

# **Answers for a Confused Church**

*Times Change—Truth Does Not.*

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## DEDICATION

### *Passing the Baton*

This book is dedicated to our children—Aubrey, Shane, and Gracie. My wife Morgan and I pray that they will take God’s Word into all areas of their lives and allow the truth of God’s Word to pass from one generation to the next.

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## AN IMPORTANT NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

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Although we've attempted to be as accurate as possible, as with any other book, there may be mistakes typographically or in subject matter. If you identify any, we encourage you to contact us.

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## ENDORSEMENTS

“Shane Idleman rings a clarion bell for the church today, calling it to its primary duty, to proclaim the truth in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is not called to make the Gospel acceptable but to make it clear. That is preaching the truth. Shane gives a stark reminder to the Emergent Church Movement.”

*Alex Montoya, Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministries, The Master's Seminary in Sun Valley, California; Senior Pastor, The First Fundamental Bible Church, California*

“Every now and again, I find myself reminded of a few things. I’m reminded of how precious the truth is, how more and more people are straying from it, and how increasingly crucial it’s becoming to contend for it. . . . Shane’s latest book has been one such reminder. In *Answers for a Confused Church*, a powerful passion for God’s truth has been put onto print . . . a passion that will prepare its readers to stand up for what’s right in a fallen world.”

*Pastor Bob Coy, Senior Pastor; Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale*

“In *Answers for a Confused Church*, Shane Idleman urges authentic Christians to stand firm against the politically correct tide sweeping our nation and to hold firm to the authority of God's Word. His challenge to speak the Truth, in love, to a culture that does not believe in absolute truth is refreshing. Shane is right: Times change, but Truth does not.”

*Tony Perkins, President, Family Research Council; Washington, D.C.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude to my wife, Morgan, my daughters, Aubrey and Gracie, and my son, Shane. All have been a tremendous blessing. I thank God for a wonderful family. They are the true treasures in life.

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## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

There is a dangerous trend in the evangelical church today. A futile attempt is being made to conform God's Word to social norms rather than to conform social norms to His Word. *As a result, truth is vague, doctrine is blurred, and the fundamentals of the Christian faith are often avoided.* For this reason, this book outlines some key issues confronting the church today such as absolute truth, unity, judging, abortion, sexual sin, politics, compromise, revival, preaching, repentance, and so on.

I'm not writing this book as if I have overcome all the challenges associated with being a Christian—nor do I want to approach these topics with a “holier than you” attitude; however, not to be open and honest about critical issues affecting the church would be unwise and unbiblical.

In addition, I don't want to imply, by the title of this book, that I have all the answers. **We cannot assume that we understand all the mysteries surrounding the nature of God—He is infinite, we are finite—but we can boldly and confidently present the absolute truth found in His Word.**

I make no apologies for the controversial content. When we fail to confront, we confirm. When we fail to confront destructive ideas and philosophies, we are, in essence, confirming them. To state the obvious, we become part of the problem. We cannot change what we will not confront. If being labeled narrowminded, legalistic, judgmental, arrogant, and intolerant is the cost of speaking the truth in love, so be it.

When terms “emergent” or “postmodern” are used, I'm referring to what is known collectively as *The Emergent Church* or *Postmodern Movement*. This movement is very popular among young adults who believe that a new church should emerge in response to changes within our culture. This isn't necessarily wrong if change operates within the perimeters of absolute truth. Change is often necessary. This movement (as a whole), however, is more about subjectivity rather than objectivity, relevance rather than repentance, outward works rather than inward change, and feelings rather than truth. Because of this, some are heading in a very dangerous direction. We would be gravely remiss to ignore it.

This book serves as a wake-up call, a call to those who claim to be authentic Christians to awake from their spiritual slumber. It's our choice—stand or fall.

—*Located at the end of each chapter*—

**Group Study Questions** highlight important points from each chapter. Each question will encourage dialogue and motivate readers to search the Bible for answers. Don't simply glance over Scripture references, even if you've read them before—read them again to see how each relates to you today.

**Recommended Resources** are additional resources for those interested in learning more about a particular topic.

**Reflection & Journaling** allows you to elaborate on the group study questions and/or journal your thoughts and prayers. Date your entry; include what you learned and how aspects of the chapter can be directly applied to your life.

*If there is no truth,  
why are so many searching for it?*

*We don't change God's message; His message changes us.*

## CHAPTER ONE

# TRUTH

### Speaking the Absolute Truth in Love

**D**arkness and dense fog forced the captain to maneuver anxiously through uncertain waters. The eerie silence was shattered as he faced his greatest fear. Through the thick fog, a faint light signaled disaster. He was on a collision course; another light was fast approaching.

In a desperate attempt to avert calamity, the captain signaled: “COLLISION INEVITABLE. TURN TWENTY DEGREES STARBOARD!” To the captain’s amazement, the light signaled back: “COLLISION CONFIRMED. . . CHANGE COURSE IMMEDIATELY!”

Now near panic, the captain signaled: “HIGHEST RANKING OFFICER IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY—ALTER COURSE IMMEDIATELY!” The oncoming light did not move but signaled: “ALTER COURSE IMMEDIATELY!”

Infuriated that this small vessel would challenge his authority and endanger both ship and crew, the captain gave a last alert: “FINAL WARNING: ALTER COURSE. WILL OPEN FIRE. I AM A BATTLESHIP!”

The final signal was chilling: “CAPTAIN, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, ALTER YOUR COURSE. I AM A LIGHTHOUSE!”

I’ve heard this story numerous times, yet I’m always reminded that absolute truth, like a lighthouse, stands solid, immovable, and unyielding as a guiding light.

A weapon of destruction has set its sights on our nation, our homes, and our families. Relativism and postmodernism continue to challenge truth, to their own destruction. Attacking absolute truth is like challenging a lighthouse. It cannot be negotiated nor bargained with. Truth cannot move.

We live in a culture that often describes conservative Christians as “ignorant” and “narrowminded” simply because we claim that we can know the truth. Postmoderns, on the other hand, often interpret only by experience and feeling. Truth is relative to the situation rather than absolute. Feelings shouldn’t lead but follow: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Although feelings can be good and God-ordained, when it comes to making decisions, we shouldn’t interpret the Scriptures in the light of our feelings but, rather, interpret our feelings through the light of Scripture.

