

Poisonous Theological Trends, Part 1

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This morning we are going to be looking at some poisonous theological trends—actually this week and next week. This morning’s [sermon] is going to be an introduction for next week. I started worked on [this topic] and the introduction got to be so big that I thought, “You know, we should just do a whole message of introduction and then we’ll get into more of the specifics next week.”

Every year 200,000 people die from medical prescription errors. Some deaths are caused by reactions to medications, or patients accidentally taking the wrong medication or too much of the right medication. But the majority of these deaths are due to mistakes made by well-intentioned medical professionals who accidentally give people the wrong medication. More die every year from this than have died in the Korean, Vietnam, Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraqi wars combined—every year. Isn’t it amazing that so many people die every year just from mistakes—information errors.

The irony of it is that the medical prescriptions are designed to help people get better. They are supposed to *help* them. The medical professionals who are distributing the prescriptions—those professionals want to help people get better. They went to school to help people get better. Yet, many, many people die because a little bit of information is off.

Well, I think most of us are aware that Satan and his demons major in distributing error. They are into the propagation of error, because they know

that if people believe a little bit of information wrong, it can damn them to hell. Jesus, in John 8:44 said to the religious hypocrites of His day:

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

There is no greater sin—no more deadly, dangerous poison, no plague so common and terrible—as doctrinal error. It is Satan’s trump card, his nuclear weapon, his bread and butter. It is what he focuses on the most because he knows that if he can get people to believe a lie, he can steal glory from God and he can damn men to hell. So that is why he does it: because he is against what God wants.

Amazingly, most professing Christians today never even think about doctrinal error. They don’t even care about it. It is inconsequential to them. They just go on in their lives, telling people they are Christians, and that’s all that matters. What you need to realize is that we are living in the spiritual Dark Ages. We have more access to biblical information—Bibles, books and commentaries—and information in general in our culture than in any other culture that has ever existed in the history of the world. Yet we are probably the most biblically illiterate society that has ever existed—even more illiterate than the people of the Dark Ages. At least they knew God created the world.

You go up to the average person and say, “Tell me about pneumatology, ecclesiology, providence, and concurrence.”

They say, “What?” They don’t even know what those words mean. They have no idea. Even if they have heard them before, they can’t give you an answer. Even if you ask people the basics such as, “Explain, from the Bible, that Jesus is God,” or “Tell me the state of man or God’s plan of salvation.” “Define for me the gospel.” Most people who call themselves Christians, can’t even do that. People who do not understand God’s Word,

His Truth, and sound doctrine are walking targets for Satan. They have no discernment—they can't tell right from wrong. If you don't know the Truth, you cannot tell right from wrong. You can't have good discernment.

So put this together in your mind. We live in a society—America—where most people call themselves Christians but know nothing of the Truth. That makes them vulnerable to every [false] doctrine—every aberration—that comes down the pike. They are like those Paul described in Ephesians 4:14, “Children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.” They are like corks in the sea; like a feather in the wind. They are just blown about and flit about in doctrinal limbo. They have no idea what truth is, and most of them don't even care.

Our society just doesn't care about truth anymore. Truth is irrelevant. We are living in what is called a “postmodern society,” where the only absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth. That's all. You can believe what you want, make up your own God, worship your own deity, do your own thing, create your own reality, and develop your own system of morals. God doesn't exist. We evolved out of slime. Truth is nothing more than your personal opinion. The sad part about people who are deceived is that they don't know they are deceived, because if they knew, they wouldn't be. They are unaware they are taking a spiritual prescription that is going to cause them to sin, or worse, damn them to hell. They don't even know that.

It is no wonder that many professing Christians are this way. Churches have stopped preaching God's Word. If you come to [Calvary Bible Church] all the time, you may have no idea of this. I talk to people who say, “You always talk about how the Church is in really bad shape, but it doesn't seem to be that bad.” Well, it's not that bad *here*. You need to realize that many people who call themselves Christians—in fact, most of the people who call themselves Christians—never go to church, never read their Bibles, and only pray when they want God to do something for them. That's it.

We live in a society in which people think they are Christians because they call themselves Christians, or because they go to church, or because

they want to be associated with that group. They have no idea what the gospel is. They have never experienced a transformed life—regeneration. You go to their homes and they have libraries with fiction books and rows and rows of music CDs, and stacks and stacks of DVDs. Then, you look at their theological library—if you can find it—and it’s telling. People do not care about truth—even most Christians. They will spend money on cars; they will spend money on furniture; and they will spend money on a million things, but not to know the truth. Satan, with his many entertainments, fads, fashions, and arts, is choking the Word out. And even now the group of churches and Christians who actually have a good understanding of the basics of sound doctrine are becoming smaller and smaller and smaller.

