community today "God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, His grace is too ordinary, His judgments are too benign, His gospel too easy, and His Christ is too common." [22]

JUST LOVE JESUS

It's hard to find someone today who doesn't lay claim to Jesus Christ. Yassar Arafat, Chairman of the PLO, sees Jesus as his forerunner, a Palestinian freedom fighter. Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganou called Jesus the first Communist. Black Muslim leader, Louis Farrakhan would have us believe that Jesus was a black revolutionary Messiah.

When we wrote Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney and asked him to give us a definition of a Christian, his response was anyone who "loves Jesus." After Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, met with Pope John Paul II and twenty-four other evangelical leaders, she stated, "The Pope talks about unity and diversity being held together. Our task is to say even with our diversity we can respect each other as people who love

Jesus."[23] J.I. Packer defended his signing of the Evangelical Catholic Accord by saying, "Those who love the Lord must stand together." [24] Certainly it would be hard to find a Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, or Jehovah Witness who wouldn't say he loves Jesus.

In I John 5:1-3 we read:

> ***"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."***

The Scripture is very clear. One who loves God keeps His commandments. In John 14:21, the Lord Himself tells us what characterizes the one who loves Him:

> ***"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him."***

Without question the one who loves Jesus is the one who keeps His commandments. He must first and foremost keep the commandment to obey the gospel. Again the Scripture is very clear.

> ***"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."***
>
> ***John 3:36***

> ***"For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed – for our testimony to you was believed."***
>
> ***II Thessalonians 1:6-10***

"For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

I Peter 4:17

The one who loves Jesus must first obey the gospel and then purpose to obey all the commandments of the Lord. One cannot love Jesus yet pick and choose which commandments or doctrines to believe and obey because one cannot separate the Lord from His Word. It is only those who obey the gospel, believe upon the doctrines He has laid out in His Word, and live out His commands who love Jesus.

EXPERIENTIAL UNITY

At the 1994 Promise Keepers Regional Conference in Portland, Oregon, Bill McCartney asked:

> Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're a Baptist. Are you born in the Spirit of God? Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Pentecostal. Are you born in the Spirit? Now hear this! Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Roman Catholic. Are you born in the Spirit of God?[25]

Pastor James Singleton responded to McCartney's questioning:

> What does that mean? Some people believe that they are born again in the waters of baptism. Others confess that they are born again at the time of their confirmation. Still others believe that they are receiving Christ and are born again each time they attend Mass. The problem with that unqualified question is that it can mean *whatever you want it to mean.* That philosophy fits with the spirit of the age that minimizes objective Biblical truth in favor of a subjective experience.[26]

John H. Armstrong also comments on such thinking as McCartney's, which is so prevalent in contemporary evangelicalism:

> Practically, we give <u>relative</u> <u>authority</u> to the Scripture. To give it <u>absolute</u> <u>authority</u> would be to question a good deal of what is presently happening in a significant number of areas. We have grown accustomed to things as they are, and as long as they seem to work, we plan to stay the course. The Word truly unleashed would judge us. We would be forced to begin a reforming process that would be painful and costly. We are not sure yet if we want to do this, especially as long as the "good times roll."

> Further, today's evangelicalism treats experience as final authority. Have you been born again? Have you been led by God? Has God spoken to your heart? Did you feel good about the worship (praise, celebration, or seeker) service? Does the music move you personally? Are your kids excited about the programs? Rarely do we examine matters of religious faith and practice by the Scripture-alone principle. But a miracle, a changed life, a profound testimony –none of these establish the authoritative basis of saving faith. If we do not soon recover the proven truth of *sola Scriptura,* the crisis we face may be seismic in proportions.[27]

Michael Horton adds:

> Apostasy begins harmlessly enough. First, we are told that we do not need creeds, confessions, and catechisms to reign us in – Scripture requires no such protection. The result is that the Scriptures go before long. Next, we are asked to tone down on our doctrinal distinctives and emphasize that which unites all religious people of goodwill. The result of this is the rejection of the gospel. Finally, we are told, "All we need is Jesus," and we are left with a moral crusader.[28]

Another example of experiential unity was the 1996 Promise Keepers Clergy Conference in Atlanta. Clergy from fundamental and evangelical churches, the liberal National and World Councils of Churches, Roman Catholic churches and even some from the Mormon church were present.

Dr. Ralph Colas, Executive Director of the American Council of Christian Churches brought to light the experiential fervor of the meeting.

> Dr. Jack Hayford, senior pastor of the Church on the Way (First Foursquare), Van Nuys, California, spoke on *The Pastor and Personal Worship*. He related David's pursuit, penchant, and passion for the presence of God. Hayford told of his own pride to preserve his dignity. He said, "For some of you now is the time to begin to lift your hands to God." Some clergy had not been raising their hands as all the Charismatics had been doing; it was not long until they began to do so.
>
> On an overseas trip, Hayford noticed some people in the churches doing a little dance, and he did not appreciate it. However, three months later he heard God ask, "Will you dance for me?" So, Hayford said, he did dance and then demonstrated this on PK's platform in Atlanta. He said, "I told the Lord I'll dance for you, because I want your presence more than anything in the world."
>
> Hayford then directed everyone to breathe deeply and then to let all the breath out of their lungs. He said, "As your lungs release their impurities, may your souls be released from your fears and enjoy the breath of Heaven." This Charismatic speaker then asked the men to lift their hands and heads to Heaven to receive God's power and blessing. The 40,000 attendees then joined hands and shouted, "God is here! God is here . . . . !"