**When people, groups, denominations, or movements depart from absolute truth and thus quench and grieve the Spirit of God, they become mechanical in their approach to Christianity and lose the ability to guide.** The Word of God is not in their hearts “like a burning fire” (Jeremiah 20:9) but becomes relative, powerless, and debatable. This is what we

see today; many are not truly worshipping God, as Jesus said, “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). Unfortunately, those Christians who are sounding the alarm are often categorized as irrational, judgmental, bigoted, and intolerant. But how can we warn if we won’t confront, correct if we won’t challenge, and contend if we won’t question? We must speak the truth in love.

When my daughter was eighteen months old, my wife and I took her to a local feline zoo. As we walked through the facility, we were entertained by a variety of small leopards, tigers, and other exotic felines. My daughter enjoyed seeing all the “kitty cats.”

Before leaving, we took a ride on a miniature train. As we rounded the first turn, I was amazed and shocked to see a large lion leaning against the chain-link fence with his massive paws slamming against it.

As the train moved slowly through the lion exhibit, I looked down, and to my horror, my daughter was unbuckling her seat belt. She shouted, “Daddy, hug the lion; play with the lion,” as she desperately tried to get out of the train. I replied with an emphatic, “No,” as I pulled her tightly to me and refastened her seat belt. Needless to say, she wasn’t happy. She began crying, hoping that it would change my mind. To her, and others looking on from a distance, I may have appeared narrowminded, judgmental, and intolerant, but had I let my daughter play with the lion, she might have been mauled to death. That’s the truth in love: loving enough to tell the truth, even if it hurts—to spare others tremendous pain.

In Acts 20:31, the apostle Paul spoke the truth in love as reflected in his statement, “Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Was he wrong, out of step with the culture, and arrogant? Or was he speaking the truth in love? Even a brief review of the New Testament confirms this. Jesus perfectly balanced grace and mercy with confrontation and correction. He wanted people to know the truth even if it offended. Oswald Chambers said, “The words of the Lord hurt and offend until there is nothing left to hurt and offend.”<sup>[1]</sup> **The Bible was written so that people would know the truth—the truth about God, creation, sin, and redemption.** *In reality, truth invites scrutiny; whereas, error runs from it* (cf. 1 John 5:13). We are not called to make truth tolerable but to make it clear.

We are to examine our own lives and motives first, and then we are to be moved primarily by love for God and others. Jesus said in Matthew 7:5, “Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Jealousy, pride, and envy can be catalysts for criticism and division. Consequently, we must remove these wrong attitudes before assessing any movement, group, association, or individual. When motives are clear, and we challenge, we are not attacking but, rather, contending for what is right. We are to detest division within the church and work toward reconciliation whenever we can, but we must not confuse “attacking” with “contending.”

With that said, I am deeply concerned with what I see, read, and hear from many “postmodern” and “emergent” Christians today. Postmodernism is a belief system that tends to deny absolute truth by redefining truth based on personal experiences. Postmodernism, in general, believes that the only absolute is that there are no absolutes, and that it’s arrogant to claim that you know the truth. In reality, only arrogance can exalt one to a level that challenges God and His truth. **It takes a great deal of humility to admit that personal opinions and beliefs are wrong when**

**they oppose absolute truth.** Postmodernism and relativism are nourished by pride because they value human reasoning and intellect rather than God’s Word and absolute truth.

Think about this: Is it really a mark of humility to suggest that after nearly two thousand years of church history, postmodern leaders have actually discovered the real truth—that there is no truth? If so, then it doesn’t matter what Christ said, the disciples wrote, or what the early church fathers believed. They were all wrong. Postmoderns may not say this directly, but their writings and words clearly point in this direction. *Humility recognizes that we are fallible human beings who have sinned against God. His Word is a lifeline to our soul, an anchor for our lives, not something to be debated, altered, or misrepresented. We don’t change truth—truth changes us.*

To be clear, I’m not challenging *emergents* if, by this term, one simply means reaching the world for Christ with God’s Word as our standard. I was thirty-seven when I began writing this book. I completely understand the need to be “culturally relevant.” My concern is not with those who hold to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith—they sometimes refer to themselves as “emerging” rather than “emergent,” at least at the time of this writing. (For more information regarding differences, refer to the [appendices](#) by Jason Carlson. He was involved with the “emergent church movement” during its conception.)

I’m also not questioning cosmetic issues in the church, such as the style of worship, ambiance, lighting, mood, attire, and so forth. What I am questioning, and what is alarming, is the massive shift toward relativism. For this reason, I’m strongly contesting “postmodern” and “emergent,” if by these terms one means: *Departing from the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints* (Jude 1:3), and thus rejecting biblical authority and absolute truth. Remember, relativism states that truth is relative depending on the individual and his situation—not absolute. When a person turns from truth, in essence, they are turning from God. “Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God . . . Truth is the self-expression of God” (John MacArthur).<sup>[2]</sup> Truth cannot be truly understood or explained without God as the source of all truth.

I agree with many of the complaints leveled against the church in general, such as hypocrisy, no authenticity, very little humility, lack of compassion, and so on. **But the problem isn’t truth—the problem is a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.** When people misunderstand and become dissatisfied and discouraged with Christianity, it’s often because they confuse “religion” and “rules” with a relationship. They base their opinion of Christianity on how they see other Christians act. This is dangerous. One of the greatest threats to Christianity is not in our failure to proclaim it but rather our inability to live it out. For this reason, opinions about Christianity should not be based solely on the actions of others. Jesus recognized hypocrisy and said, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Matthew 15:8). A. W. Tozer states it well: “Millions of professed believers talk as if [Christ] were real and act as if He were not. And always our actual position is to be discovered by the way we act, not by the way we talk.”<sup>[3]</sup>

More often than not, postmodern and emergent leaders simply isolate the collective failures of people claiming to be Christians. This fuels the movement. From this premise, they presume that Christianity needs an overhaul, beginning with doctrine and the fundamentals of the faith. After all, if Christianity isn’t working, then the platform needs readjusting. Not surprisingly then,

many postmoderns use Martin Luther's example of reformation to validate their cause. But Luther moved back to absolute truth and God's Word, not away from it.

As a side note, Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German professor and priest who helped to initiate the Protestant Reformation. He confronted corruption in the church with his *Ninety-Five Theses* written in 1517. His refusal to retract all his writings at the demand of the pope in 1520 resulted in his condemnation as an outlaw of the Church and the State.