I want you to know that I am at war against doctrinal ignorance. I am at war against it. People say, “Why are you always teaching doctrine over there?” Well, why do all the people always come? People say, “Well, you can’t just sit there and teach for an hour and a half and have people come. There’s no music, no singing, no drama, no skits and no cappuccino machine.” (Although some people come from Starbuck’s with something.) People sit for an hour and a half and listen to doctrine. Why? They are starving for it. They are starving for doctrine. Most churches aren’t even teaching it—ever—from the pulpit or anywhere else.

I want you to know I can handle personal attacks on my family and me. I can handle the economy fluctuating, bad traffic, and air pollution. But, I *cannot* handle doctrinal error. I am at war against it and you should be, too. As a Christian, you are commanded to wage war and take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” [2 Corinthians 10:5]. We should all, with the psalmist, hate doctrinal error with the utmost hatred.

That is why every year I spend a Sunday addressing doctrinal error. This year, I am spending two. Next year it will probably be three. But if you are out there wondering, “Is this something we *really* need to do?” Let me first try to persuade you that doctrinal error is a big deal with God. In Mathew 7:15–16 in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Beware of the false prophets.” There’s a little command for you. Are you obeying that?

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?”

You are to be aware that false prophets are out there. Examine their lives and look at the fruit of their lives. In Mathew 24, when Jesus is asked by the disciples, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” [24:3], Jesus describes the age in which we live. In Matthew 24:4, He says, “See to it that no one misleads you.” Now, when Jesus tells you that—“You see to it that no one misleads you”—that requires you to take some action, doesn’t it? You have to do something to “see to it.” “See to it” is an action. We are to take action against not being misled. He goes on in Matthew 24:11 to say, “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.”

In Acts 20:29–31, Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders and he says this:

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert.

Paul says, “Listen, I know what’s going to happen as soon as I leave. False teachers will come from within and without—wolves.” Now, he uses the metaphor “wolves” because wolves have big teeth. Well, their “big teeth” is doctrinal error. That’s how they devour people—with lies, deceptions, and slightly distorted truths. There is the command, “Be on the alert,” which requires you to pay attention to what you are learning, to what’s going on.

In Romans 16:17, the end of the epistle of Romans, Paul says this, “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eyes on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.” Romans 16:18 says, “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” You don’t want to be one of the

unsuspecting. You need to know that these false teachers propagating false doctrines are out there. Don't be unsuspecting. In other words, be suspicious.

In 1 Timothy 4:1–2, Paul tells Timothy,

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, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.

You may think something is unconscionable, and think, “I would never do that.” Well, these people have their consciences seared with a branding iron. They will take people to the cleaners, seduce women, pillage, plunder—do anything. They are wicked, they are false teachers, and they are using people. You think, “How could they do that?” They do that because their consciences are seared with a branding iron.

In 2 Peter 2:1, Peter says,

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

You have to ask yourself, “Why does the Word of God have *so many* passages like this?” And this is just a small sampling. Why is there so much emphasis in the New Testament on truth, sound doctrine, teaching what is right, and refuting what is wrong? It's because God hates false doctrine. He *hates* it.

False teaching is insidious because it causes people—often those with good intentions, who want to obey God—to systematically sin against God. They think they are doing the right thing but they are doing the *wrong* thing. Those who are deceived unwittingly become purveyors of false doctrines themselves. Satan loves it. He *loves* this. Satan and his demons do not materialize and say, “Hey, I'm a fallen angel. I am rebelling against God. Let me tell you a lie.” No. They deceive men, and those deceived men become their instruments, their pawns for spreading doctrinal error.

There are basically four categories of doctrinal error or false teaching, ranging from mildest to worst. First, you might misinterpret a text and teach true doctrine, but from the wrong passage. Let's say I am studying a passage and there are a couple of different interpretations. I interpret that it teaches one thing when in fact it teaches another. Now, the thing that I am teaching is true. It can be supported from other texts. I am not teaching doctrinal error. What I am doing is misinterpreting the text. I am teaching truth, but from the wrong passage. What's wrong with that? In 2 Timothy 2:15, we are told to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." We are to be workmen, diligent, unashamed, precise interpreters of the Word of God. We have to do that. If we don't, we are sinning. So, even if you are a hard worker, and even if you do your best, you can still misinterpret a text and teach truth but from the wrong passage. That is the mildest form of false doctrine.