> Dr. Jesse Miranda (one of the signers of the joint declaration *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium),* Associate Dean at Azusa Pacific University, dealt with *The Pastor and the Bigger Picture.*
>
> Miranda asked the clergymen to stretch out their hands, palms down, and then to turn them over and "place in your hands worries, boredom, fruitlessness, etc. Now shake your hands, shaking those things loose. Take your hands and reach over your head, forming your hands into the shape of a crown which you will place on Jesus' head." In an almost unbelievable display, the 40,000 ministers did exactly what Miranda had suggested.
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> Dr. Miranda's message was followed by what was perhaps the "keynote" message of this Clergy Conference. The speaker was Rev. Max Lucado, formerly of Oak Hills Church of Christ (San Antonio, Texas), and now vice president of PK's Ministry Advancement. . . .
>
> He rebuked those who refuse to acknowledge the presence of another group on the ship. "That is why the world will not believe, because we fail to get along with each other, and our prayers will not be answered. The sin of disunity causes people to go to Hell!" (No chapter and verse was given.) "While we may like the fruit, it is not necessary to like the orchard," he said. "The step to unity is acceptance and no longer to speak evil of one another. Would it not be wonderful not to be known as either Protestant or Catholic? (sic) This is a God-sized dream and no one in our generation has ever seen the Church united." Lucado then pled that every clergyman who had ever spoken against another group or denomination, find a member of that group and apologize. Steve Green then belted out repeatedly "Let the Walls Come Down." The 40,000 ministers shouted, whistled, clapped, and cheered as they worked to a higher and higher pitch of emotion.[29]

Dr. Colas, in a letter sent out on April 10, made this conclusion of the Atlanta Clergy Conference:

> As a reporter who covered this meeting with press credentials, I would describe it as a meeting which included compromise, apostasy, Jesuit casuistry (the end justifies the means), and hyper-emotionalism, along with a theology based on relationships rather than biblical truth.[30]

There is in present day evangelicalism a hunger for God but an aversion to theological definition of that experience. There is a hunger for God but a disenchantment with dogma or doctrine. This very thing was actually celebrated in the cover story of *Christianity Today:* "Reaching the First Post-Christian Generation" (12 September 1994, 18-23), especially page 22, where we read: "An emotional experience of God is more important than its theological content." The danger inherent in such a position, is that "religious experience can be made to yield almost any sort of God."[31]

COOPERATIVE EVANGELISM

Years ago Billy Graham initiated cooperative evangelism, in which all churches in an area were invited to take part regardless of their position on the gospel or the doctrines of Scripture. Eventually this grew to include churches which are a part of the National Council of Churches as well as the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox church. Campus Crusade for Christ and the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association also heavily embraced cooperative evangelism.

While on a mission trip to Russia and the Ukraine, I was a guest in the home of Dr. Grigory Komendant who was the President of the Union of the Evangelical Christians Baptist of the former Soviet Union. Dr. Komendant told me of the great pressure placed on him by Billy Graham and other Western evangelists to be a part of cooperative evangelism with the Orthodox church. Dr. Komendant refused, knowing the Orthodox church did not hold to the true gospel and that it was presently persecuting true believers. Unfortunately, the Western evangelists and many America-based parachurch ministries have by-passed the true church that paid such a great price under Communism to cooperate with a false church.

The problem with cooperative evangelism is that all who cooperate have to be treated as Christians, though they may belong to churches that do not hold to the gospel or to other important doctrines. Not denying the sovereignty of God, Satan will gladly give up a few souls to see a multitude of others deceived and eternally damned. Perhaps this explains why surveys indicate that less than 15% of those who make decisions in cooperative crusades later demonstrate evidence of salvation.

Approaching the year 2000, we are seeing cooperative evangelism come to its pinnacle. Several inter-denominational and ecumenical coalitions are working together to accomplish the goal of world evangelization by the year 2000. Examples of AD 2000 movements include AD 2000 Together (Pentecostal, Charismatic, Catholic, and non-Catholic) and North American Renewal Services Committee (Catholics, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Evangelical Protestants).

This past December in Chicago, many church and para-church leaders came together in order to form a collaboration of denominations and parachurch ministries to proclaim the gospel to America by the year 2000. These leaders represented the American Baptist Church, Assemblies of God, Church of God in Christ, Church of God of Prophecy, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Free Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Free Methodist of North America, International Church of the Four Square Gospel, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Mount Sinai Holy Church of America, North American Baptist Conference, Presbyterian

(U.S.A.), Pentecostal Holiness Church, Southern Baptist Convention, United Methodist Church, AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, Campus Crusade for Christ, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, Luis Palau Evangelistic Association, National Association of Evangelicals, National Religious Broadcasters, The Navigators, Promise Keepers and several more.[32]

Which gospel are they going to take to America – the gospel of the good news of man, the gospel of good works, the gospel of grace plus baptism, the gospel of emotional subjectivism or the gospel of intellectual diversity, which are just some of the many gospels represented by this cooperative collaboration of ministries?

In May of this year (1996), there will be the first National Symposium of the Post Denomination Church. This symposium involves Networking Apostolic Thrust Internationally or Nationally (N.A.T.I.O.N.) which is a conglomerate of ministries uniting through E-mailing, networking and strategic alliances. The vision of N.A.T.I.O.N.s is to facilitate the networking of Apostolic leaders and Apostolic Church movements. Larry Lea of the San Diego Lighthouse says that "the Post Denominational Symposium has the potential for the furtherance of the gospel primarily because of unity."[33]

Ministries involved in the Symposium are mainly of the Signs and Wonders movement but also include Elmer Towns of Liberty Baptist Seminary. Dr. Thomas Ice makes this observation of the Symposium:

> I believe it is the first emerging sign of what we have to expect in the future – networking towards the Global Church. Note the wide range of ministries and denominations. Note also that there is a vision to set up "apostolic" teams – this could be the start of a new hierarchy, the world rulers of the global super-church. It is of course a pyramid structure, and we need to ask – what or WHO is sitting at the top of the pyramid?[34]

A recent article in a local newspaper stated the following on a local church in the area: "In an effort to heal and build bridges between genders, races and denominations, Metroplex Covenant Church is a part of Reconciliation, and an international network of churches and ministries." The article went on to quote one of the pastors:

> We want to pull together all the denominations and work together as a unit. That is why we don't call ourselves a nondenominational church. We are not against denominations. We consider ourselves to be interdenominational. Foster said. "Right now on our staff we have two Catholics, a Methodist, an Episcopalian, a Baptist and one from the Assembly of God Church."[35]

Two questions come to mind – what gospel can this church clearly proclaim and what is the meaning of the Lord's Table? I would guess that the answer to these questions are really insignificant. What is significant is the experience they are having together. Unity centered in experiential subjectivism has taken center

stage over doctrine in much of the church today and will continue to do so in the forming of a global church.

