

Poisonous Theological Trends, Part 2

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This morning we are going to do Part 2 of the message we started last week. Last week was an introduction to get us ready to talk about what we are going to talk about today. We're not really going to be looking at any [biblical] text in detail. This is kind of just a big warning this morning.

Every day we eat a variety of foods. Imagine you went out to your favorite restaurant, ordered whatever your favorite dish was, and your favorite drink, and sat down. But the cook decided to put a little strychnine or cyanide on your food. Compared to the whole [amount of food], the amount of poison on your food would be relatively little, but it would be enough to kill you.

In a similar way, there are a lot of trends, views, theological positions, movements, cults, and things like that out there that have quite a bit of truth in them. But they have just enough theological poison to not only kill you, but to damn you to hell. So that is why [in last week's sermon] we started looking at the different kinds of error.

We talked about four different kinds of error. There is misinterpreting a passage—teaching true doctrine, but from the wrong text. There is having a wrong view of [something like] the end times, which would be to teach a false doctrine, but it has no major bearing on your life. There is the kind of error that causes you or other people to sin, but doesn't damn you to hell. Then there is the worst kind, which is a damning heresy: something that if

you were to believe, it would prevent you from getting to heaven. We talked about those different kinds of error.

Then we talked about the Church in America as a whole—a broad, sweeping picture of where Christianity has gone astray in different areas. We talked about professing Christians. Many people in America profess to know Christ, but they don't know Christ. They don't read their Bibles; they don't even go to church. They just live like they want to. They are "Christians" because this is a "Christian country." They call themselves "Christians" because they live in America. That is the "social type" of Christian out there. Of course, those people are living in error.

There are also the mainline denominations that have gone liberal. Those are the churches that have pretty much rejected the Bible and the basic beliefs that we hold to be essential, and yet they're still a church that has become a kind of social activism group. They are the mainline liberal denominations. Then there are the cold, dead, orthodox churches. These churches are holding on to sound doctrine, but they aren't doing anything with it. They aren't evangelizing, they aren't multiplying leaders, they aren't discipling, and they aren't training. They're just hiding in their little fortresses and slowly dwindling, dying, and pining away. It's just a mess out there.

Then you get into another large group, the Charismatic-Pentecostal-Third Wave churches, which have some good things going for them as far as their zeal and passion for the Lord. However, in many cases [that zeal is] not according to knowledge. They believe in continuing revelation, and they delude themselves into thinking that God is still performing miracles through people who have the sign gifts. So we talked a little bit about that.

Finally, we have a very inclusive and extremely broad, sweeping movement called the seeker-sensitive movement, or the church-growth movement, or the purpose-driven church movement. This is just *giant*, and has infiltrated liberal Christianity, conservative Christianity, and the Pentecostal-Third Wave-Charismatic movements. It is a huge movement that is just trying to entertain the world—to give unbelievers what they want in order to try to draw them into church, to get them "churched." As if being in the Church

was a matter of coming into the building when, in fact, it's not—that only happens through repentance, faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, we surveyed all of that last week, and saw that it is important. We looked at many Scriptures talking about the importance of being aware of false doctrine—being warned of it and that we need to expose it, that we need to refute it, and that we need to reject false teachers.

Last week was a big introduction to what I want to say this morning, which is this: I want to warn you about a variety of theological poisons out there that you most certainly will encounter. After the first service many people came up to me and said, “Yeah, I’ve got a son,” or “I’ve got a daughter,” or “I know this person,” [who is involved with one of these poisons]. As we go through here, I think you will be made more aware of things that are going on.

I think that a lot of times people who go to Bible churches are pretty ignorant about reality out there. [You may think,] “Things aren’t that bad, are they?” You come to church, you bring your Bible, we open up the Bible, we study it week by week—go through passages verse by verse, book by book, and you think, “Well, isn’t that how it is out there?” No. *No*. Most people never bring a Bible to church. [For them] there is never a time when someone says, “Look at the text, see what it says, this is what it means, and this is how to apply it to your life.” Most people never experience that in “Christianity” in America. Churches like [Calvary Bible Church] are very rare.

The first thing to beware of is the emergent church. The term “emergent church” is used to describe a new movement from within Christianity which is a reaction against the standard, old, stale, orthodox churches; churches like [Calvary Bible Church]; the Charismatic churches; or the seeker-sensitive churches. It is a reaction emerging from standard, Bible-believing Christianity, or even old, stale Christianity of any form that you want to say. [This reaction, coupled with postmodernism, has given birth to the emergent church.]

You might be out there thinking, “Postmodernism. What is that?” This is how most people feel when they hear a term like that: “I have no idea what postmodernism is.” Well, I have to tell you, because if we are going to see this all the way through this morning, [you will need to understand it.]

What we need to do is a little history of the world, starting with the Dark Ages. I just want to very quickly survey some of the movements of thought that have brought us to the place where we are today, so that you can understand what I mean when I say, “The emergent church is a baby, a byproduct, a spawn of postmodernism.”

The Dark Ages was from around AD 500 to about AD 1200. It was called the “Dark Ages” because in that time ignorance reigned. The Roman Catholic Church was in power. They had the Scriptures, and they told people, “Listen, you can’t read the Scriptures, you can’t know the Scriptures, and you can’t understand the Scriptures. This is for the Church alone to interpret, so we are going to tell you what to believe, tell you what to do, and tell you what God wants of you. So, you just trust us, and we will tell you.” Well, as soon as that happened, huge abuses [of that authority] started happening. If you have ever read church history, you know what they were—people being used, being manipulated, put under fear, taught a false gospel, and taught to trust in sacraments to save them. It was a time of great ignorance—a time when ignorance reigned. That’s why it’s called the “Dark Ages.”