Second, and slightly worse, is to have a false view about what we think God is going to do in the future. For instance, there are four different views of when the Rapture will occur among those who are premillennial—that is, those who believe Christ will come back and set up a 1,000-year kingdom, and then the eternal state will happen after that. We [at Calvary Bible Church] teach what is called the "pretribulation view" of the Rapture. Now, let's just say we are wrong. What does *that* mean? It means we have misinterpreted a lot of passages, so we've blown the 2 Timothy 2:15 thing. Not only that, but we have taught others what is wrong. Now we enter into the Tribulation and we go through part or all of the Tribulation. So when we see the anti-Christ, we'll think, "You know, our view is probably wrong." God will preserve us during the Tribulation like the Israelites were preserved in Egypt against the plagues, not like Enoch who was Raptured out before the Flood. As the Tribulation prophecies unfold, it would become obvious that our view was wrong. But no one is damned because they have the wrong view of the Rapture. Teaching any false doctrine would be wrong and sinful, and is to be avoided, but such doctrines as the Rapture and things like that—if we

don't have them right, we are not going to hell. It is not plunging us into some sort of immoral behavior.

Third, there is a kind of false doctrine that causes us to sin against God and others, but still doesn't damn us. Let's say that someone comes along and concludes that Christians should never seek medical help. Or Edward [the pastor of music and worship] decides that we are going to start handling poisonous snakes during the service and that we should not practice baptism. See, those are things that make you think, "You have got to be kidding." Well, people believe those things. You can believe those things and still know Christ—still trust Him as your Savior, and still be saved. It's just wrong. You are doing what's wrong, and you are teaching other people what's wrong. It's not a *damning* error, but it's definitely a false teaching, and it's leading other people into sin.

Fourth and finally, the worst kind of false teaching is a damning heresy. A damning heresy is something you believe and if you die believing it, you are going to hell. Beliefs such as salvation by works or that Jesus is not the God man, He is only partially God or partially man, He is not 100 percent of both—those kinds of doctrine are damning. You have to have the gospel right or you cannot be saved. You have to trust in the right Jesus or you cannot be saved. You have to appropriate the truth in the right way or you cannot be saved. False teachers, of course, being deceived by Satan, promote all sorts of gospels that are just slightly off, ways of salvation that are very close, but just off a little bit—not huge deviations, but just enough to damn people. False teachers fill the pulpits of churches around the world. A few are like well-intentioned pharmacists who make mistakes and accidentally give their congregations deadly spiritual prescriptions. But most of them, they are wolves. They are using their congregation. They are using their position. They are using their power. They have no love of God; they just like the position and what they can gain from the ministry.

People of Calvary Bible Church, you need to listen to me now. *Good intentions and sincerity don't save anyone.* I don't care how sincere you are, or how honest you think you are. There is one way, one truth, and one

life. No one gets to heaven except by that one way, and that one way only [see John 14:6]. It is a narrow gate, and few enter it. You have to strive to enter that narrow way [see Matthew 7:13–14]. Remember what Jesus said to those people who came up to Him on judgment day, in Matthew 7:21–22, “Lord, Lord, did we not” and they list all these things. Jesus says to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.” And those people go to hell.

Think about it. These people are in church. These people know who Jesus is. They even call him “Lord,” and they are even doing works in His name, and they end up in hell. Why? They believed a lie, that’s why. They were deceived and they didn’t know the truth. You may think, “Well, false doctrine like that doesn’t exist in churches like ours.” Think again. You just talk to any of the pastors. One of the things we do when people come to us is talk to them about their salvation. A lot of times people tell us, “Yeah, yeah, I am a Christian.”

“How do you know you’re a Christian?”

“Well, you know, I try to be good; and I’ve grown up in the church and I never murdered anybody.” That is a damning heresy. That person is damned. They are trusting in their own good works to save them.

What’s amazing is that people say, “Jack, why are you always hammering away on the gospel? We *are* all Christians, aren’t we?” No. It’s amazing that people can hear the gospel week after week, and then come in and say, “Yeah, I have been pretty good.”

This happens. If you die trusting in your own good works to save you, you are not trusting Christ to save you. It’s either Christ—His righteousness, His person, His work on the cross, His resurrection, His gospel—or nothing. There is no other way under heaven by which man must be saved. That is why false teaching is such a big deal. You cannot be co-redeemer with Jesus. You don’t get to say, “Thanks for dying on the cross. Now I will just throw my works in there to chip into the pool and *we* will save us.”