A TALE OF TWO SISTERS

With heart so kind and gentle.
And sympathetic eye:
With touching, deep affection,
And loyal, tender tie –
Was LOVE betrothed to DOCTRINE
To hold him all her days:

And walk the aisle of gladness
United in His ways,
Her younger sister also
Had qualities as fair.

Of caring, selfless, kindness.
And warmth without compare;
Thus UNITY was drawn to
The husband of her youth:
And pledged herself forever
To be the bride of TRUTH

But TIME, with bitter envy,
Across the testing years,
Pursued the slow erosion
Of happiness to tears;

Till LOVE began to weary
Of DOCTRINE'S pleasant voice
And UNITY grew cold to
The partner of her choice.
Then LOVE began to notice
The charms of HERESY,
And awed by his opinions,
She wanted to be free;

And UNITY perceived that
Her virtues were desired
By many, many others
Whose ways she so admired.

At length, two precious unions
So promising, so blest,
Were darkened by delusion,
Disloyalty, unrest;
Till came the day of sorrows
And rending vows of youth,
When LOVE divorced her DOCTRINE,
And UNITY her TRUTH. [36]

A CRISIS IN LEADERSHIP

Never in the history of the church have we had anything that is comparable to today when it comes to those who are the spokesmen for the church. We live in the day of multimillion dollar ministries centered in celebrity figures much like a Christian Hollywood. Recently one of these ministries was sold with a price tag reportedly in the millions.

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul selling his ministry or an unwillingness to come and speak without a comfortable fee or a guarantee of at least a thousand in attendance? Can you imagine the Apostle Paul building a house in Jerusalem to go along with a house in Ephesus?

Compare today's celebrity leaders with the biblical heroes of the faith.

"and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground."

Hebrews 11:36-38

"Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?"

II Corinthians 11:7

"You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes."

II Timothy 1:15

"But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus."

Philippians 2:19-21

There are relatively few men today of popular status who truly stand firm for God's Word, sound doctrine, and the narrowness of a true gospel. There are relative few who pay a great price for their stand. Do we follow those who stood alone, forsook the comforts of the world, and gave their lives like Paul, Luther, or Hudson Taylor? Or do we follow those who represent popularity, ecumenism and religious elitism? Luther was excommunicated from the church and was charged with forfeiting his soul to stand for salvation by grace alone. Today, popular ecumenical leaders disregard true biblical doctrine for unity, and receive one-million dollar gifts. Who will you follow?

Although we cannot question the motives or sincerity of these ministries or men, we can question the results of celebrity Christianity. For twenty-five years, they have promoted the same agenda to us: a stronger coalition, more involvement in the political arena, a stronger stand against moral decadence, family values, therapeutic sanctification, and now they add better marketing techniques. Cal Thomas summed it up this way, "We are living like the rest of the world."[37]

There are very few of today's popular leaders who remain focused on the heart of God's program on earth. The Apostle Paul said "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2). The true issue of Christianity remains the same. Man is a sinner and out of his sinfulness there arises a multitude of problems. The true answer to these problems remains the same – Jesus Christ.

Michael Horton reminds us of the true issue of Christianity:

> How we define the problem will define our gospel. If the "big problem" in the universe is lack of self-esteem, the gospel will be "finding the neat person inside of yourself." If the great question is "How can we fix society?" the gospel will be a set of moral agendas complete with a list of approved candidates. But how often do we discuss the "big problem" as defined by Scripture? That problem is the wrath of God. . . . apart from His saving work, His sacrifice, goodness, and love, every one of us would face a consuming fire. That is the problem: God's justice requires His hatred of sin and evil. It is because of His love that He chose and redeemed His people and continues to call, justify, and sanctify until the return of Christ. So, if the great question is: "How can I, a sinner, be reconciled to a holy God?" Then, the gospel is substitutionary atonement and justification by faith alone. If we do not see divine wrath as a "felt need," we will not preach the biblical gospel. The problem defines the solution.[38]

Unfortunately the evangelical community is becoming more and more Bible oriented and less and less biblical. It cloaks the world's wisdom in biblical terms, but the end result remains the same as Christianity continues to blend more and more with its surrounding worldly culture. Celebrity kingdoms spring up almost overnight financed by their many fans. Meanwhile pastors, who preach the Word in season and out of season, and missionaries, who are proclaiming a life-changing gospel to the world (which are the New Testament models), continue to decline in number.

Leadership for the future offers no great hope or promise. A 1993 survey of seven evangelical seminaries revealed that our future church leaders "are at least as self-focused, self-absorbed, and therapeutically driven as their secular counterparts. . . ." And, there is "a heightened sense of civility toward other religions, a tolerance that sometimes carries with it a willingness to accord those teachings some truth, and in a few cases, a lot of truth. It is there in a heightened concern to avoid offending people with the claims of an exclusive gospel."[39]

THE DETHRONING OF CHRIST

Satan has always tried to dethrone Christ. After all, if prophecy is to be fulfilled, a man of sin must reign on earth as a false Messiah – a one-world leader who requires all to worship him. Satan has plenty of help today. For some, the Lord Jesus Christ is just a created being (Jehovah Witnesses); a noble religious leader (Unitarian Universalists); a spirit-brother of Satan (Mormons); a Christ consciousness (New Age); one who couldn't die for sin (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism); or a good man and teacher (Liberalism). The list goes on and on. It is clear that the christ of the final one-world religious body on earth will not be the Christ of Scripture.