But, at the end of the Dark Ages, there were some men like John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, and certain other men who were Roman Catholic monks and priests, who wanted to get the Scriptures into the hands of the common man. They started doing things like translating the Latin Vulgate—the Latin version of the Scriptures of the time, or the Hebrew and Greek—into the common language. When the [Roman Catholic] Church found this out, they started killing these men because [the Church] was so fearful of the truth getting into the hands of the population because it would expose their doctrines as being wrong.

Coming out of the Dark Ages, we have the Reformation. The Reformation was a time when God, through His Holy Spirit, moved in the hearts

of men—most of them Roman Catholics—to bring the truth of God to the common people in a language that they could understand.

It was also the time of the printing press, which was invented in the middle of AD 1450. The printing press allowed people to have books, which was something they were never able to have before. People could actually have their own copy of the Bible.

With the invention of the printing press, and with God moving in the hearts of people, it became more and more obvious that God was trying to reform the Church. The gospel, the saving gospel of Jesus Christ—salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone—was being kept from the masses.

As these men [like Wycliffe and Tyndale] started bringing the Scriptures out for the common people, the Church started killing those men. And so those who rebelled against the Catholic Church—protested against the Catholic Church—were called “Protestants.” If you have ever wondered where the term “Protestantism” comes from, that is it. We are a Protestant church; that is, our church falls in line with those who rebelled against the Catholic Church and refused to believe their false gospel, their mysticism, and their teaching of salvation by the sacraments.

The Protestants, then, started to study the Bible, [with the help of] men like Martin Luther who got the Bible into the common language of the people. The people started reading it, and really became angry. They became angry because of the ignorance they were kept in for so long. As soon as books started to become available, more people wanted to read. They wanted to read, they wanted to study, and they wanted to read every book that was written.

This moved the times into what is called the “Renaissance.” The Renaissance was a period of great learning during which people were reacting against the Dark Ages. Study was the socially acceptable thing to do—to know four, five, or six different languages, to know science, botany, music, and art. People just studied, and studied, because they were angry and reacting against this time of great ignorance. That is why the great composers, the great artists, and the great mathematicians almost all come from the period

of the Renaissance, because that was the time when learning and studying was in vogue.

It was also the time of the Westminster Assembly, where Presbyterianism was hammered out, and the Westminster Confession was hammered out. It was the time of the Puritans, who were great preachers, theologians, and intellectuals. They systematized many of the doctrines of the Christian faith.

After the Renaissance came the Enlightenment. This time period was characterized by people considering ethics, knowledge, and scientific theory; but still the Bible was considered the “queen of the sciences.” The Bible was directing all of these different fields of study.

With the Enlightenment, and following from the Enlightenment, came what is called “rationalism,” where men got so smart they decided that maybe they were smart enough to come up with the truth *without* the Bible. That is when things started getting bad. It was in the late 1800s that rationalism really took hold. The German theologians began to develop all sorts of weird theories that undermined the validity, authority, and historicity of the Bible. They began to attack the Scriptures viciously, because they thought that they could, in their own minds, come up with an explanation for miracles, and try to get rid of and explain away all the supernatural parts of the Bible.

This gave rise to what is called “theological liberalism.” If you ever hear me say something like, “Well, that is liberal thought,” that is what I’m talking about. Theological liberalism rose out of this; that is, that the miracles of the Bible aren’t true, the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible isn’t true, the virgin birth of Christ isn’t true, and the deity of Christ isn’t true. You would just invent your own God, and make him what you want. Thinking, studying, and academia about the Bible were OK, but only as a piece of literature, not because it’s some sort of supernatural book.

Rationalism and liberalism devastated Europe. They swept through Europe. That is why if you go there even today there are many gorgeous, large, dead churches—some of them with nobody in them on Sunday. The German rationalists were so effective at destroying people’s trust in the Bible that

people just walked away from Christianity. The Church died in Europe, and it has never recovered.

Rationalism and liberalism gave way to what is called “modernism.” This was during the first fifty years of the 1900s—from 1900 to 1950. Modernism was a time when, since the Bible had been attacked and scandalized by rationalism, people were looking for new sources of truth. No longer was the Bible the primary source of truth. Things began to develop, like evolution, humanism, and psychology. Man was trying to develop his own ways to deal with people’s problems—their spiritual issues. The Bible was no longer the standard of all truth and doctrine. People were not turning to it to guide their every thought. All of these corruptions started to spring up in the Church.

[In recent times,] starting in the 1960s, we have what is called “liberal, post-modern thought.” So we’ve gone from modernism to postmodernism, or “after modernism.” People do not even care about truth today. Truth is irrelevant. There are no absolutes. This is a reaction against the seeker-sensitive/church-growth movements, coupled with post-modern thought, which has given birth to the emergent church. So now we are back to that.

The emergent church is a reaction [that says,] “We’re tired of having fluffy church. We’re tired of coming and singing a bunch of songs—kind of a cheap version of Hollywood. We’re tired of the ‘rah, rah, rah’ and a little wimpy message. We’re tired of going through the same kind of motions that the old church did, and we’re tired of old church, too. We’re tired of old doctrines, tired of old ways of doing things. We want new things, and new inventions. We want to rework Christianity. It’s not about truth so much; it’s about what you *do* that is important. [We believe] that Christianity and the doctrines of the Christian faith need a major overhaul.”