So what are we to do about false doctrine? Well, as you would expect, Scripture gives us several courses of action. The first course of action is:

use discernment. Don't just go willy-nilly through life saying, "Well, that's a nice view," "Well, that's neat," and "I guess so." Proverbs 14:15 says, "The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps." In Acts 17:11, Luke writes about the Bereans who heard Paul preach the gospel, and this is what Luke says, "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." They were listening to the Apostle Paul, and they said, "Paul, that was fascinating; we're going to go see if you're right." They opened up the Scriptures and they examined them. They said, "He is right." They didn't just say, "Well, he's a good teacher. We will just accept him. He is passionate so he must be right." In 1 Thessalonians 5:21, Paul says, "Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good." Be examining everything carefully. Are you doing that? I talk to people, and they say, "Oh, yeah, I do that. I just turn on the Christian network." That is such an oxymoron. That is like pumping doctrinal sewage into your house. There is so much trash and doctrinal error that a lot of times people who listen to Christian radio and Christian TV all day are so confused they don't know what they believe. They're just confused.

In 1 John 4:1 we see a second course of action that we are to take. All the way through the book John is telling us, "this is what a Christian is, and this is what a Christian isn't." Then in 1 John 4:1, he says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." Some have taught incorrectly from this passage and said, "This is a special gift that certain people receive so that they can see demons. They can discern which demons are good, and they know if demons are behind different teachings." And it's like, "Oh, man." First John 4:1 says, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." He's not talking about sensing demons, but look in the middle of verse 1, he says, "Because many false prophets have gone out into the world." When he talks about "testing the spirits," he's talking about testing the teachings of men and determining which ones are false. That's what he's talking about.

Because “many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The same is true for all of us. We need to beware and not believe every spirit, but test them. How do we do that? We do that by examining Scripture.

In the third course of action, not only are we to use discernment, but we are also to expose and refute error. Paul, speaking of doctrines that promote sinful behavior in Ephesians 5:11–13, says:

Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

In other words, when you hear a teaching and you know it’s wrong, you take the light of Scripture and you shine it upon that teaching to make evident whether it is a lie or it is truth.

I have taught people who have grown up with a Nazarene background. [As I was teaching,] I got to a passage that talked about predestination. I knew all the Nazarenes had never been taught predestination. One man even told me, “Every passage that has predestination in it, my pastor would just skip.” You can’t just go up to somebody who has been raised in a church and who has not been taught something like that all his life and say, “You need to change.” That’s not persuasive. If they love God—and they usually do—and if they love God’s Word, [God’s Word] is what persuades them. So, you very carefully answer all of their questions from Scripture. [Once they had looked at the Scripture,] all of those people [with the Nazarene background that I had taught] said, “Man, it’s crystal clear.”

People just need to be shown from Scripture. That’s what [Paul] means by “exposed by the light” [in Ephesians 5:13]. It literally means “to reprove or rebuke by the truth; to take the error and shine the truth on it and make it evident that this [doctrine or belief] is wrong.” Paul, in 1 Timothy 1:3, tells Timothy to do that. He says, “As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not

to teach strange doctrines.” [Paul is saying,] “Timothy, I want you to stay at Ephesus, and while you are there I want you to be exposing truth, correcting those who are in opposition.”

In Titus 1:9 we are told that the elders must “be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” Think about that. If you’re going to be an elder in the Church, you have to know doctrine well enough to teach others doctrine and to refute those who are in doctrinal error. If you can’t do that, you can’t be an elder. It’s just the way it is. So, we not only have to use discernment, we also have to expose and refute error.

Our fourth course of action is: guard and warn the flock. In Acts 20:28, Paul, speaking to the elders of the church of Ephesus, says, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” You have to guard. What does that mean? Does that mean you have to put a fence around the church? No. Does that mean get guns and ammunition and shoot at people? No. What is it talking about? It’s talking about guarding from error. That’s what you need to guard against. You can take a Christian, and shoot a Christian, and they just go to glory. They’re just going to be with Jesus, freed from sin. (Don’t do that; it’s murder. That would be a doctrinal error.) But what damns people, what kills their souls eternally, is a false gospel.

In 1 Timothy 6:20 and 2 Timothy 1:14, Paul tells Timothy to guard the truth. So false teachers need to be exposed and rebuked so that the truth can be guarded. You don’t just accept them and say, “Well, I know you have a different gospel than I do, but let’s be brothers.” No, if someone has a different gospel, one of you is not a brother. One of you is a child of Satan.

People are often offended when I am preaching and I use names from the pulpit. They think to themselves, “Do you have to name names?” Jesus did. Paul did. Luke did. John did. Peter did. So I am going to. They say, “But why do you have to do that?” Well, let’s say I was up in my office looking out the window and I saw somebody put a land mine in the parking lot—some terrorist. Now, I tell you all, “I want you to know there is a land

mine out there somewhere. Don't step on it." Is that helpful? Would that be good for you? No. What you want is specifics. Where [is the land mine]? Right here, this is it. That is why you need to name names. It needs to be a specific warning. I am not doing you a favor by saying, "Hey, you may get blown up as you go home from church today. I am warning you. It's out there!" Then everybody wanders out and, well, that wouldn't be helpful.