With the end times in view, Dave Breese states:

> The Biblical teaching of Christ as the only Savior and finally the judge of the universe is rarely heard. Christ is a friend, a buddy, rather than "very God of very God." The end of real Christianity will be in the denial of the essential deity of Christ. [40]

Tragically, the evangelical church has now become a part of the dethroning of Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Bible describes as Faithful and True, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:11, 16) is being stripped of His Deity in three areas – evangelism, teaching and morality.

EVANGELISM

Today's fad and fashion is church marketing. It is highly promoted by "affluent leaders" seeking "affluent consumers." Seminaries still claim to be training men to preach the Word, but the message is marketing and management. It is now so far removed from the biblical norm that a church in Maryland is offering $10 bills to the first 125 adult visitors. [41] Compare that to Peter in Acts 3 where he told the lame man, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give you." He gave him a new lease on life through the saving power of Jesus Christ!

> "That your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."
> I Corinthians 2:5

The message to sell the church and gospel is everywhere. The book, Developing A Vision For Ministry in the 21st Century, is one of many examples. It reads more like a management book than instructions from the Scripture. One

must hunt diligently to find any reference to prayer, the work of the Holy Spirit, or spiritual qualifications for pastors. The author spends more time on the Myers-Briggs personality test which is steeped in psychology rather than Scripture.[42]

IF THE APOSTLES WERE TO APPLY TODAY FOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Jesus, Son of Joseph
Woodcrafter Carpenter Shop
Nazareth, Galilee

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests. We have not only run the results through our computer, but have also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. The profiles of all tests are included. You will want to study each of them carefully. As part of our service, we make some general statements. This is given as a result of staff consultation and comes without any additional fee. It is the staff's opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, educational and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. We would recommend that you continue to search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus have radical leanings and register high manic-depressive scores.

Only one of the candidates shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness who meets people well and has a keen business mind. He has contacts in high places and is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely yours,
Jordan Management Consultants - Jerusalem, Judea

by James B. Clark, Fort Worth, TX - appeared in All Saints Bulletin

Today, we continually hear these expressions:

> *"Jesus Christ was a marketing specialist."*
>
> *"The church is a business."*
>
> *"The Bible is one of the world's greatest marketing texts"*
>
> *"Think of your church not as a religious meeting place, but as a service agency - an entity that exists to satisfy people's needs."*

Wells correctly observes:

> The fact is that while we may be able to market the church, we cannot market Christ, the Gospel, Christian character, or meaning in life. The

> church can offer handy child care to weary parents, intellectual stimulation to the restless video generation, a feeling of family to the lonely and dispossessed – and indeed, lots of people come to churches for these reasons. But neither Christ nor His truth can be marketed by appealing to consumer interest, because the premise of all marketing is that the consumer's need is sovereign, that the customer is always right, and this is precisely what the Gospel insists cannot be the case. [43]

Tozer would agree:

> At the heart of the Christian system lies the cross of Christ with its divine paradox. The power of Christianity appears in its antipathy toward, never in its agreement with the way of fallen men . . . . the Cross stands in bold opposition to the natural man. Its philosophy runs contrary to the processes of the unregenerate mind, so that Paul could say bluntly that the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness. To try to find a common ground between the message of the Cross and man's fallen reason is to try the impossible, and if persisted in must result in an impaired reason, a meaningless Cross and a powerless Christianity. [44]

Today, many of our evangelical leaders have lost sight that our Lord said the Holy Spirit would come to convict the lost of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). Breese writes, "Time was when the word relevance was totally unconnected with the preaching of the Gospel and modernity was as well. The Gospel was proclaimed no matter who listened or who thought what. Now Christianity must be modern, relevant and accommodational." [45] Very often these days, the demand is overpowering for the "practical." If the modern man or woman is going to take the time to get up, dress the kids, and make it to church, it had better be relevant. But is this great redemptive story irrelevant? Have we reversed our definition of the trivial and the grand? Is the greatest story ever told now boring, since we cannot see how it can possibly make us feel good or advance our self-fulfillment over the next seventy-two hours? [46]

When Paul preached at Mars Hill, there were not a dozen people who believed and followed him out of town. Do you think he would have considered a marketing strategy? He said:

> ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."***
>
> ***Romans 1:16***

> ***"And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much***

trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

I Corinthians 2:1-5

Recently, I was appalled to receive a brochure from a sister Bible Church in the Metroplex inviting me to a seminar entitled "Reaching the Unchurched" featuring an interview with Dr. Robert H. Schuller. What does a Bible church that supposedly upholds the Word of God as authoritative and sufficient for all the issues of life have in common with a man who declares "sin is psychological self-abuse" and "sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem."[47] Do we no longer believe that man is totally depraved? Do we no longer believe that all our righteousnesses are filthy rags? Do we no longer believe that God is opposed to the proud and gives grace to the humble? Do we no longer believe that we are to keep an "eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them?" (Romans 16:17).

I continually hear church leaders say we are just trying to reach the unchurched, as in a recent article in the Dallas Morning News stating it is our "desire to reach those who've become disenchanted with traditional church worship."[48]

Tozer wrote:

> I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for Heaven.[49]

John Hannah writes:

> To parrot David Wells' judgment of the church at large, and I have in mind the evangelical church, theology is fast becoming "an embarrassing encumbrance." The doctrine of the utter otherness, or holiness, of God has been replaced by the idol of the moral self. God is slick and slack, happiness is the opposite of righteousness, sin is self-defeating behavior, morality is a trade-off of private interests, worship is entertainment, and the "church is a mall in which the religious, their pockets filled with the coinage of need, do their business."[50]

How tragic when the evangelical church would rest its faith on the wisdom of men rather than the power of God. What is the power of God? "The gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Any move away from the gospel to attempt to bring men back to God – whether it be marketing or felt needs – erodes the deity of Jesus Christ (John 6:44; John 14:6; I Timothy 2:5; Titus 2:13, 14).