Brian McLaren, former pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church [near] Baltimore, is a primary instigator of this movement. He has written a book entitled *A New Kind of Christian*. Now, the title of the book explains itself, doesn’t it? There is only one kind of Christian and there will only be one kind of Christian, and that is the Christian who has placed his faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, repented, and believed. Christians are saved and

regenerated, and that is the only kind of Christian there is. There is no “new kind” of Christian. Brian McLaren has written this book, and, ironically, it was presented with the 2002 Award of Merit by *Christianity Today* (which many now call “Christianity Astray”).

Another recent book by McLaren is called *A Generous Orthodoxy*. “Orthodoxy” is a term used to describe those doctrines of the faith that have always been believed by all branches of Christianity, that people hold to be essential doctrines—orthodox beliefs. *A Generous Orthodoxy*, you can kind of tell where this is going. McLaren has no formal theological training, yet says he believes in the historic creeds of the faith like the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. However, he does say the major doctrines of the Christian faith are “nauseating.” Amazingly, he also says truth should not be stated in propositional form. That is, it should not be defined by words, and that to discuss Bible doctrine is just nauseating. For example, to say, “Your doctrine is wrong and mine is right”—to have these discussions [is nauseating.]

In the February 7, 2005 issue of *Time* magazine they quoted McLaren, who at a conference was asked about his views on gay marriage. His response was, “The thing that breaks my heart is that there’s no way I can answer it without hurting someone on either side.”¹ Whoa. Let me ask you, does it hurt somebody to tell him the truth? Well, sometimes. Sometimes it hurts someone, but only in a little way compared to if you don’t tell him the truth. If somebody is headed for hell, and you tell him, “You are going to hell,” that might hurt him. But you are doing him a favor; you are loving him. To tell somebody, “Well, I don’t want to answer the question because it might hurt somebody on either side,” [is not loving]. What is going to hurt people on the one side is that if they are homosexuals, and they are practicing homosexuals, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. Then they will have *eternal* hurt.

¹<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/weblogs/mohler/1336217.html?view=print>

So [the emergent church philosophy] is a very man-centered approach. [In fact,] the most loving thing you can do is to speak the truth to people, but in the postmodern mindset, truth hurts, truth harms, and truth separates. It causes division; it hinders progress. The mindset says, “Why even talk about doctrine? Let’s just do something!” This is why McLaren refers to the doctrines of the Bible as “weapons of mass distraction.” He is very eloquent, but he is saying that doctrine is a waste of time even though the Bible says that we are to devote ourselves to, and to continue teaching sound doctrine [2 Timothy 4:2–4]. He says it’s a waste of time. So you have to decide whom you should believe here.

When asked about his views on the Great Commission, McLaren said, “I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts. This will be hard, you say, and I agree. But frankly, it’s not at all easy to be a follower of Jesus in many ‘Christian’ religious contexts, either.”²

Do you see that? You can be a Hindu and be saved by Jesus. You can be a Buddhist and be saved. You can be a Satanist. You can be an atheist; that is not important. Some of the primary tenants of the emergent church are that the Bible is not inerrant, it’s not infallible, and it’s not authoritative. Jesus is not “the way, the truth, and the life” [John 14:6], and you can get to heaven in other ways but by Him.

Pastor Rob Bell is the pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church. He and his wife are both graduates of Wheaton Bible College. Bell has stated that McLaren’s book *A New Kind of Christian* is “our life boat.” Bell’s wife has stated, “I grew up thinking that we’ve figured out the Bible, that we knew what it means. Now I have no idea what most of it means.” Bell himself has stated, “I don’t think the liberals have it right. But I don’t think we have it right

²<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/weblogs/mohler/?adate=2/16/2005>

either. None of us has arrived at orthodoxy.”³ Nobody knows the truth. You can’t know the truth.

One writer defined the emergent church as a movement within Christianity that seeks “liberation from what it classifies as the antiquated dogmas and traditions of Christianity.”⁴ In other words, the doctrines that define Christianity need to be reworked, rewritten, or just totally ignored all together because obviously we are moving on in this world and those doctrines are old and archaic. The emergent church is tired of old, stale doctrine; old, stale, church hymns; old, stale, church services; old, stale, evangelism practices; and all the trappings of old, stale Christianity. They even think that the seeker-sensitive movement is kind of old and stale, because it is still holding on to some of that old, stale stuff. [They believe] that the seeker movement isn’t going far enough, that we need a total redo of Christianity.

Postmodern thought has been worming its way into Christianity since the 1960s. Even Billy Graham, in recent years, has stated that you don’t even need to hear the gospel or know Christ in order to be saved.⁵ Think about that. You can be an animist, worshipping bugs in the jungle and as long as you are sincere, you’ll get to heaven. That is postmodern thought. That is a damning heresy.

Jesus prayed for his followers in John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” Paul told Timothy in Titus to preach the word, to teach sound doctrine, and to correct those in error, because sound doctrine must be maintained in Christ’s Church [see Titus 1]. Yet, the emergent church is not into that doctrine stuff. [It is] “pressing on” and “forging new horizons.” I want you to know that this movement is *exploding*, and you’re going to hear a lot of more of it in the future. You’re going to be hearing more of the emergent church.