Some say, "You can't name anybody from the pulpit unless you do church discipline." Well, that's if you're doing church discipline. If there is a false teacher in here and we confront him and he refuses to quit teaching false doctrine, yes, we will kick him out and we will warn you. That's what we have to do as a local body of believers. But if there is somebody else and he is writing books, and he is on TV or writing articles, or preaching publicly then he is open for public censure. So we comment on it. And no, we don't have to do church discipline on him. Paul didn't say, "Well, I would tell you about Alexander the coppersmith, but we haven't done discipline on him" [see 2 Timothy 4:14].

Now, before we get into the doctrinal specifics (which we are actually going to [cover in the next sermon]), I just want to give you a broad overview of the state of Christianity in America. I think a lot of times when you come to a church and you are hearing the Bible taught and you are involved in ministry, and maybe discipleship and things like that, you may think to yourself, "What's the big deal? The church doesn't seem like it's in *that* bad of a condition." It is bad. *It is really bad.* I just want to tell you some things so you are not ignorant of the state of Christianity in America.

The visible church in America is just a total disaster. There are many buildings, many so-called ministries, and many programs that are "Christian." That's true—they are *called* that. But do not be ignorant and think, "There are tons of churches that teach God's Word and sound doctrine and try to evangelize the lost. There are lots of them out there." There are not. There are very few. We have people all the time who leave here and move to other places, and search and search and cannot find a single church in their entire town where the Bible is being taught.

Most churches in America think that churches like Calvary Bible Church are freakish, that we are dangerous, that we are hate mongers—divisive and unloving—and that we are fundamental extremists. That’s how they see us. We actually believe the Bible is true. We actually believe that God spoke the world into existence in six literal twenty-four hour periods. [They think,] “How ignorant can you be?” We actually believe in a hell and that only a few get to go to heaven. To [most American churches] that is just absurd.

You can go to most churches and never hear the gospel preached—ever. You could sit there for a year and never hear a clear gospel presentation—ever. I recently attended a large, conservative Bible church. If I told you which one it was, you would moan. I went there because I thought it was good. But there was never a single mention of sin, of judgment, of wrath, of hell, of repentance, or of salvation. Jesus was only mentioned once at the very end in a prayer. The whole sermon was an innocuous forty-minute history lesson. The gospel presentation was, “Would you like to receive the love of God?” They said it about eight times: “You know, some of you might need to receive the love of God.” Can that save you? I mean, who wouldn’t want to receive the love of God? “Okay, I’ll receive it.” Does that make you saved? I felt like jumping out of my seat and saying, “Wait, he’s missing the important part! You are a sinner, and you need to be saved because God’s wrath is upon you. And this is how you get saved.” But I didn’t.

If that is what is happening in Bible churches, what is happening in the churches that don’t even believe the Bible is true, who never teach from Scripture? What’s happening in those churches? I am telling you, it is scary. If you have the stomach for it, sometime when you are on vacation or something, just go to some mainline denomination and sit there and get a clue. It is scary how bad it has become.

First, there are various kinds of professing Christians in America. There is the majority of people who just call themselves Christians. They are Christians because they are Americans and America is a Christian country. They never go to church, they never read their Bibles, they only pray when they want something from God—some terrorist bombs a building so they

ask for God's blessing. That's the extent of their Christianity. And so, you may be talking to somebody and say, "Yeah, I'm a Christian," and they'd say, "Oh, I am, too." That's what they mean: "Yeah, I live in America." They have no idea what the gospel is—how to be saved. They're lost. They think that you become a Christian by just claiming that you are one. That's all. Most people who call themselves Christians fit into that category.

Second, you have your mainline Christian denominations, most of which have gone liberal. You have the Roman Catholic Church, which teaches works salvation, the works of Mary, idolatry, mysticism, and a host of other false doctrines and heresies that cannot be found in the pages of Scripture. You have the Protestant denominations like the United Methodist and Presbyterian Church of America and Lutherans and Episcopal churches—just to name a few—that have totally imploded doctrinally. They say, "Well, fornication and adultery are not *that* big of a deal. You can be a homosexual pastor; you can be a lesbian woman pastor. There's freedom in Christ." If the founders of most of these Protestant denominations could be resurrected, they would just throw up with dry heaves over this. It's so wretched. It's so bad. It's so wicked how [some of these mainline denominations] justify their sin.

Then somebody like us comes along and says, "The Bible does say right here that that is wrong." They come back with, "You are so unloving. You are so divisive. You're homophobic." There are all these labels. We say, "I just said what the Bible says." And they say, "Well, you can't believe everything. That's an ancient book or that's cultural." That's how it is in those mainline denominations. They are going down, and they are going down fast. The Southern Baptists are probably the only ones who are maintaining some level of conservative doctrine. The rest are in bad shape.