The truth is that we don't spend enough time teaching truth (biblical doctrine). With very few "born-again" Christians believing in moral absolutes, the need to address this topic has never been greater. How will we know the difference between right and wrong if it's not defined according to God's Word? King Solomon prayed that God would give him an understanding heart so that he could discern between good and evil (cf. I Kings 3:9). The ability to discern between right and wrong is absolutely critical. *God's absolutes are guardrails through the canyons of life. They don't prevent us from enjoying life—they protect us from falling.* Unfortunately, many are trying to remove these guardrails.

### **Relativism opens the door to speculation and closes the door to truly understanding God.**

It's a very popular and pervasive deception: "Every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes" (Deuteronomy 12:8). The term "situational ethics" comes from the relative viewpoint. As a matter of fact, the educational system, as a whole, relies largely on "values free" and "situational ethics" textbooks. The natural question is "What impact has this had on our youth and on the nation?" An undeniable impact.

Imagine building a house with no regard to the master plans—allowing contractors to build as they choose. It would be an architectural nightmare. But that's exactly what we do when we embrace relativism and attempt to build our lives according to our own design. God is the Creator with a clearly defined master plan.

Granted, if we encourage truth yet fail to relate to our culture, the church can seem formal and dead. This fact also fuels the postmodern movement. But when truth is sacrificed for the sake of relating to the culture, as we see today, the very foundation is destroyed. Truth—the foundational beliefs clearly outlined in Scripture—must remain unmoved and unchanged. Times change, but truth does not!

### ***Where You Look Is What You Find***

I learned a simple yet profound lesson as a very young boy. Summer came, and I was on an early morning bike ride to school. As I turned the corner and headed west, a heavy gust of wind slowed my pace. It was clear that I would be late for school, so I turned around and headed home for a ride. To my surprise, when I changed direction, my bike felt as if it were gliding on air. I turned and headed back to school, but once again, I was bombarded with gusts of wind that nearly forced me to a stop.

At that young age, I realized what had happened. The wind was against me as I headed in one direction but with me as I headed in the other. Isn't that true so many times in life? One direction can be challenging and another almost effortless. In the same way, as we discuss controversial issues, it may seem as though we are pushing against the flow of society—and we are. Here's the

principle: even though it was easier for me to go with the wind, I was actually going in the wrong direction.

**When it comes to contending for absolute truth in a postmodern culture, there will be resistance.** No resistance may mean that we are going in the wrong direction as well; it's often easier to go with the flow of society than against it. Martin Luther wisely said, "Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is tested." Resistance tests our faith.

All this talk of relativism reminds me of a story of a university professor who told his class, "What's wrong for me might not be wrong for someone else." One student challenged him on this. Midway through his lecture, the student walked to the professor's desk and pushed his paperwork on the floor. Visibly upset, the professor demanded an answer for the student's outrageous behavior. The student replied, "I had my reasons. What's wrong for you may not be wrong for me." Even from this simple illustration you can see that relativism does not make sense. **There are certain "rights" and "wrongs" called absolutes that are given by God to save man from himself.** God's Word is truth (cf. John 17:17).

During the summers when I was young, my family took frequent trips to the Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains in California. We didn't question the wisdom of staying on the highways that led to our destination. Similarly, the way has been clearly defined in God's Word; follow the directions and keep the course. Detours will cost you. It's been said that *sin takes you farther than you want to go, costs you more than you want to pay, and keeps you longer than you want to stay.* I couldn't agree more.

Some argue that since we can't see, touch, taste, smell, or hear God, that He must not exist; thus, there's no absolute truth. This is not true. When I worked in the construction field, I attended a confined-space training class. This training was mandatory for anyone desiring to work in a confined or enclosed space, such as a vault or a tank. I was fascinated and grateful to learn about the poisonous gases inside many confined spaces that can kill within seconds. The only way to detect them is with a special device. You can't see, touch, taste, smell, or hear the poisonous gas, but it's there—and so is God. Life-sustaining oxygen is also undetectable through our senses, as is our life-sustaining Creator. But, in reality, "His invisible attributes are clearly seen" (Romans 1:20).

Many reject the Bible as absolute truth because absolute truth, by definition, is exclusive. But they fail to realize that relativism is also exclusive—it excludes those who hold to absolutes. People will accept numerical truth such as  $2 + 2 = 4$ , but they don't like "moral" truth. *They want the freedom to do what they want, when they want, how they want, to whom they want, which, according to Scripture, leads to their own destruction.* God's Word says to confront, confess, and turn from our sins, whereas relativism encourages us to ignore, overlook, and continue in them. Relativism says, "If it 'feels' good, do it."

Many are willing to go in God's direction but only if He's going in theirs. Postmodernism really isn't about "truth," it's about doing whatever is right in our own eyes. Sadly, many embrace the occult, horoscopes, contemplative spirituality, spiritual advisors, witchcraft, New Age philosophy, or other things in search of truth. But God clearly warns against this in Isaiah 30:1 when He says, "Woe to the rebellious children, says the Lord, who take counsel, but not of Me, and who devise plans, but not of My Spirit." Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet, proclaimed

God's Word at an important time in history. In this verse, God warned against looking to anything or anyone other than Him for the truth. Although Isaiah lived centuries ago, the same truth applies today—*truth is not relative*. **No other decision will impact our lives more than who, or what, we choose to follow.** For this reason, lay aside feelings and opinions as you embrace absolute truth. Feelings and opinions change—truth does not!

### ***Society's Trend...Not Surprising***

Although disheartening, society's trend away from God's Word (absolute truth) is not surprising. The apostle Paul warned centuries ago: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine [God's Word], but according to their own desires . . . they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). If this isn't exactly what we see today, I don't know what is. **Searching for spiritual fulfillment isn't wrong, but where we search can be wrong.** There is tremendous power and wisdom in the Bible. Many religions and cults recognize its influence, often adding portions of the Bible to their own writings. The fact that people have greatly altered the truth of God's Word is a startling reality. To whom would you rather trust your soul—God or man?

There are not "many" ways to God. The Bible and the beliefs of other religions cannot all be right. They can all be wrong, but they cannot all be right. The Bible was not written "in addition to" anything—it stands alone. The apostle John, who walked with Jesus, said to test everything (1 John 4:1), and Jesus said in Matthew 24:24 that *false Christs and false prophets will appear and deceive many*.