TEACHING

The Scripture tells us that in the last days people will become lovers of self (II Timothy 3:2). With the preoccupation of self rapidly marking Christianity as well as the culture, one thing must follow, and that is a disenchantment with sound doctrine. In the 1970s, the evangelical church began to move away from sound doctrine through the integration of psychology and Scripture.

> "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires"
>
> II Timothy 4:3

The view of the integrationist is probably no better stated than in Larry Crabb's book, Understanding People. Here Crabb states under the banner of "all truth is God's truth:"

> Truth is truth, whether scientific truth or theological truth, whether found in the psychologist's laboratory or in the Bible student's library. To speak of biblical truth as somehow more authoritative than scientific truth is really absurd. Truth has authority over error, not over another truth. [51]

It is amazing that these words are found in this highly proclaimed book under a chapter entitled, "The Bible Warrants Our Confidence." To say the least, Crabb and the other integrationists have a low view of Scripture. Why wouldn't we look to other truths for the answers of life if they are just as valid as the Scriptures? Why should we trust our hearts, minds, and souls to the Word of God, if it carries no more weight than that found in some laboratory?

Pastor Don Matzat correctly addresses the integrationists:

> Those who promote the integration of psychology with Biblical theology have failed to grasp the basic essence of the Christian faith. I know that is a very serious accusation, but nonetheless, when you examine the writings of Christian psychologists, it is very evident. They hope that psychology will provide answers to questions not specifically addressed in Christianity. This understanding is based upon a wrong definition of the very essence of Christianity. Since the essence of Christianity is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, any claim that the Christian faith falls short in providing answers for the needs of hurting people is in fact a criticism of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. [52]

Pastor Ed Bulkley goes on to add:

> The heresy is not merely in substituting psychological principles of counseling for Biblical principles of counseling. The heresy is substituting anything for the completed and sufficient work of Christ. [53]

Under the banner of "all truth is God's truth", we have incorporated man's wisdom into the teaching ministry of the church. In fact most of the popular

celebrity figures of Christianity are now psychologists. Using the "all truth" philosophy, anything can be proclaimed as truth. For example when Focus on the Family introduced a tape by New Ager Norman Cousins, the announcer made these statements:

> We are fully aware that Norman Cousins does not come from an evangelical Christian perspective, but all truth is God's truth. If it's true, it came from God, and the next twenty minutes we feel are true and valuable and will make a contribution in your life. [54]

Cousin's teaching was one of holistic health that one can control pain, bleeding, and infection through a mental process. James said, "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic" (James 3:15).

Warren Wiersbe gives the following commentary on this verse:

> What is the origin of man's wisdom? "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15). The believer has three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil (Ephesians 2:1-3). These enemies are suggested by the terms "earthly, sensual, devilish."
>
> But this false wisdom has another source: it is "sensual," that is, it is "natural." The Greek word is PSUKIKOS, which comes from the Greek word PSUKE meaning "life" or "soul." Our English word "psychology" is derived from it. In I Corinthians 2:14; 15:44, 46, PSUKIKOS is translated "natural," referring to the opposite of "spiritual." In Jude 19, it is translated "sensual." The main idea seems to be that of man's fallen nature as opposed to the new nature given by God. There is a wisdom that gets its origin in man's nature totally apart form the Spirit of God.
>
> But this "wisdom that is from beneath" is also "devilish." Perhaps the best translation is demonic. Beginning with Genesis 3, where Satan successfully deceived Eve, and continuing through the entire Bible, there is a "wisdom of Satan" at work, fighting against the wisdom of God.
>
> The origin of true spiritual wisdom is God. To get your wisdom from any other source is to ask for trouble. There is no need to get the counterfeit wisdom of the world, the wisdom that caters to the flesh and accomplishes the work of the devil. Get your wisdom from God! [55]

You would think, if we understood the Scriptures and realized that "Christian psychology" as well as secular psychology has its roots in godless men, that we would run from it instead of running to it.

Carl Jung, who was Freud's most famous disciple stated: "Patients force the psychotherapists into the role of priest and expect and demand of him that he shall free them from their distress. That is why we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which, strictly speaking, belong to the theologian." [56]

As stated by the late Dr. J. Vernon McGee, Jung's words proved to be prophetic:

> If the present trend continues, Bible teaching will be totally eliminated from Christian radio stations as well as from TV and the pulpit. This is not a wild statement made in an emotional moment of concern. Bible teaching is being moved to the back burner of broadcasting, while so-called Christian psychology is put up front as Bible solutions to life's problems . . . so-called Christian psychology is secular psychology clothed in pious platitudes and religious rhetoric.[57]

Recently, I have been reading the Book of Hebrews preparing to teach it on Sunday mornings. I am continually intrigued by chapter eleven and the "Hall of Fame" of faith. By faith, Sarah at age ninety received the ability to conceive. By faith, Abraham offered up his only hope of the promise in Isaac. By faith, Moses rejected the riches of the world and the passing pleasure of sin. By faith, they conquered kingdoms, quenched the power of fire, sent foreign armies in flight and shut the mouths of lions.

Today, we strip Christ of His deity by "teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Mark 7:7). We cannot whip depression, resolve our marital problems, discipline our children biblically, forget our past, forgive our parents or be distinct from the rest of the world. Jesus claimed, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We claim to be of Christ yet cannot overcome anything. Christ is no longer sufficient, because our minds have been "led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (II Corinthians 11:3).

Every believer should be able to have the following epitaph graciously etched upon his gravestone:

He had a pure and simple devotion to Jesus Christ
Jesus Christ was enough
The Holy Spirit was enough
The Word of God was enough

He needs no more!

MORALITY

In the Book of Revelation, the church of Pergamum was known as the worldly church. History is repeating itself today in the evangelical church. When the church becomes popular, the people of the world come in along with the world's wisdom and the world's morality. In Revelation chapter 2, the Lord commends Antipas for his faith in standing firm to the name and doctrine of Christ even unto death among those at Pergamum. When the church becomes popular, those who stand alone will always pay a great price.