Third, you have the cold, dead, orthodox churches. These are independent Bible churches, community churches, and reform churches that at one time were thriving and had great teaching. They have a great history behind them, but over the course of time the Christians become ingrown and self-preserving. The church begins to stagnate and people quit sharing their

faith. They have become cold and passionless. They don't have any zeal for God or holiness and they just go through the motions. The teaching is monotonous and dry. [With a deadpan, lifeless voice, they say,] "I am a Christian. Would you like to be a Christian? It's really exciting, and I just praise God. I am just so excited about being a Christian."

The quality of doctrine [in these orthodox churches] is sound; the doctrinal statement is good. But there is no evangelism going on, which means there are no new Christians being led into the church. There are no leaders being trained, and no discipleship happening. The churches begin to shrink and the younger people start disappearing. They come to church and they say, "Man, this is irrelevant." Then, over the course of time the congregation, because they can't pay the bills, starts selling off their parking lots. Then they become one of those churches that have no parking. The congregation gets smaller and what happens? The pastor gets old and dies or is too old to preach. They close the door, and somebody buys the building and turns it into a restaurant. That is cold, dead, passionless orthodoxy.

Fourth, and on the opposite extreme, is the charismatic movement—the Pentecostals and Third Wave churches. Man, they are excited about God. Praise Jesus! They're excited. Hallelujah! They are just frothing themselves up into an emotional frenzy. "I got a revelation. God spoke to me; let me tell you what He said! I feel the Spirit moving... blah, blah, blah." They pretend to deceive themselves. "Oh, yeah, we have the sign gifts operating in our church." Well how come those gifts are not operating in the world since they are given for the *unbelievers*? [So we ask,] "Why don't you go out there and heal people instead of trying to heal people in controlled environments of their backaches and earaches? Get out there. Heal people. Go empty out the hospital."

"Well, we can't do that."

"That's right, you can't. Let's get real. Do what Jesus and the apostles did and heal all manner of disease and sickness or be quiet. Quit trying to say that you have the same spiritual gifts [as Jesus and the apostles did] when you don't."

Everything [in the charismatic movement] is about feeling and everything is about emotion. “God spoke to me and I sense God is telling me this.”

“I know the guy is an unbeliever, but I feel like God is telling me I should marry him.”

That’s not God, that’s Satan. God never moves you or senses you or feels you contrary to His Word. You say [to the charismatics], “You guys need to give us some biblical exposition; go through the Bible.”

They say, “Oh, that is so technical and dry and boring; that would kill our delusion.” That’s what would happen. They want to try new things; everyone wants to have their own new revelation.

I don’t know if you read the paper, but in the *Daily News* on Friday, December 30, [2005], I was working on the sermon, and I was getting some tea, and I looked on the counter and there was the illustration [for this point]. “Youths Believe in Church Hopping,” it said. The article started off talking about a teenage girl who first goes to church—the boring church—with her family. Then she goes to the mega church to hear the band—a choir of 250 people—and enjoy a nice Christian rock concert. They had a picture showing people swaying, lying on the ground, reaching out toward the band, and screaming. The article says, “Many youths go church hopping even to other faiths in an attempt to meet their social and spiritual needs.” Their spiritual needs are repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, committing to a local church, being involved in the ministry, and placing themselves under the oversight and shepherding of godly men and women.

One parent interviewed said, “I saw that my parents’ relationship to Jesus Christ and my relationship to Jesus Christ were different. My kids are not going to relate to Jesus Christ the same way I do. That is to be expected because Jesus Christ is your own personal Lord and Savior.” Now, since He’s your *own* Savior, you get to define Him like you want, worship Him like you want, because He’s your *own* Savior. He’s not somebody else’s; He’s yours.

Now, does that sound to you like one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and being of the same mind and of the same spirit? Doesn't sound like that to me. Sounds like everyone gets to define Jesus and worship Him the way they want. What's amazing is that they quoted Jose Zayas, the director of teen evangelism for Focus on the Family, who said, "We see it all the time, everywhere. They gravitate to where they feel a connection. They're more pragmatic than their parents' generation. They look to what works for them. I think it's healthy."

Does God want us to make decisions on what makes us feel good? What we *think* is good? How can you be involved in serving in church if you're church hopping? How can the leaders of the church oversee you if you aren't there? Since when is going to church about getting what we want? This is the total consumer mentality brought into the Church: that church is about getting what you want. No, it's not. Church is about getting what God wants from us. Do you know why we sing? So God gets praise. Do you know why we give? Because it's an act of worship to God. Do you know why we preach the Bible? Because God says to, and God needs to speak to His Church. That's why. This is about God. It's about believers gathering together for God, to be God-focused, not self-focused.