A "prophet," as mentioned here, can be anyone in a position of spiritual authority or claiming to be. Wolves don't often attack wolves, but they do go after sheep. False teachers aren't dressed in red holding a pitchfork. They often look the same as everyone else. They bring destructive teachings and lies into the church, telling people what they want to hear (Jeremiah 23). They provide layers of truth mixed with error, but even a broken clock is right twice a day. Consequently, when the truth of God's Word is spoken, people are often offended because they've been conditioned to hear "feel good" messages. **"Many, who for the first time, come under the sound of Holy Ghost preaching are mortally offended . . . because they have never been exposed to the white light of the Spirit" (William Still).**

How do we "test every spirit" and avoid false teachers? It's very simple: Determine if what they are teaching agrees with the Scriptures. And that's exactly what we will do throughout this book. For example, if a person says that there are many gods, Isaiah 45:22 tells us otherwise: "For I am God, and there is no other." If they say, as many are saying today, that we can learn a great deal from other religions, Exodus 23:24 says just the opposite: "You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works." In short, don't follow their practices or their examples. If a person claims that a "messenger of light" appeared to one of them as the voice of God, we should point to 2 Corinthians 11:14 where Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. If one says that righteousness is only obtained by following rigid codes of financial and moral requirements, the New Testament says otherwise—"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Can you see the unparalleled truth in all of this? Unless a person is anchored in God's Word, knows what the Bible teaches, and believes it, he or she will be led astray by error. "We should

no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:14). It’s vitally important that we study the Bible and surrender our lives to Christ and to the work of the Holy Spirit. It’s impossible to gain a clear picture of absolute truth without this. Unless one is firmly grounded in God’s Word and led by His Spirit, it is easy to be led astray.

I had a friend who experimented with a myriad of religions and read dozens of “spiritual” books. He rejected the Bible as absolute truth. As a result, he was confused, depressed, and uncertain about life. He lacked direction and purpose. I often reminded him that where he was looking was what he was finding. The same holds true with you and me. The human mind, apart from God’s Spirit, will never comprehend or understand spiritual truth. 1 Corinthians 2:14 validates this: “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The natural man (the man without the Spirit of God) does not receive the things that come from God because they are foolish to him. The word “receive” (*dechomai*) can also be translated “welcome” or “accept.” The natural man does not welcome or accept the things of God. This is why many reject the Bible and Jesus Christ—their natural mind does not receive, welcome, or accept the things of God. Truth is foolishness to them. Truth cannot be argued into someone. We are called to lovingly proclaim, defend, and guard the Word of God but never to force it upon someone.

Ravi Zacharias, a leading Christian apologist, said, “The denial of Christ has less to do with facts and more to do with the bent of what a person is prejudiced to conclude.”<sup>[4]</sup> **In other words, people often reject absolute truth and a relationship with Jesus Christ, not because they lack facts, but because they do not want to surrender their will and give up the so-called “good life.”** They don’t want there to be an authoritative God. It’s often an issue of the heart, not the intellect. There are enough facts archaeologically, scientifically, prophetically, and historically to support the authenticity of the Bible. From my experience, I’ve noticed that a truly surrendered heart does not have a problem with the absolute truth of God’s Word.

What does all this mean to you? It means everything! The concepts and ideas of postmodernism are lifeless because there’s no genuine spiritual life in them. Paul warned Timothy that a time would come when people would not be receptive to God’s Word. They would look for teachers who would tell them what they wanted to hear instead of what they needed to hear: relativism. As a result, many would turn from the truth and begin to follow false doctrines. Paul also said to *rightly divide the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15). This is why we must continue to speak the absolute truth in love. There are times to encourage, motivate, and uplift, but there are also times to confront, challenge, and contend for what is right—that time is now! Let it not be said of us today that there arose a generation who did not know the Lord (cf. Judges 2:10). To state it again, we don’t change God’s truth—His truth changes us.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Group Study Questions/Responses

1. Why are those who promote truth often categorized as irrational, judgmental, bigoted, and intolerant? Can this be prevented or minimized?

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2. The Bible was written so that people would know the truth about God, creation, sin, and redemption? How does this fact challenge the premise of relativism?

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3. What does this say about postmodernism: *truth invites scrutiny; error runs from it*?

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4. It takes a great deal of humility to admit that personal opinions and beliefs are wrong when they oppose the truth. Comment.

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5. Why do so many accept numerical truth such as  $2 + 2 = 4$  but not spiritual truth? List a few examples.

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6. Do you agree that there are not “many” ways to God, and that the Bible and the beliefs of other religions cannot all be right? Explain.

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7. How do we “test every spirit” and avoid false teachers? List a few examples.

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**Reflection & Journaling**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights*

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*Prayers & Practical Application*

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## **Recommended Resources**

*Culture Shift*, by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president, Albert Mohler Jr., addresses tough topics such as humanism, secularism, and moral relativism and how they affect our culture.

*A Ready Defense*, by Josh McDowell, is arranged topically. It offers more than sixty well-reasoned arguments from creation to the virgin birth, to the resurrection of Jesus, and much more. It's ideal for skeptics who are curious about Christianity and for Christians who want to learn more.

*Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church—Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*, by D. A. Carson, is a careful and informed assessment, illustrating both the strengths and weaknesses of the movement.

*The Truth War*, by John MacArthur, masterfully lays out the importance and significance of following absolute truth.

*Word in Life Ministries*, with Justin Alfred, is a well-balanced online resource for biblical, historical, and contemporary information.

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*“God blesses the peacemaker,  
but abhors the religious negotiator.”*

*A.W. TOZER*

*Biblical unity is unity with the Spirit,  
not unity for the sake of unity.*



## CHAPTER TWO

# UNITY

### Can't We All Just Get Along?

Can't we all just get along? This thought taunted me as I began working on this book. At that time, there was a local assistant pastor accused of doing and saying some very controversial things. As a result, a significant number of members left the church. I knew that being "controversial" wasn't necessarily a bad thing, so I arranged a meeting. What followed was one of the most confusing and disheartening discussions that I've had with a Christian leader. However, it helped to propel the writing of this book.