> "But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior."
> I Peter 1:15

Secondly, the Lord condemns the overall church of Pergamum for allowing the teaching of Balaam to mislead them. Balaam was a gifted prophet who prostituted his gift for financial gain and worldly honor. So it is today whether it be the one of celebrity status or the Christian book store. Money speaks more loudly than truth.

Balaam also enticed them with the sexual sin of fornication, thus corrupting their moral purity. Dr. John F. Walvoord commenting upon the church of Pergamum states, "Compromise with worldly morality and pagan doctrine was prevalent in the church, especially in the third century when Christianity was so popular."[58]

We should expect the world to be immoral. It always has been. After all, the Scripture says all are under sin (Romans 3:9) and "there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Romans 3:12).

It should be no surprise that Father Andrew Greely has the age old pagan view of God. He states that, "Sexual passion is a very good image of what God is like."[59] In other words, the God of creation is just one of the boys. It should not surprise us that Episcopal Bishop John Spong declares, "Some of us are created heterosexual and some of us are created homosexual and both can be lived out with beauty, honor, holiness, and integrity."[60] I would hope that anything similar to this would be shocking and unacceptable if proclaimed in the evangelical community. It is not!

It took only a few to move the evangelical church toward marketing. It took only a few to move the evangelical church toward human wisdom. It will take only a few to move the evangelical church to the acceptance of immorality. Every Christian has the potential of choosing to disobey God in this area of life, but it is another thing when immorality becomes our theology.

Among the few in recent years who have opened the door to accepting immorality in the evangelical church are Tony Campolo and Robert Hicks.

Christianity Today makes the following statement concerning Tony Campolo:

> Most of the heat steams from 20 Hot Potatoes Christians Are Afraid To Touch (Word, 1988). In the book, Campolo describes "homosexual covenants" in which males trying to alleviate loneliness vow to live together in celibacy. Campolo says, "I don't see anything wrong with people not having sexual relations living together. If homosexuals are going to be celibate, what alternative do they have to loneliness?"[61]

What is the biblical alternative for anyone who experiences loneliness? Isn't it none other than the Lord Jesus Christ? He said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5b). The Scripture states: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you" (I Peter 5:7).

Christianity Today goes on to say:

> In 20 Hot Potatoes, Campolo urges the church to overcome its homophobia and work to stop discrimination that denies homosexuals their civil rights. And he says some Christians have a homosexual orientation, with the majority of them born that way.[62]

Here Campolo makes an excuse for sin. All men are born sinners (Romans 5:12). Therefore, regardless of their type of sin, all men need to be born again. Campolo strips the sinner of his need for Christ. John Alexander states it this way:

> Sin is the best news there is, the best news there could be in our predicament. Because with sin, there's a way out. There's the possibility of repentance. You can't repent of confusion or psychological flaws inflicted by your parents – you're stuck with them. But you can repent of sin. Sin and repentance are the only grounds for hope and joy. The grounds for reconciled, joyful relationships. You can be born again.[63]

One of the most disturbing things I have read in recent years was written by Robert Hicks. Hicks is highly promoted by the Promise Keepers both in his book, The Masculine Journey and their book, What Makes A Man A Man. In The Masculine Journey, Hicks states:

> But it was never recorded that Jesus had sexual relations with a woman. He may have thought about it as the movie The Last Temptation of Christ portrays, but even in this movie He did not give in to the temptation and remained true to His messianic course. If temptation means anything, it means Christ was tempted in every way as we are. That would mean not only heterosexual temptation but also homosexual temptation! I have found this insight to be very helpful for gay men struggling with their sexuality.[64]

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil"
Isaiah 5:20a

I would make four observations of Hicks' statements. First, like Campolo, he fails to call sin, sin. Secondly, he even justifies sin by relating it to none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Third, he totally misunderstands the temptations of Christ. If we compare Hebrews 4:25 with Matthew 4:1-11 and I John 2:15-17, we can easily understand that the mind of the Lord was not continually consumed by all the evil possibilities of sinful man.

Concerning Satan's temptation of Christ, Sproul writes:

> One difficulty concerning the sinlessness of Christ is related to Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." If Christ was tempted as we are, how could He have been sinless? The problem becomes even greater when we read James 1:14-15: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."
>
> James describes a kind of temptation that arises from sinful desires within us. These desires are already sinful in nature. If Jesus was tempted as we are tempted, it would seem to suggest that He had sinful desires. Yet this is precisely the point of the qualifier "yet without sin" in the book of Hebrews. Jesus had desires. But He had no sinful desires.[65]

How is this "very helpful" to gay men struggling with their sexuality? It would be helpful if Hicks were declaring that the Sinless One was the answer to their sin. Fourth, and by far the most serious, Hicks strips Christ of His deity by stating He may have had a sinful thought. If Christ had just one sinful thought, He was not God. He could not satisfy the righteousness of God in His death. And, we are without hope. Even to say "He may have" dethrones Him. Fortunately, for those of us who are born again and can say by the Spirit, Jesus is Lord – God (I Corinthians 12:3) our spiritual eyes have been opened to the wonderful truth:

> ***"For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;"***
>
> ***Hebrews 7:26***

> ***"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."***
>
> ***II Corinthians 5:21***

Jesus Christ is perfectly holy. His thoughts are holy. His words are holy. His actions are holy. His sacrifice was holy. His judgments are holy. He is completely separated from sinners.

Why is it so important that Satan infiltrate the organized church with a theology that dethrones Christ and accepts immorality? Is it not to deceive the church and prepare it to bow to a man of sin?
(II Thessalonians 2:1-12; Revelation 17).

LOSING THE SENSE OF AWE

Whenever the evangelical church comes to the place where:

- Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit are not sufficient;
- We need "other truths;"
- The gospel needs human help;
- We must pay, entertain, or soften our approach to bring people in;

or

- We begin to see Christ as one of the boys struggling with the same sins we do;

> "There is no fear of God before their eyes."
> Romans 3:18

then we have brought the "fullness of deity" in bodily form down to a place where:

- He is not much different from us;
- He has not the power to resist sin and therefore;
- He certainly has not the power to judge sin.