The charismatic movement is plagued by people striving to feel good. They just want to feel good. Well, so do people who take drugs. They want to feel good. People want their own revelations, their own dreams, their own visions inflated without cause by their fleshly mind. They aren't concerned about the Bible and doctrine and what the Bible says. They just pluck verses out of context, saying, "Oh, yeah, it says here in this verse..." Well, what is the context? "I don't know, but it says *that*."

Although I criticize the charismatic movement because of their hysteria, there are some good things in that movement. They have a passion for God, and a zeal for God. It may not be in accordance with knowledge, but I am telling you they are out there sharing their faith. They are doing. They are giving. I have people [from charismatic organizations] call me up all the time. They say, "We heard you are building a new building. Well, we raise

funds for churches. We just got through raising \$85 million for such and such a church.” They have a whole park, waterfall, indoor streams, a little Christian mall, and a café. It’s a shopper mentality. People like to shop, so why don’t we just create a mall? Put some little Christian things attached to it and people can come and get what they want. It works for me; it meets my needs—my spiritual needs.

God tells us what our spiritual needs are. God tells us how we are to worship—although there is some flexibility in styles, order of service, and when you worship. Listen, the things that are mandated have to be complied with. They have to be. You have to go to Scripture first and find out what is mandated and then you can do whatever, as long as it doesn’t contradict what is mandated. Doctrine is good. But if doctrine becomes emotionless—if there is no passion in your life—something is wrong. This is the danger of churches that give good teaching. People can come to church and say, “Oh, that was good. That was convicting,” but never do anything. Or they say, “Yeah, I need to be sharing my faith,” but never do it. “Yeah, we need to pray,” but they never pray. You just become complacent and theologically fatheaded. You become like those guys that are really excited about their faith who say [in their deadpan voices,] “Yeah, you ever thought of becoming a Christian”? Oh, no thanks. I don’t want to become like you.

When you know the Lord and you know God’s truth, it should make you excited. It should thrill you. You should be psyched. I was just telling somebody that when I type my sermons I get so excited my hands sweat. I have to run them under hot water just so they get warmed up so I can keep typing. They are sweating right now. Doctrine is good. Good teaching is good, but doctrine is to be *applied*—it’s to be lived out.

If there is anybody that is to have passion and zeal and fervor for the Lord, it should be people who are getting good teaching. Because we know what’s right. We are going to go do it, and not just say, “Yeah, we know what’s right.” That’s not the end of it. Granted, doctrine should never be derived from our emotions, our feelings, or our passions, but when you are a Christian—when you know the Lord, and when you know the truth—you

should *feel* it. You should have passion: you should weep, cry, rejoice, and praise God from the heart. It is “worship the Father in spirit and truth” [John 4:23]. The spirit part is the emotions and the mind and the thoughts and the feelings. The truth is the doctrine. So you just make sure that all those feelings and emotions conform to the truth. But don’t just snuff them out and just have truth. Because as soon as you do that, you lose your first love and you become the cold, dead, orthodox church.

Fifth, you have those involved in the seeker-sensitive, or church-growth, movement. This is such a huge movement right now. It has swept the globe. In Russia they are trying to figure out what to do with this [movement]. Many Baptist churches in Russia are starting to buy into it now. It goes like this: you have a boring preacher and your church is shrinking. What do you do about it? Instead of firing the preacher, you say, “Well, how are we going to attract them in? They don’t seem to want to come here. Let’s market. Let’s survey the neighborhood. Find out what people want, get a big list, summarize it, and give people what they want. Let’s appeal to their fleshly needs. Let’s ask the children of Satan how we are to construct our worship services. That’s a good idea.” And you know what? That will get them to come in. They’ll keep everything light. Give them kind of a cheap version of Hollywood: some skits, some drama, some professional music, keep the sermon short, non-confrontative, kind of self-help—real practical. They won’t mention anything about sin or judgment or wrath. They definitely won’t do church discipline. That would empty the whole place out. Then they’ll tell them, “You are coming to church now.” All these people are “churched.”

Well, church isn’t a place you go to. Church is what you become through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Once you become saved, you *are* the Church; you don’t *go* to church. We gather together because we are the Church. We assemble together, the Church in the building, but the building isn’t “the Church.” If [unbelievers] come into the building, it doesn’t make them part of the Church—part of the visible church, maybe, but not the real Church.

The gospel at these [seeker-sensitive] churches is all about grace, mercy, compassion, and the love of God. The unbelieving seekers come week after week and they feel just great. “Oh, that was a good song; that makes me feel so great.”