To begin, he believed that we could learn a lot from other religions, such as how to pray and meditate. I asked for clarification: "You mean that the spiritual disciplines of other religions should *motivate* us to be more disciplined since we know the truth, correct?" He replied, "No, that's not what I mean." I would soon learn that he, along with many other postmodern leaders, believe that we can actually *learn* spiritual truths and benefit from the spiritual practices of other religions. He, like many, also believes that we should be a *protector* of other religious ideals. This caught me off guard. I don't believe that we can learn how to relate to God through other religions. This is neither arrogance nor narrowmindedness; it's biblical. Recall Exodus 23:24: "You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works." Don't follow their practices or their examples. It's a subtle deception when we do so. When the apostle Paul addressed the men of Athens, he didn't say, "I want to learn from your religion" but, rather, "The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). With boldness, truth, and love he added, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

God warns time and time again not to look to other religions for guidance or direction. His patience is tested when His people do. The Scriptures are so clear on this that it makes me wonder why so many miss it—unless it's intentional. The religious practices of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and so on drew the children of Israel away from God, not closer to Him. **Granted, we should demonstrate a spirit of love and kindness toward all people, but we are called to "contend for the faith," not to contend for all faiths.**

Secondly, the pastor didn't like the catchphrase, "Love the sinner, but hate the sin." At first thought, this wasn't a hill to die on, as it can become an overused cliché. But as we began to talk, he clarified: "Only God should hate sin; that's not our job. People don't need us to point out sin or mention it." I immediately thought of Paul's admonishment, "Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9) and Jesus' words in Revelation 2:15 that he hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. James 1:15 warns that sin "brings forth death." Psalm 119:163 adds, "I hate and abhor all lying, but I love your law."

Sin is serious, and it should not be taken lightly. The records of the great revivals also bear this out. It was said of the powerful preacher Daniel Rowland during the eighteenth-century Welsh revivals: "Rowland preached repentance, until the people repented; he preached faith until men

believed. He portrayed sin as so abhorrent that all hated it; and Christ so glorious as to cause all to choose Him.”

Although dealing with sin is critical because of its destructive nature, we also need to encourage, love, support, and seek to understand. When we forget about grace, we can become legalistic. Legalism can be defined as a self-righteous attitude that rates spirituality by how well a person follows rules—Christ plus something equals salvation. This we want to avoid at all costs, lest we become a modern-day legalist. **But hating sin is not legalism—it’s wisdom, and it’s biblical.**

At this point in the conversation, I began to ask myself, “What happened to unity—why don’t we agree on these important issues? What am I missing?” He then made an unforgettable statement, “We should also avoid mentioning the *fear of the Lord*. It makes people feel uncomfortable.” Just writing that sentence makes me feel uncomfortable. The fear of the Lord is mentioned frequently throughout the Bible as the beginning of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. “The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him” (Psalm 147:11).

Fearing the Lord isn’t the type of fear one would have toward an abusive father, but rather, it’s the type of fear that involves respect and reverence for God. For example, I fear jumping off a hundred-story building because I respect gravity. Fear, in this sense, is good and God-given—it protects us. 2 Chronicles 19:9 reminds us that we should “act in the fear of the LORD, faithfully and with a loyal heart.” Psalm 25:14 declares, “The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him.” Proverbs 1:7 adds, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”

Fear can also motivate a person to repent. Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). *Jesus spoke more on the fear of hell than on the glory of heaven.* “That makes me both love Him and fear Him! I love Him because He is my Savior, and I fear Him because He is my Judge” (A. W. Tozer).

We continued, and I asked about homosexuality. He said that he personally thought it was wrong, but in doing so, he offered no scriptural support other than saying, “The Bible is static.” Instead, he spoke of a time when a liberal professor convinced him that homosexuality was okay. This confused him. He then sought out professors who wrote dissertations on human sexuality. They, on the other hand, convinced him that homosexuality was wrong. But again, the Bible was never referenced. What would be the next step if a professor with even more credentials offered a convincing argument for homosexuality? Would he again change his mind and be tossed back and forth by opinions? Probably so, and where would it end? Who would have the final say?

I left our meeting disheartened and discouraged thinking that we could never serve in ministry together because the differences were too great. I thought, “Lord, what’s wrong here? How can we both claim to be Christians and yet understand the Bible and Your attributes so differently?” The answer was obvious: biblical unity is unity with the Spirit—unity of doctrine and unity of truth—not unity for the sake of unity.

From this encounter came many hours of prayer and study on the subject of unity. I would spend the next several months asking God to help me understand genuine unity. The following pages include comments and thoughts made during that time.

### ***What Is Biblical Unity?***

Without question, the need to understand true biblical unity has never been greater. In one sense, the church is so divided that we are, in many cases, ineffective, and yet, we are compromising in so many areas that we are grieving and quenching the Spirit and becoming unproductive. For this reason, it's vitally important that we understand unity from a biblical perspective. **One thing it is not—it is not unity for the sake of unity.**

The following section is not an exhaustive study on correction, disunity, or confrontation, nor is it a step-by-step guide to resolving conflict. There are pastors and Christian leaders who have written exceptional books on unity. The goal of this section is to better understand biblical unity. With that said, consider the following:

1. Biblical unity encourages us to remove the plank from our eye first. In Matthew 7:5, Jesus said, "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Our sinful tendency is to point out the flaws in others; therefore, a first step toward genuine unity begins with removing our plank first. Pride is the primary cause of division. Did you catch that? It's not the enemy, though he causes division and uses pride. It's not false teachers, though they cause division. It is pride. That's why the New Testament encourages us to err on the side of grace, not judgment. **It takes humble, broken people to admit that they need to remove things from their own lives before critiquing and instructing others.**

This doesn't mean that we should simply look the other way, but, as John Calvin (1509-1564) said, we should "refrain from an undue eagerness to judge."<sup>[5]</sup> Before critiquing or confronting, we're instructed to first look within. Is jealousy, envy, bitterness, or unrighteous anger influencing my attitude? Do I have a critical spirit? Many times, those emotions are influencing our critique of others. We may be jealous of those who share our interests—authors get jealous of authors, athletes of athletes, doctors of doctors, pastors of pastors, and so on.

In some cases, God clearly instructs us to confront. In other cases, He encourages us to turn the other cheek; however, our motives must stem from a right heart. Wrong motives, arrogance, and a critical spirit hurt unity and cloud our ability to see clearly. It's important to ask, "Is the main goal of my constructive criticism to show and display my knowledge and self-righteousness, or is to lovingly encourage the person to rethink their position?" The criminal and the surgeon both use a knife—one to help, the other to harm.

But how do you check motives? Here are a few helpful questions: Will I keep the confrontation to myself and avoid gossiping? Do I take pleasure in confronting? Am I known as a confrontational person? Am I a faultfinder who rarely apologizes? Do I have a problem with authority? Do I have the "I'll show you mentality"? Is the confrontation fueled by a sinful impulse—jealousy, anger, envy, pride, etc.? Do I need to confront, or can I wait on the Lord and pray for clarification? Answers to these types of questions reveal a great deal about personal motives. Confrontation may need to take place, but not until motives and attitudes are clearly understood and repentance (if warranted) occurs.