³<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/011/12.36.html>

⁴http://mensnewsdaily.com/blog/meekins/2005/04/emergent-error-pastor-seeking-with-it_17.html

⁵<http://www.biblebb.com/files/tonyqa/tc00-105.htm>

The second theological trend you need to be aware of is the new perspective on Paul. Now, we talked about the Renaissance giving birth to the Enlightenment, rationalism, and theological liberalism. Within theological liberalism there is another kind of thought, which is called “higher critical theory,” and a group of people who are called “higher critics.” I hate to bombard you with all these terms but you need to understand them at least a little bit.

Liberal Bible scholars have viciously attacked the historicity, authority, and reliability of the Bible. They have done everything they can [to destroy the validity of the Bible]. They are called “higher critics,” but they are from the pit [of hell]. Having done all they could to discredit the Bible as a whole, they then moved on to attack the Old Testament.

They began writing these theories, just thought up out of their rationalistic minds: that the Old Testament wasn’t *really* inspired by God, and that God didn’t actually move men to write down His words. “What actually happened,” [they said,] “is that over the course of years the Bible slowly evolved. It slowly morphed into the Old Testament we know. People kept adding to it, subtracting from it, and refining it. These different sources, JEP and D—the redactors [editors]—slowly assembled the Bible and turned it into what we have today. So the prophecies aren’t really prophecies, they are [the product of] men trying to make the Bible look like something special.” Well, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls pretty much rang a death knell for one.

When this view first became popular, the oldest manuscripts of the Old Testament we had were from about AD 900. But the Dead Sea Scrolls had manuscripts from 150, 200, 250 BC—so a thousand years earlier—and they matched up with these AD 900 copies of the Masoretic text (the Hebrew text) with precision—absolute precision. I want you to know I still read in commentaries where people believe [the JEPD theory]—they just blindly believe it.

When the [higher critics] got through trying to attack the Old Testament, then they moved to the Gospels. They decided to “fix” the Gospels. They

decided to explain away all the miracles, explain away the resurrection, explain away the deity of Christ, explain away all those passages that talk about miracles, and explain how the Gospels, which are four different accounts [of the same thing], can have such incredible agreement and not conflict.

So they said, “There is this document. It’s called ‘Q.’ No one has ever seen it. No one’s even ever heard of it. No one’s even ever found a fragment of it, but it must have existed. [The gospel writers] all drew their information from Q.” [The higher critics] developed what is called the “Q-source theory.” It sounds like Star Trek, doesn’t it? They said that is why [virtually nothing in the gospels is true or to be attributed to Jesus]. These higher critics then began to attack the Bible and tried to explain things away by talking about Q.

Some of the higher critics that you hear about today are covered by the liberal media quite often—front page of the *LA Times*, “The Jesus Seminar: Determines That Pretty Much Everything in the Gospels Is Not True, and Jesus Didn’t Say Everything It Says He Said.” All of these self-proclaimed Bible scholars, all these unbelievers—these liberals [who reject miracles, the resurrection, the deity of Christ, and the inerrancy of Scripture]—these scholars got together and they decided, “Let’s vote to see what Jesus actually said.” So they got different colored beads and put them in a hat [to indicate their votes on different things]. When they got done they decided that maybe, *maybe*, Jesus uttered two verses in the Gospels.

That is higher critical thought. Their approach is to first undermine the Bible, then the Old Testament, then the Gospels, and now they are after the Apostle Paul. They are trying to destroy Paul, his arguments, his thoughts, and his main doctrines. Of course, he is the New Testament champion of justification by faith through grace. These higher critics, these liberal theologians, have been very surreptitious and insidious in the introduction of what is called the “new perspective on Paul.” The new perspective is complex, and the theological consequences of it are even more complex. Let me try to explain to you, in a very simplified form, what it is.

The ideas of the new perspective were taught before it became popular. Other people wrote these same ideas, but they were made popular first by a man named E.P. Sanders, who is a liberal theologian. He is an unbeliever. He has written many works and has done a lot of research in the area of what is called “Second Temple Judaism,” or “Palestinian Judaism,” which is around the time of Jesus and Paul, which is called the “Second Temple Period.” He has done a lot of study in the readings of the rabbis and things like that. He has written a book called *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. In that book he challenged the idea that the Jews of the New Testament times were legalists. He did extensive reading and came to the conclusion that legalism was not a problem in first-century Judaism. [He concluded that] the Jews were not hung up on works, they were not trying to earn their way into heaven, and they were not trusting in their good deeds to save them.

In addition to Sanders, another liberal theologian and unbeliever, James Dunn, piggy-backed on Sanders’ research, and then applied it to the Apostle Paul—especially [Paul’s] statements on the works of the Law (when Paul talks about not being justified by works, or not being justified by the works of the Law [see Romans 3, Galatians 2:16]). Dunn came to the conclusion, along with Sanders, that Paul was not addressing legalism, and he was not addressing people who were trying to be saved by works; that was not a problem.

Paul, in Galatians and Romans, for instance, was not combating Judaizers (that is, these people who were saying, “Yeah, we believe in Jesus, but you have to do these works to be saved”), and he was not confronting the false notion that a person by his/her good deeds could be saved. Dunn concluded that what Paul was really addressing were issues of community—the “covenant community” (which is another way of saying the “Church”). Dunn said that Paul was really combating some Jews who weren’t quite sure whether or not Gentiles should keep the Sabbath, be circumcised, and partake of some dietary laws.