Why should we stand in awe of Him?

The prospect of worshipping a man as God rings through the sanctuaries of the evangelical church today nearly as much as in liberalism. To swing open the doors for self, felt needs, what one can get, and how one can feel only glorifies man.

Stephen Charnock wrote:

> To pretend a homage to God, and intend only the advantage of self, is rather to mock Him than worship Him. When we believe that we ought to be satisfied, rather than God glorified, we set God below ourselves, imagine that He should submit His own honor to our advantage: we make ourselves more glorious than God.[66]

A.W. Tozer stated:

> In olden days men of faith were said to "walk in the fear of God" and to "serve the Lord with fear." However intimate their communion with God, however bold their prayers, at the base of their religious life was the conception of God as awesome and dreadful. This idea of God transcendent runs through the whole Bible and gives color and tone to the character of the saints. This fear of God was more than a natural apprehension of danger; it was a nonrational dread, an acute feeling of personal insufficiency in the presence of God the Almighty.[67]

The evangelical church in moving away from Christ and His Word, fails to see God as He really is, therefore, fails to see man as he really is. In doing so, the evangelical church is destroying the need for grace. No fear. No awe. No reverence.

Grace rises out of the amazing truth that God desires to save us. Grace rises out of the sinfulness of man. Grace rises out of the hopelessness and helplessness of man. Grace rises out of eternal judgment, eternal damnation, and eternal hell. Grace rises out of the blinding brightness of a Holy God whose relationship to the sinner is one of a consuming fire and a Holy terror!

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
*The hour I first believed.**

APPENDIX I

HOW TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S GRACE

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him,
for he who comes to God must believe that
He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."
Hebrews 11:6

☐ Accept by faith what the Bible teaches about God.

> ***"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory."***
>
> ***Isaiah 6:3b***
>
> ***"For holy is the Lord our God."***
>
> ***Psalm 99:9b***

☐ Accept by faith that you are a sinner and therefore separated from a Holy God.

> ***"But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and yours sins have hid His face from you, so that He does not hear."***
>
> ***Isaiah 59:2***
>
> ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"***
>
> ***Romans 3:23***

☐ Accept by faith God's provision and forgiveness for your sin.

> ***"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."***
>
> ***Romans 5:8***
>
> ***"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."***
>
> ***Acts 4:12***

☐ Realize that you cannot save yourself, because salvation is a free gift from God.

> ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."***
>
> ***Ephesians 2:8, 9***

☐ What must you do to receive God's gracious gift of salvation?

> ***"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."***
>
> ***John 1:12***
>
> ***"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get. But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."***
>
> ***Luke 18:10-14***

☐ To become a Christian, you must give up on yourself and humble yourself as an unworthy sinner before the Lord and place your faith (trust) in Jesus Christ alone to save you from your sin.

> ***"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."***
>
> ***John 3:18***

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured-
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
You that are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?

Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within,
Grace, grace, God's grace,
*Grace that is greater than all our sin!**

APPENDIX II

LIVING A LIFE OF GRACE

"For of His fulness we have all received,
and grace upon grace"
John 1:16

Today, we have rendered grace ineffective in the believer by limiting grace to the salvation experience and not recognizing its work in the life which follows. In salvation the Lord Jesus Christ not only changes our eternal destiny but our present life (II Corinthians 5:17; I John 2:3-6).

The message of a changed life used to be the standard of biblical preaching. Charles Haddon Spurgeon proclaimed:

> If you are just beginning in the divine life, the Lord can give you an irreproachable character. Even though in your past life you may have gone far into sin, the Lord can altogether deliver you from the power of former habits and make you an example of virtue. Not only can he make you moral, but He can make you abhor every false way and follow after all that is saintly. Do not doubt it. The chief of sinners need not be a step behind the purest of the saints. Believe this, and according to your faith it will be unto you . . . the mercy which could forgive the sin and yet let the sinner continue in it would be scant and superficial. It would be unequal and deformed mercy, lame in one foot, and withered in one of its hands. Which do you think is the greater privilege: cleansing from the guilt of sin, or deliverance from the power of sin? I will not attempt to weigh in the scales two mercies so surpassing. Neither of them could have come to us apart from the precious blood of Jesus . . . but if we could be forgiven and then could be permitted to love sin, to riot in iniquity, and to wallow in lust, what would be the use of such a forgiveness? . . . repentance of sin is as truly the work of grace as the making of an atonement by which sin is blotted out. Salvation, from first to last, is of grace alone. [68]

D. L. Moody said, "We do not walk in the same way as before we were converted. A man or a woman who professes Christianity and yet goes on in the same old way has not been born again." [69] There are those today who in the defense of grace actually defend carnality. To others, insistence upon a changed life is a form of legalism which places one under the law. The Scripture says just the opposite:

> ***"For sin shall not master over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace."***
>
> ***Romans 6:14***

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"

Romans 6:1, 2

It is certainly true that believers must be taught and they must respond to the Word by faith, but it is also true that God works His will in each believer. Paul said in Philippians 2:13, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Dr. Walvoord commenting on this verse states:

> Though the Scriptures recognize the validity of human choice, it is no contradiction of the principle of human responsibility that God works especially in His children inclining their wills to do the will of God and providing spiritual enablement that they may accomplish His good pleasure. Even the present experience of salvation depends upon divine provision. The present tense of the word *worketh* is most significant. It is God who keeps on working, not content with initiating the believer's salvation, but continuing the work of salvation until the process is complete in glory. [70]

There are a multitude today who profess to know Christ, and yet, with the exception of some religious activity, really do not live a life much different from the world. They lack peace and purpose. They grumble and complain. Often they are overwhelmed by their problems or someone else's.