Don't move too quickly when confronting (there are exceptions). Instead, patiently wait on the Lord and pray about the situation. *Confrontation must come from a true desire to help, not from self-glorification or self-righteousness.* Difficult as it may seem, it can be done if we check our reasons for confronting and remove the plank through humility, prayer, and brokenness—

confession of sin, forgiving others, etc. **I rarely hear “I moved too slowly” when confronting, but I do hear “I moved too quickly.”**

2. Biblical unity involves seeking counsel. I don't want to spend too much time on this point, but let me simply say that godly counsel is absolutely vital! It has helped countless people navigate through some very difficult confrontations. Mature Christians, for example, often have great insight, and their counsel can be invaluable. Parents are also a rich resource, as are local leaders in the church. Don't overlook the phenomenal wisdom God has given us through godly counselors.

3. Biblical unity is not “unity for the sake of unity.” Here's where many are confused. Again, biblical unity is unity with the Spirit—unity of doctrine, unity of truth, and unity of faith in Christ—not unity for the sake of unity. **The next time you struggle with disunity, remember that the Holy Spirit is never divided.** Search your heart and try to discover if the source of the conflict is you; however, some conflict and disunity actually promote unity. Let me explain. In Romans 16:17, the apostle Paul says, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.” And John Gill (1697-1771), commenting on Jesus' words in Matthew 18:17, said that if a person has been “rebuked without success,” that “their company is to be shunned, and intimate friendship with them is to be avoided.”<sup>[6]</sup> Wait a minute. Are Paul and Jesus actually encouraging disunity? Yes, as it relates to divisiveness, unrepentant sin, and spreading false doctrine. But keep in mind that these Scriptures must be under-girded with love. Many churches have fallen prey to legalism and judgmentalism by not balancing these commands with humility and love: “Conviction that is not under-girded by love makes the possessor of that conviction obnoxious, and the dogma possessed becomes repulsive” (Ravi Zacharias).

**When we separate from those who are unrepentant, who teach false doctrine, or who cause disunity, we are united with God even though we are not united with them.** Nevertheless, there are exceptions. For instance, a parent may handle a wayward daughter or prodigal son much differently than they would handle a so-called “friend” who is divisive and troublesome. And a pastor may handle an immature believer much differently than a seasoned “religious” person who is causing division within the church. Not all situations are the same, nor is there a blanket statement that will cover all issues. Again, wisdom is the key.

Sound doctrine, humility, and genuine faith are the foundations of unity. We can't be united if we don't agree on truth. Doctrine, though it may sound boring and “religious,” describes in words and terms the heart of God. Pastor John Piper, however, offers a word of caution here: “You can become so obsessed with doctrinal error that you lose the ability to rejoice in doctrinal truth.” In other words, seek to be united with the Spirit first and foremost—be a peacemaker; not a religious negotiator.

4. Biblical unity encourages us to avoid relationships that take us in the wrong direction. Spring boarding off point three, 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 states: “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.” Paul continues, “Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” John Wesley (1703-1791), commenting on this passage, said, “Have no company with him; no intimacy, no familiarity, and no needless correspondence . . . tell him lovingly of the reason why

you shun him.”<sup>[7]</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits.”

Please understand, I’m not suggesting that Christians only interact with other Christians. Jesus was a “friend of sinners.” We are called to minister to others in all areas of life. From time to time, we also need to put aside personal offences with other Christians. We cannot totally separate from them or from the culture. What good is a light that is hidden? **But if a relationship is pulling you in the wrong direction, it’s time to rethink the relationship.** Remember, unhealthy relationships corrupt character. Biblical unity encourages us to avoid destructive relationships (cf. 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

5. Biblical unity differentiates between essentials and non-essentials. There is a familiar phrase often credited to St. Augustine (AD 354-430): “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love.” This statement, however, can be dangerous if you *pick and choose*. “All Scripture (not some) is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Saint Augustine demonstrated a deep love for God and Scripture. It’s easy to assume that the word “biblical” was understood in relation to the essentials.

There are issues that have been central to the Christian faith since the inception of the church; these are known as “essential doctrines.” If a person denies one or more, they are walking on dangerous ground. These include salvation through Christ alone (not good works), His resurrection, His deity, sin, the inerrancy of Scripture, and so on—these are “essentials.” For example, there’s an enormous difference between a new believer who does not understand the Trinity, but who is open to learning, and the person who’s been a Christian for years yet still denies this foundational truth. A faulty belief system should not be overlooked, but we should work patiently with those who are willing to learn.

You may have heard the term “conservative Christian.” Conservatives, and even some conservative emerging leaders, differentiate themselves from liberals and progressives because they hold to the aforementioned essential core doctrines. Liberals and progressives, on the other hand, tend to question many core beliefs.

**My point is simple: How can we be united in Christ if we are divided on foundational issues?** We can’t. Foundational issues are just that—foundational. But on other issues there is flexibility. For example, I have many friends who differ with me on issues such as eschatology, the Spirit-filled life, gifts of the Spirit, church government, election, free will, eternal security, women in leadership, and so on. Although these are important issues, they are not “essential to salvation,” in most cases. This may be why the Lord has granted denominations within the Christian community. Denominations often begin as a result of disagreeing on the “non-essentials.” For example, if a person believes that all the gifts of Holy Spirit are valid today, they may have a difficult time attending a church that teaches the opposite. The key is to be united in the essentials, allow liberty in the non-essentials, and let love guide in all things. If love does not guide, one may be filled with anger, pride, judgmentalism, and impatience instead of love, joy, peace, contentment, and gentleness. How would you rate in this area? Love makes all the difference.

6. Biblical unity encourages us to respond rather than react. Proverbs 14:17 states: “A quick-tempered man acts foolishly.” Think before you act. A reaction often calls for an apology, while a response generally thinks things through. Among other things, unity avoids being rude or critical—it seeks to protect, not attack. Patience should be sought when others do not agree. **Those who are bold, persuasive, and opinionated will often have to put on the brakes to avoid reacting. Those who are shy, timid, and withdrawn might have to step on the gas to respond.** I can think of instances when I shared something with someone that initially upset them, but he later thanked me. I can think of other times when I should have said nothing. *There are times to create conflict, times to resolve it, and times to avoid it—use discernment.* “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Proverbs 27:6).

We all make mistakes, and a “holier than you” attitude is not the right approach. **When possible, don’t initiate anything with a rebellious, prideful attitude—you can be right in your reasoning, yet wrong in your attitude.** It’s wise to ask, “Is it the truth that offends or my attitude?” One we cannot prevent; the other we can. Jesus said, “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division” (Luke 12:51). The truth of God’s Word will divide; this can’t always be prevented, nor should it be.