That was the conflict. He concluded that all that Paul was saying was, “Listen, you don’t have to obey these dietary laws in order to be part of the

covenant community (the Church).” [Dunn asserted that] they weren’t hung up on works salvation, they were just wondering if these things needed to be done as badges of one’s covenant community—that is, Church—status.

After thinking about something like this, you may think to yourself, “Well, Jack, is that a big deal? Is that some theological poison? I mean, come on! That doesn’t seem all that strange. They have a different view: they weren’t legalists.” It is a huge, *huge*, deal! This is why: If Jesus didn’t combat legalism, and Paul wasn’t combating legalism when he talked about justification not being of works and all those other statements, do you know what that means? That means all the Reformers were wrong, the whole Reformation was wrong, Protestantism is wrong, and we believe in the wrong gospel. That’s the end of it.

Now, do you think that’s a big deal? It’s a huge deal. Our understanding of Romans and Galatians, and all the commentaries that have been written since the Reformation, they’re all wrong. In essence, the Roman Catholic Church is right, because salvation is by works: “Oh, we believe in God’s grace, and we believe in faith, but grace and faith are given to us so that we will maintain our works in order to keep ourselves saved.” In other words, Paul and our whole understanding of Paul, and all of his doctrines, need an overhaul.

Sound familiar? Postmodernism. Bingo. It is postmodern thought, liberalism, and higher critical thought, applied to Paul. It’s an attack on the biblical doctrines defended by the Reformers. It is an attack on Protestantism. And while the historical view itself seems rather harmless, the consequences of that view are horrendous. They’re catastrophic. It has led some to reject justification or redefine it; to say, “Well, justification isn’t God declaring a believer to be righteous because of Christ and His righteousness. Justification is nothing more than future vindication. Justification is nothing more than God in the future saying, ‘Hey, you sided with the right guy. Way to go.’ There is no imputing of righteousness; there is no Christ-righteousness reckoned to you.”

As soon as you redefine justification that way, you have no need of imputation. Imputation is the doctrine explaining that God “imputes” or “reckons” to believers the righteousness of Christ. The reason you can pray to God, the reason you can boldly approach the throne of grace is not because you’re perfectly holy; God is perfectly holy. The reason you can approach the throne of grace and find help in a time of need is because you have a mediator [see Hebrews 4:14–16]. You can go through Christ, and His righteousness is reckoned to you, so that you, being a sinner, can approach an infinitely holy God through the righteousness of Christ reckoned to you. But if you redefine justification, you don’t need imputation, so out it goes.

Not only that, others have redefined other things. Some in the new perspective camp have redefined righteousness as “covenant community.” That’s a fancy name for “the Church.” “So,” they say, “when Paul says [in Romans 1:18] ‘The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,’ he’s really saying, ‘The Church of God is revealed against all ungodliness and. . .’” and then comes the same word, “righteousness,” with the negate on there, but in this case it’s not the “Church.” They say, “But, Paul’s just saying, ‘Oh, yeah, you get into the Church.’ He’s talking about the Church, the covenant community.” No, he’s not! Paul is talking about Jesus’ righteousness applied to believers. That’s what he’s talking about. However, they [those in the new perspective camp] have redefined “righteousness.”

When all of this is boiled down, it comes down to this interpretation: “Sure you have to believe in Jesus. Sure it is by being in Jesus and being in the ‘covenant community’ that gets you saved. But what keeps you in that ‘covenant community’—the Church—is doing good works; and if you don’t do good works, to hell you go. So you can, by faith, enter into the Church; you can be cleansed, you can be sanctified, you can be washed, and you can be forgiven, but if you don’t continue in good works, to hell you go.”

That is the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation, essentially. That is a damning heresy. That is trusting in your works to save you, and that is what the new perspective has boiled forth. Yes, it started with a historical view,

but people are now taking that view, applying it to Paul and they're coming up with these kinds of things. In other words, you're saved by grace and kept by your works.

One of the more prolific and winsome writers of the new perspective, N.T. Wright, said he doesn't even believe legalism existed in the first century. N.T. Wright is a bishop of the Anglican Church, which is known as the Episcopal Church in America. Wright is a major proponent of the new perspective. N.T. Wright recently endorsed a book by Steve Chalke [and Alan Mann] entitled *The Lost Message of Jesus*. (Whenever you hear a title like that, run.) In his book, Chalke describes the idea of the substitutionary atonement (that is, Jesus' dying on the cross in our place) as "cosmic child abuse." Chalke says the cross is a symbol of love and not a place where God's justice is satisfied through the death of His Son. Chalke rejects the biblical view of justification, yet Wright's endorsement of the book says [the book is] "rooted in good scholarship."⁶

You might be thinking to yourself, "Jack, how does this happen? How does something like this happen?" Remember, people like Sanders and Dunn are unbelievers. They're children of Satan. They're dead in their trespasses and sins. Scholars? Yes. Diligent students? Yes. Held captive by Satan to do his will? Absolutely. They're of their father the devil, and the devil speaks nothing but lies (see John 8:44). So these men then write these things in the academic community. In the postmodern age, what's cool is what's new and the revamping [of things into] something new. All of these young men, and all these theologians, are grabbing on to and latching on to the new perspective. It's cool. It's fast. It's free.