We live in the day of victimization. It is so easy to make an excuse for not living the Christian life. The Bible holds every individual accountable and will not allow you to blameshift concerning your past, parents, problems, peers, pastors, or partner in life. The Bible declares as a believer you are "complete in Christ" (Colossians 2:10). You have the Spirit of God to guide you "into all the truth" (John 16:13; I Corinthians 3:16). You have the Word of God to equip you "for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16,17). You have through "His divine power" been given "everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him" (II Peter 1:3, 4). You are without excuse!

What is available to you as the result of God graciously saving you?

☐ You now have peace with God. *Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14; I Thessalonians 5:23*

☐ You have the burden of your guilt and sin taken away. *Romans 8:1; I John 1:9*

☐ You are able to obey the Scriptures. *I Peter 1:2; 14-16*; *I John 2:3-6*

☐ You trust the Lord for daily provisions and strength. *Matthew 6:33, 34; Philippians 4:13, 19*

☐ You become more and more like Christ. *Philippians 3:13, 14; I Peter 2:2, 3*

☐ You have the power to tell others about Jesus Christ. *John 15:5; Acts 1:8*

☐ You can forgive all others. *Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 7:14, 15*

☐ You have at least one spiritual gift that allows you to minister to others. *Romans 12:1-8; I Corinthians 12:1-11*

☐ You find church vital, not routine or boring, with a sense of joy and purpose. *Psalm 122:1; Hebrews 10:24,25*

☐ You desire Christian fellowship**.** *Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 5:21; I Thessalonians 4:18; I Peter 4:9; Hebrews 3:13*

☐ You have a love for your brothers and sisters in Christ**.** *Galatians 6:1, 2; Colossians 3:13; I Thessalonians 5:11; James 5:16; I John 4:7, 11, 19-21*

☐ You respond to the authority of God and man. *John 14:15; Romans 13:1-7; Hebrews 11:8; 13:17*

☐ You have victory over sin's dominance. *Romans 5:20, 21; 6*

☐ You endure hardship and suffering. *Hebrews 12:3; I Peter 4:12-19*

☐ You have peace in the midst of the trials of life**.** *Philippians 4:6, 7*

☐ You have assurance that you will go to heaven. *John 10:27-30; Romans 8:29-39*

☐ You live in the anticipation of the coming of Christ. *Philippians 3:20; I John 3:2-3*

Wonderful grace of Jesus,
Greater than all my sin;
How shall my tongue describe it,
Where shall its praise begin?
Taking away my burden,
Setting my spirit free,
*For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.**

APPENDIX III

SOUND DOCTRINE

On this side of heaven, believers will never agree on all things. Neither is it essential that we agree on all things. Unity does not necessarily pour all believers into one mold. Some hold to congregational rule and some hold to elder led. Some have altar calls and some simply close with a hymn. Some sing hymns and some sing choruses. The Scriptures and the Lord give us that freedom.

The great mistake of ecumenism is the call for oneness apart from uniting on that which is essential. Unity is invalid among those who do not hold to the essential doctrines of Scripture. The biblical barriers of sound doctrine and a narrow gospel were created by God and not by men.

What doctrines are essential and a necessary yardstick to separate us from others?

☐ Humanity of Christ (Incarnation)
Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:16; Luke 19:10; John 1:14; I John 4:2-3; II John 7

Why? If Jesus Christ was not a man, He could not take on our sin or die for our sin.
I Corinthians 5:21; I Timothy 2:5; I Peter 3:18

☐ Deity of Christ (Very God)
John 1:1; 14:6; Colossians 1:19, 2:9; Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 19:6

Why? If Jesus is not God, He could not be the required pure sacrifice nor could He conquer death and sin.
I Corinthians 15:55-57; II Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 10:1-10

☐ Resurrection of Christ (Bodily)
Matthew 28:6; John 20:11-17; I Corinthians 15:1-19; Ephesians 1:19-22

Why? If Christ has not been raised, our faith is worthless, and we are still dead in our sins.
I Corinthians 15:1-19

☐ Trinity (One God - Three Persons)
Matthew 28:18, 19; Mark 12:29; John 1:14; Acts 5:3, 4; II Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 1:1-3; I John 2:22, 23; Revelation 1:4-6

Why? The Bible affirms both the oneness of God and the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19

☐ Inspiration of Scripture (Authority and Inerrancy)
Matthew 5:17; John 10:35, 17:3; II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:21

Why? Because God is the ultimate source of the Bible, making it authoritative for life, and totally trustworthy.
John 17:17; II Timothy 3:14-17; II Peter 1:20, 21

☐ Substitutionary Atonement (Total Depravity)
Romans 5:8; I Corinthians 15:1-3; II Corinthians 5:21; I Timothy 2:5

Why? Because man has no possibility or potential within himself to save himself, so Christ had to redeem him.
Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:9-18

☐ Justification by Faith (Grace)
John 1:12; Romans 4:45, 5:1, 11:6; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:4-7

Why? Because salvation is a gift of God impossible to receive through human merit, human worth, and human ability.
Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8, 9

☐ Holiness (Sanctification)
John 17:17; Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 3:18, 7:1; Ephesians 4:24, 5:25-27; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 10:10, 14, 12:10

Why? Because if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation (born again) and he cannot embrace the living God and remain the same.
II Corinthians 5:17; I Peter 1:4

☐ Second Coming of Christ
Matthew 24:15-25; 46; Acts 15:16-17; Romans 8:19-23; 11:25-27; I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-5; Revelation 20:1-3

Why? Jesus Christ promises to come back for His own
John 14:1-3; I Thessalonians 4:13-17
and to establish on earth the promised kingdom to Israel.
Ezekiel 37:21-28; Romans 11:25-27

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'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to take Him at His word,
Just to rest upon His promise,
Just to know "Thus saith the Lord."

O how sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to trust His cleansing blood,
Just in simple faith to plunge me
'Neath the healing, cleansing flood!

Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just from sin and self to cease,
Just from Jesus simply taking
Life and rest and joy and peace.

I'm so glad I learned to trust Him,
Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend;
And I know that He is with me,
Will be with me to the end.

<u>Chorus</u>
Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus
*O for grace to trust Him more!**

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