Anger can be the correct response or a dangerous emotional reaction. The nature of anger is defined by the motive. Anger over issues that anger the Lord, such as crime, abortion, pornography, abuse, oppression, and so on is justifiable and can cause positive action. William Wilberforce (1759-1833), for example, was grieved and angered over the slave trade in Britain. Wilberforce, a Christian member of parliament, was very influential in the abolition of the slave trade, and eventually, slavery itself in the British Empire. If anger sparks prayer and a Christlike stance, as it did with Wilberforce, it can be productive. Martin Luther said, “When I am angry, I can pray well and preach well.” Strive to respond in love rather than react in anger.

7. Biblical unity encourages us to go directly to the source when possible. Where are we getting our information about a person, movement, or ministry? Are we going directly to them and reputable sources, or are we looking to smear websites, gossipers, and “heresy hunters” for the answers? Make no mistake. **We are heavily influenced by what we read and to whom we listen.** Check sources carefully. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve changed my view after talking directly to the person in question or after hearing both sides. We should approach others with an understanding, humble heart while removing any preconceived notions. For this reason, I went directly to the assistant pastor mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. I wanted his opinions not the opinions of others.

When I began writing this book, I was also reading *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic*. The subtitle itself demonstrates a gross misconception by suggesting that God’s absolutes are not authentic. This book contains short autobiographies of many postmodern and emergent leaders. I went directly to the source and read their words with an open mind. I then had a clearer understanding of their beliefs and backgrounds. The cloud of confusion about this movement began to lift when I isolated four specifics. These may help to better understand differences, and why we can’t “just all get along”—although I wish we could.

- Many of these leaders were educated at liberal universities. This is why numerous reputable Christians say that the emergent church philosophy, as a whole, reflects the latest version of liberalism.

- Most are rebellious and have unresolved anger toward the “established” protestant church, and it jumps from the pages of their books, blogs, and articles. Protests against fundamentalism and conservatism seem to fuel the movement.
- As a result, many emergent leaders routinely challenge the truths of the Bible. Thus, they place a very low value on the clarity of God’s Word by making statements such as “Our modern understanding of the gospel may be faulty, warped, and twisted.” How can it be faulty, warped, or twisted when Jesus’ words about salvation are crystal clear—so clear that even a child can understand them? For example, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). That’s pretty clear.
- Many quote or reference famous secular professors, philosophers, and psychologists to prove their point. They rarely reference the Bible (contextually) regarding difficult issues such as sin, hell, judgment, and so on. **It appears that most are influenced more by secular sources than by biblical truths.**[\[8\]](#)

These points remind us why experiences, feelings, and presumptions cannot replace the Scriptures. Herein lies the core problem: those who are not committed to upholding truth will look for approval from the culture rather than from God’s Word. *Postmodernism focuses on pleasing man rather than God—telling people what they want to hear, not what they need to hear.* This is why absolute truth and biblical unity are critical. They keep us grounded. God’s church and His leaders are to be pillars of truth.

Please don’t misunderstand. As I said earlier, I’m all for being *tolerant and relative* if it operates within the perimeters of absolute truth. But again, I’ve discovered that many postmodern and emergent leaders aren’t interested in absolute truth. Therefore, I strongly challenge the theological direction of this movement. Choosing the subtitle, *Moving from Absolute to Authentic*, identifies misguided theology. To be a truly authentic Christian, one must embrace absolutes. You can’t have one without the other.

8. Biblical unity can “rock the boat.” The gospel—the good news that Jesus came to save sinners—is an insult to the world. Jesus Himself said that His message of redemption would be offensive. He spoke the truth because of His love for the lost, and we should seek to do the same. **The good news can only be appreciated and properly understood with the bad news as the backdrop.** *How can we discuss God’s love, mercy, and grace without mentioning his justice, righteousness, and holiness? How can we discuss heaven but not hell, relationship but not repentance, a Savior but not sin? We can’t.*

I believe that people respect the truth and are hungry for it. **We are to do what is right because it’s right, not because it’s popular.** But at the same time, we must avoid being a “divisive man” who is proud, unteachable, and eager to dispute. Paul had harsh words for this type of person (cf. Titus 3:10-11).

Recall what was said earlier—it’s all about *motives*. Do you take pleasure in confronting and in “rocking the boat”? Are you known as a confrontational person? Do you have an “I’ll show you mentality”? Is the confrontation fueled by a sinful impulse—jealousy, anger, envy, pride, etc.? If

so, you're walking on very thin ice. Spiritual pride is hard to spot because it seems right. The Pharisees thought they were always right, and they often were, but their hearts and motives were wrong. When talking about the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said, "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do" (Matthew 23:3). As public teachers and interpreters of the law, they had an obligation to instruct the people; however, pride affected their motives, and hypocrisy crept in.

If we are continually fixed on the faults of others, or how much we know, an entire lifetime can be wasted because of pride. God does mighty things in the lives of those who are teachable and humble. Proverbs 18:12 states it well: "Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility." We see this often—a man's heart is proud before his downfall, but humility brings him honor. Be careful. The higher up you think you are, the farther you can fall.

There are times, especially today, when we do need to rock the boat and contend for truth with boldness. Regrettably, it's not possible to be liked by everyone. When we speak the truth in love, we will inevitably disengage and upset others. Jesus' words, although seasoned with a tremendous amount of grace, offended people. He rebuked religious leaders, reprimanded entire cities, challenged the rich, and lectured His disciples when needed. After all, how can we expose the unfruitful works of darkness and expect not to offend (cf. Ephesians 5:11)? But at other times, Jesus would build up rather than pull down. For example, the only command He gave the woman caught in the act of adultery was to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). He didn't condemn her, criticize her, or bring up the past. He gave her clear direction concerning what to do from that point forward. We should seek to do the same.

9. Biblical unity balances both truth and love. Recall the statement by Ravi Zacharias, "Conviction that is not under-girded by love makes the possessor of that conviction obnoxious and the dogma possessed becomes repulsive." That's powerful! Truth without love makes us intolerable and detestable. I'm aware that I'm really driving this point home, but I'd rather err on the side of speaking too much about humility than too little. I've observed that most of those (conservative Christians and emerging leaders alike) who criticize, whether through websites, books, articles, or sermons, often come across as vindictive, arrogant, and angry. We must equally balance truth and love. Here is a simple illustration:

"I didn't like it when our old pastor said that you're going to hell if you don't repent and trust in Christ. But I like our new pastor," a woman told her son. In response, he asked, "Well, what does the new pastor say?" The woman answered, "He says that you're going to hell if you don't repent and trust in Christ." The son interrupted, "But, Mom, they said the same thing." "Yes," she replied, "but the new pastor said it with tears in his eyes."