So everybody jumps on this new thing, and this new view that has new consequences, because it helps us revamp what is old. It's just postmodernism being expressed through liberalism. All these people have jumped on this bandwagon and, granted, they have gone a lot of different ways from

⁶http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?841

the new perspective, but every way I've seen has been bad, and I've read quite a bit on it.

The lesson to learn here is this: you do not go to the children of Satan—to those who are spiritually dead, to those who reject Christ, reject His deity, reject the authority and inspiration of the Bible—and sit down and learn theology from them. That is foolish. Bad company corrupts good morals and good morals are nothing more than the expression of living out theology. So that's how it comes about. It started in the academic realms, it's trickling down, and now it's infiltrating churches.

The real question is, “Do Jesus and Paul say legalism is a problem?” The Bible is true. God is true, “though every man be found a liar” [Romans 3:4]. When you look in the Gospels, you read phrases like this: Jesus condemned the Pharisees saying, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men” (Luke 16:15). In other words, “You think you are right before God because of what you do.”

Do you remember when Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector? Do you remember the Pharisee? “I'm so glad I'm not like other men.” Meanwhile, the tax collector is beating his breast, and saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” Do you remember who Jesus told that parable to? Let me remind you. Luke 18:9: “And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” That, people, is legalism—a damning form of it. All the way through the Gospels, Jesus condemns religious hypocrites who pretend to be one thing, but are not; those who don't need repentance; those who don't need a physician; and those who think that by their own works they are righteous before God. It was a *huge* problem, according to God.

Paul, after condemning the Jews, the Jewish moralists, the Gentiles, and everyone else, says in Romans 3:20, “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” All of these examples talk about all these good deeds that they were trying to do—these moral deeds.

The whole book of Galatians is a warning against the Judaizers (not according to the new perspective, but according to the truth). In Galatians 2:15–16, Paul addresses this specifically:

We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Do you know what he’s talking about when he says, “works of the Law”? He’s talking about “works of the Law”—the Law of Moses, as a whole, not just circumcision, some dietary laws, and Sabbath-keeping.

In Galatians 3:11, Paul says, “Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’” He says in Galatians 5:4, “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Again, he’s not talking about just a couple [points of the Law;] he’s talking about the Law—the whole Law. But someone who has adopted the new perspective says, “Oh, these verses don’t mean what they seem to be saying. They’re talking about community—about these people having a problem with other people not being in their community and not trying to make them do these certain things as badges. No, they weren’t trying to be saved by these things.” It’s bad. They openly accuse Paul of being “conflicted.”

I had to read so much of this stuff—prayer journal articles, etc. People saying, “Well, Paul was confused here. Paul was conflicted. Paul was developing his theology.” Do you understand what the consequences of that are? The Bible is the Word of God, and “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” [2 Peter 1:21]. So, to say Paul was conflicted and confused is to say what? *God* was conflicted and confused. It is blasphemy—blasphemy against God! Paul, along with all the other authors of Scripture, wrote down the very words of God, and that is why we call this the “Word of God.” So

beware of the new perspective, which is nothing but an attempt to attack the authority of the Bible—specifically the Apostle Paul—and to teach salvation by works, and to try and undermine all the efforts of the Reformation.

Third, biblical illiteracy and incorrect doctrinal belief is a huge theological trend. I mentioned this last week. Even though we have more resources, even though we have more things available to us than we have ever had before—as far as Bibles, sermons, commentaries, whatever—biblical literacy is at an all-time low. I want to demonstrate this by just one example.

The Barna Research Group surveyed a large group of people and nine percent of that large group of people professed to be “born-again believers.” Now, when somebody says, “Yeah, I’m a born-again Christian,” you think, “Wow! My brother! My sister! We finally found somebody who’s born again.” Why? Because Jesus said, “You must be born again” [John 3:7]. So, you think, “Good, good. He/She is a Christian. Praise God!”

Then they decided to survey these “born-again believers” to see how many of them had a biblical worldview. Now they just arbitrarily invented what a “biblical worldview” is, but these things, these eight criteria, they decided would define what a biblical worldview is. So, see if you have a biblical worldview.

1. Absolute moral truth exists.
2. Absolute truth is defined by the Bible.
3. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life.
4. God is the all-powerful, all-knowing creator of the universe and still rules it today.
5. Salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned.
6. Satan is real.
7. Christians are responsible to share their faith in Christ with other people.

8. The Bible is accurate in all of its teachings.

Those are the eight. Now, those are pretty basic. There are actually a lot of doctrines that are left out, but they thought, “Well, we’ll just say if somebody says he’s ‘born again’ and somebody agrees with these things, then we’re going to say he has a ‘biblical worldview.’” So this is what they found. Point five, or half a percent, of Roman Catholics held these beliefs; two percent of those who attended mainline Protestant denominations held these beliefs; eight percent of those who called themselves “born-again” Baptists held these views; only ten percent of people who called themselves Pentecostals had a biblical worldview, according to Barna; and finally, among non-denominational Protestant churches like ours, only thirteen percent, *thirteen percent*, [had a biblical worldview.] Half of the Protestant pastors surveyed rejected one or more of the critical doctrines I just stated.

Why am I including this? It is because ignorance of the truth is to believe an error. If you don’t believe the truth, you believe something wrong. *You believe something wrong*. There are faithful men out there preaching and teaching God’s Word, but that is the rare exception—the *rare* exception. Do you wonder why one of our primary missions’ criteria is to train up pastors to teach and plant in local churches? This is why: because there are some places you go and there isn’t a church. You could drive for a hundred miles and not find a church that teaches the Bible, even in America.