People say things like, “Jack, you are so ‘in your face.’ Why don’t you lighten up a little bit? Sometimes I feel like you are just jumping down my throat.” Good. “Why do you do that? Whenever you teach on Sunday night, you are really laid back. But when you preach, you are ‘in your face.’” Do you know why? Here’s why. I would rather some believers leave here offended and go worship somewhere else—they’re already saved, they’re getting into heaven—than to think that one person could sit here week after week and never come to Christ. That doesn’t settle with me. So I get into people’s faces. I know I don’t like wimpy sermons. The best sermons are the ones where the guy gets out a bar and hits me. Hits me so hard that I am just convicted to the core and I realize, “I am such a sinner. I need to get my act together.” I love that kind of preaching. Hurt me!

People say, “Oh, it’s OK. You’re good and I am good and let’s just feel good.” People pay for entertainment. We all know that: We’re living in the entertainment capital of the world. People are willing to pay for entertainment. That’s why churches [and organizations] like [the one I mentioned before] give \$85 million. Why? Because I can come to this place where there are no drugs, there’s no alcohol—I can come to a wholesome environment. I can be entertained on Sunday morning. Everything I want is there. There is a whole bunch of nice, friendly people. I might be able to find a wife. But, biblical success is not about gathering a whole bunch of unbelievers into a building and saying, “Now you are in church.” Biblical success is about having God’s Word in your heart and doing it, regardless of the consequences.

Jeremiah had a successful ministry and no one repented. John the Baptist had a successful ministry and they cut off his head. Jesus had a successful ministry and they crucified Him. Successful ministry is not about getting a whole bunch of people into a building and saying, “Hey, we kind of did a

very light version of a truncated gospel presentation. We didn't mention sin, salvation, repentance, the death part, the wrath of God and judgment part, but God is love. If you want to receive the love of God, come forward and receive it."

Biblically mandated approaches to ministry cannot be rejected. If we have freedom, we can do a lot of things a lot of different ways. However, when the Bible says, "When you gather do this," we have to do that. The church is the place where the believers come in as a group and assemble to worship, to give, to praise God, to hear from God's Word, to be equipped to go out into the world, and to share the gospel. That is what the Bible teaches. Sure there are always unbelievers in every service, and that's why I preach the gospel frequently, but church is primarily for believers—for believers to worship God.

You have to remember that when unbelievers gather, they can't worship God. It's impossible for them to worship God. Do you realize that? An unbeliever who is spiritually dead, who doesn't know Christ—nothing he does is acceptable to God. They are hostile to God. Their prayers aren't heard by God. Their worship is not accepted by God. You bring them into the building to a worship service, and you are deluding them. You are deceiving them. You are leading them astray, and they think, "Yeah, I go to church."

"No, you don't."

"Yeah, I just went to a worship service."

"But *you* didn't worship."

"Oh, yes, I did."

"No, I have news for you. You are dead when it comes to worship. You need to believe in the gospel." And so what happens is that we propagate all sorts of error.

I don't know Rick Warren and Bill Hybels personally, but I am sure they have good intentions. They want to reach their community. They want to see it happening—they want to see a lot of people saved. They are doing the best they can—but [in a way that is] contrary to God's Word—to draw people in. You can go to the hula service (seriously), the Hawaiian luau

service, the surfer service, the mechanics service, or the old peoples' stuffy hymn service. Whatever you want, we'll give you a variety. We'll give you whatever you want. You want a café, or you want the McDonald's Playland? Sure, we'll give you that. Whatever you want, just come in. Come in, and we'll talk to you about the love of God.

No. That's not what church is about. Church is about being holy. God wants holiness in His church. He says, "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. Any so-called brother, if he be an immoral person, remove him" [see 1 Corinthians 5:11–13]. Can you imagine what would happen if one of those churches said, "Hey, we got a person here who has been in ongoing sin, we want you to know we are kicking him out"? What would happen in that church? There would be a stampede. People would run.

Well, that's more than enough for today. You can see why I had to do this in two messages. Let's pray and ask God to help us beware and be warned. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You so much for Your many warnings in Your Word. And Father, we just want acknowledge that Calvary Bible Church is not the perfect church. We have many areas where we are pretty pathetic: in our prayer, in our evangelism and other times in our zeal, and in our commitment to You and Your word and Your truth, and in knowing the truth, and in our discipleship. Father, a lot of times when we worship, our hearts are distracted. Father, we are not perfect. And yet, Father, you have told us to examine everything carefully—to be warned, to beware. Father, as part of that, we want to just stop for this week and next and examine some of the errors that are out there so that we will be warned and will not be led astray into them. Because we do want to give You glory—we want to worship You in spirit and truth. Father, we know that is what pleases You and we want to please You. So we desire to do that in Your name. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

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