Do you remember Charles Dickens’ classic, *A Christmas Carol* with the three ghosts who visited Ebenezer Scrooge in the middle of the night? Remember when he was visited by the Ghost of Christmas Present? At one point, that ghost draws Scrooge’s attention to his cloak, and under his cloak are these scrawny, emaciated, scary-looking, deformed children who are clinging to find refuge in the Ghost of Christmas Present. Dickens writes this:

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such

enormous magnitude. “Spirit! Are they yours?” Scrooge could say no more. “They are Man’s,” said the Spirit, looking down upon them. “And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom.”⁷

That is exactly true! If you don’t know the truth, you will go to hell. You will go to hell! There is one way, one truth, and one life, and no one gets to the Father but by that Truth [see John 14:6].

Do you wonder why Calvary Bible Church is into teaching and equipping and training people to do the work of the ministry? People come here for the first time and they say, “Man, everything in your church is about the Bible!” They say, “We were looking at your literature, and everything you say has Bible verses tacked on to it.”

Hello! Of course! *Of course!* Why? If you don’t know the truth, you’re vulnerable to deception. You believe a lie. You can’t worship in spirit and truth if you don’t know the truth [see John 4:24]. You can’t be saved if you don’t know the truth. You can’t be sanctified if you don’t know the truth. So we teach truth. Why? Because the Bible says to constantly give ourselves to teaching, exhortation, and reading of the Scriptures [see 1 Timothy 4:13]; to “take pains with these things. . . to be absorbed in them” [1 Timothy 4:15]; to “let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” [Colossians 3:16]. You don’t get to just sit there and say, “Well, let’s not get too fanatic about this Bible thing.” No. Let’s get fanatic!

The fourth error to be warned of is bad Bible translations. Most of you are familiar with the New International Version of the Bible [the NIV]. I mentioned this a couple of years back, and I just want to warn you again. The *TNIV* or *Today’s New International Version* by Zondervan is an attempt to make the Bible gender-neutral. They’ve taken a lot of the “he’s” out of

⁷<http://www.literature.org/authors/dickens-charles/christmas-carol/chapter-03.html>

there and put “they” and “them.” They make God neither masculine nor feminine. They try to make it so feminists can read the Bible and not be offended. Be warned of the *TNIV*.

Recently, even a more hideous version has come out called *Good as New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures*. Now what does that sound like? Postmodernism. Everything is “new” these days. This is the thought of the age. Just beware of it. The text is very simplified. All politically incorrect statements or allusions have been reworded so that now the Bible teaches what is politically correct. Well, that’s nice. Not!

The foreword of this new version (the *Good as New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures* version) is by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, the highest-ranking person in the Anglican Church. The editor/author of this version, John Henson, is a former Baptist minister, who refers to himself as a member of “a network of radical Christians.” (Redoing, emerging from the stale Christianity, and rewriting.) He has created this new perversion of the Bible in which all the key characters of the Bible are renamed to have more modern names people can relate to. Peter is called “Rocky.” Mary Magdalene is “Maggie.” Aaron is “Ron.” Barabbas is “Barry.”

Here are a couple of examples from this new version of the Bible: Mark 1:10–11, Mark’s account of Jesus’ baptism, “As he was climbing up the bank again, the sun shone through a gap in the clouds. At the same time a pigeon flew down and perched on him. Jesus took this as a sign that God’s spirit was with him. A voice from overhead was heard saying, ‘That’s my boy! You’re doing fine!’”

In 1 Corinthians 7:1–2, the New American Standard Bible reads, “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.” The King James translates it, “to avoid fornication.” The word “immoralities” there is any sort of sexual perversion. Henson renders it this way in his new version, “Some of you think the best way to cope with sex is for men and women

to keep right away from each other. That is more likely to lead to sexual offences. My advice is for everyone to have a regular partner.”

Later in verse nine of that same chapter, 1 Corinthians 7, Henson’s version reads, “If you know you have strong needs, get yourself a partner—better than being frustrated.” This Bible is advertised as “women-, gay-, and sinner-friendly,” and a version of the Bible where readers can “hear for the first time what the Christian Scriptures are really saying.”⁸

So beware of that. I hope that you notice that every one of these aberrations is an attack on the Bible. All of them are attacks on the Bible.

Fifth, there is the total collapse of the Anglican Church. We’ve already mentioned N.T. Wright, a bishop in the Anglican Church, and Archbishop Williams endorsing the above-mentioned “Bible.” The Anglican Church supports homosexuality, sexual immorality, lesbianism, and fornication—all sorts of things—but more recently, even the worship of pagan deities.

Bishops in the Anglican Church like Jack Spong and Charles Bennison even deny the Resurrection, yet they’re still bishops—Anglican bishops. The worship of pagan deities was found in an article titled “A Woman’s Eucharist: A Celebration of the Divine Feminine,” which was listed on the Episcopal Church’s official women’s ministry website.⁹ There we read of women who gather around a little table [on which there is] sweet wine, milk mixed with honey, a bowl filled with salted water, and raisin cakes. [During the ceremony,] one of the women says,

“Mother God, our ancient sisters called you Queen of Heaven and baked these cakes in your honor in defiance of their brothers and husbands who would not see your feminine face. We offer you these cakes, made with our own hands; filled with the grain of life—scattered and gathered into one loaf, then broken and shared among many. We offer these cakes and enjoy them too. They are rich with the sweetness of fruit, fertile with the ripeness

⁸http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=39114

⁹<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/1258401/posts>

of grain, sweetened with the power of love. May we also be signs of your love and abundance.”

They’re worshipping the “Queen of Heaven” in “defiance of their brothers and husbands.” Where do they get this? They get it from two texts in the Old Testament, primarily Hosea 3:1 where the Lord says to Hosea, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”

So what these Episcopalian women are saying is, “We want to do what God prevented Gomer from doing, because God was anti-feminine.” But, most of this comes from Jeremiah 44:15–19 where the Lord, through Jeremiah, is rebuking the women who have worshiped the “queen of heaven.” This is what the text says:

Then all the men who were aware that their wives were burning sacrifices to other gods, along with all the women who were standing by, as a large assembly, including all the people who were living in Pathros in the land of Egypt, responded to Jeremiah, saying, “As for the message that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we are not going to listen to you! But rather we will certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths, by burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, just as we ourselves, our forefathers, our kings and our princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food and were well off and saw no misfortune. But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine.”

“And,” said the women, “when we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were pouring out drink offerings to

her, was it without our husbands that we made for her sacrificial cakes in her image and poured out drink offerings to her?"

In other words, these women [in Jeremiah's time] were saying, "We aren't going to submit to our husbands, we aren't going to submit to God's Word, we aren't going to submit to God's prophet. We're going to keep worshiping the 'queen of heaven' because when we did that before, we were blessed, and when we stopped, we weren't, and we're going to do it without our husbands' consent. We're going to rebel against them." And now these [Episcopalian] women have made a Eucharist to worship the "queen of heaven." It was on the official Episcopal site for women's ministry. Is that unbelievable or what? That is enough to give somebody an aneurism.

OK, moving on. One more thing and we'll stop. The Roman Catholic Church denies biblical authority. The *Times* reported that in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's statement on the Bible, Roman Catholic bishops in England, Wales, and Scotland have stated that people should not expect "total accuracy" from the Bible. The bishops stated, "We should not expect to find in Scripture full scientific accuracy, or complete historical precision."¹⁰ They deny the first eleven chapters of Genesis and say that we should not expect the Bible to be accurate except maybe in issues of salvation.

Do you know what the consequences of that are? Jesus said, along with the other authors of Scripture, that Adam was a real person, that Eve was a real person, that Creation actually happened, and that God actually spoke the world, all of the universe and all it contains [into existence] in six, literal days. So, if what [the Catholic Church is] saying is true, then Jesus is a liar and the writers of Scripture are liars. That is the outcome.

Now here is the irony of this. Do you see how satanic this is? First, the Catholic Church had the Scriptures, and wouldn't let anybody read them. "You have to be trained. You have to be a priest to read and study the Scriptures. We'll interpret them for you and tell you what to believe." Then

¹⁰<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,13509-1811332,00.html>

the Reformation comes along. The Bible starts getting into the people's hands. The Roman Catholic Church tries to kill as many people as they can, and to burn as many copies of Bibles that were in the common language [that they can] in order to keep people from reading the Bible. Finally, the Reformation takes off, and they can't stop it. But those who stayed in the Catholic Church were content with being ignorant until just recently. Now Roman Catholics are starting to read the Bible. So now [the Roman Catholic Church] is saying, "Oh, but it's full of errors." See that? They will do anything they can to keep people from reading the Bible. The irony of this is that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Bible came from them—they produced the Bible. They also claim to be infallible. [Now they say,] "It's full of errors."

What are we to do with all this? Calvary Bible Church believes that the Bible is God's Word, that "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" [2 Timothy 3:16]. We believe that the sum of God's Word is truth, and the individual pieces of God's Word are truth; that not even a jot or tittle will pass away from all of God's Word until all is accomplished [see Matthew 5:18]. We believe that "the grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever" [Isaiah 40:8]; that it is totally accurate; and that it is sufficient for "everything pertaining to life and godliness" [2 Peter 1:3], because it is the very word of God. "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" [2 Peter 1:21].

That is why this is Calvary *Bible* Church. That is what we teach, and that is what we believe. We make no apology for it. I don't have to prove to you the Bible is true. It is true because God said so. You are in no place to judge God. He's going to judge you, and the question is: Are you going to, right now, repent, give your life to Christ, and believe Him, or not? That is the issue. He's not going to [excuse] people who say, "Well, you know, I had some problems." Well, He has problems, too. He has problems with those who think that they can judge Him and His Word.

As we come into this next century, beware and be warned. There are a plethora of bad doctrines and movements out there whose sole purpose is to try to discredit the authority and integrity of [the Bible.] The good thing is that many people tried to do it in the past, and they couldn't do it. Like one author said, "The Word of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers." Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that You have given us Your truth and Your Word. We thank You that we have everything we need in it for life and godliness and that heaven and earth will pass away before one jot or tittle of Your word ever fails. Father, we thank You that You have given us Your truth that we might know it—that we can know the truth, that we can be sanctified by the truth, that we can worship You in spirit and truth. And that we can, by Your spirit, come to know what You have for us—Your plan for the future—who You are, how to be saved, how to grow in You, how to overcome every spiritual problem in our lives. All those things are in Your Word. Father, we are grateful for this great gift. May we guard the truth and protect it because there are many forces in the world that are trying to undermine it. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible ®,©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, by The Lockman Foundation.