Hell is horrible, real, and eternal. Love compels us to share this truth. This is why Paul can instruct Titus in one verse to "exhort and rebuke with all authority" (truth), and a few verses later, encourage him to "be peaceable, gentle, showing humility to all men" (love). (Refer to Titus 2:15; 3:2.)

True love is a "choice" and a commitment to do good to others; it is not a "feeling." If love is the greatest commandment, it should be our first priority. When our concept of love is different from God's, unity suffers. Love hopes for and believes the best in others. It is demonstrated through our actions and our words. Strive to develop the type of love that protects and defends others.

For instance, stop yourself when you're tempted to gossip or belittle others, and turn the conversation if someone is taking you in that direction. The Bible is clear: If you have not love, it profits you nothing (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:3). You can be well read in all sixty-six books of the Bible, preach as well as Whitefield, Moody, and Spurgeon, and have a PhD in theology, but if you don't have love, you have nothing. Make love, forgiveness, and unity top priorities. They will not rise to that level alone.

In closing this chapter, I'd like to make a final suggestion. Instead of quickly jumping on the "gossip" or "heretic" or "false prophet" bandwagon the next time we don't agree with someone, we should ask, "Are these people truly preaching heresy (a self-willed opinion that opposes the truth), or are they simply espousing non-essentials that we don't agree with?"

Christians are fallible and make mistakes. We should consider the total portrait of one's life, character, and ministry and evaluate on that basis. A few poorly chosen statements over the course of many years shouldn't define a person. One's life and character speak volumes as to the sincerity of his or her ministry. We should extend to others the same grace that we desire and be patient with others. "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32). Patient people deliberately take their time and examine the possibilities, weigh the consequences, seek guidance, and do what they believe to be right. Again, we can be right in our reasoning yet wrong in our attitude. Patience allows us to control our desires and emotions rather than allowing them to control us. After all has been said, there is one closing thought: "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Group Study Questions/Responses**

1. How does Exodus 23:24 apply to us today: *Don't bow down before other gods or worship them, or follow their practices or their examples?*

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2. Our sinful tendency is to point out the flaws in others. List three ways that we can avoid this inclination.

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3. If the Holy Spirit is never divided, why is there so much disunity? Remember: Biblical unity is unity of doctrine, unity of truth, unity of fellowship, and unity of faith in Christ, not unity for the sake of "getting along."

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4. Do our relationships and associations play a significant role in shaping who we are? Why or why not?

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5. Comment: *How can we be united in the cause of Christ if we are divided on foundational issues?*

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6. Why is it important to go directly to the source (if possible) before drawing any final conclusions?

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7. Why does unity sometimes mean “rocking the boat”? Is it possible to be both truthful and loving? Offer at least two examples.

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### Reflection & Journaling

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights

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### Prayers & Practical Application

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## **Recommended Resources**

*The Basis of Christian Unity*, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, reveals why unity is never something arrived at by ignoring or minimizing truth.

*A Hill on Which to Die*, by Judge Paul Pressler, tells the story of the battle between moderates and conservatives for control of the Southern Baptist Convention. We can glean insight on biblical unity from this great struggle.

*On Being a Servant of God*, by Warren Wiersbe, is an excellent resource for those wanting to understand how unity and humility affect all areas of life.

*The Cross Centered Life*, by C. J. Mahaney, shows the reader how to escape the pitfalls of disunity, legalism, condemnation, and more.

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*“These words of Christ do not contain an absolute prohibition from judging, but are intended to cure a disease—criticism.”*

*JOHN CALVIN, Commenting on Matthew 7:1*

*“The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but the conscience of the state.”*

*MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.*

## CHAPTER THREE

# JUDGING

### Who Are You to Judge?

A few years ago, a news report featured a famous athlete who was considering running for political office. As soon as the news correspondent asked about abortion and gay marriage, the potential candidate became visibly upset. He criticized Christians and ended the interview saying, “Doesn’t the Bible say ‘judge not’? Who are you to tell people what they can and cannot do?”

Unfortunately, misrepresentation of this Scripture is common among the media and other groups who often misquote Jesus’ words from Matthew 7:1, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” Ironically, few reference another Scripture that also deals with judging, John 7:24. Here Jesus encourages His followers to “judge with righteous judgment.” At first, these two scriptures may seem contradictory, but when we look at the context and the true meaning of “judge,” we clearly see that there is no contradiction. This misrepresentation of “judging” is an attempt to conform Scripture to support opinions, when in fact, moral values are designed to conform to scriptural truths. **Personal opinions vary—truth does not.**

We tend to pick and choose certain Scriptures as if they were choices on a menu. But we can’t choose those we like and discard the rest. I liken it to someone skimming through the pages of my first book, *What Works When “Diets” Don’t*, and reading: “Eat whatever foods you choose.” In its entirety, it actually reads, “If you follow these guidelines, stay within these ranges, and avoid these foods, you can eat whatever foods you choose.” Reading and following fragments of information can be misleading. **If we apply only what we choose, we can easily miss what we need.**

Judging within the context of Matthew 7:1 refers to the type of judgment that a judge would render in a court of law, such as in Romans 14:4: “Who are you to judge another’s servant?” A judge hears the evidence and pronounces a judgment. We are in no position to do this—we don’t have all the facts. God tells us to leave justice to Him because He is the judge. In John 7:24, however, Christians are to judge or “call into question” those things that clearly contradict God’s principles. In 1 Corinthians 2:15, the apostle Paul said that those who are spiritual should judge and discern all things.

The famous reformer John Calvin, commenting on this topic, said, “These words of Christ do not contain an absolute prohibition from judging, but are intended to cure a disease—criticism.”<sup>[9]</sup> The Bible commentator John Gill (1697-1771) added, “Give your sense and judgment of things, according to the truth and evidence of them.”<sup>[10]</sup> And the Geneva Study Bible (1599) states, “We must judge according to the truth of things, lest men turn us from the truth and carry us away.”<sup>[11]</sup>

Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but the conscience of the state.” Serving as the conscience of the people has been one of the primary functions of the church since its conception. Scripturally, we are commanded

to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, truth and error, light and darkness. We are to judge according to the truth.

Regarding moral issues that destroy lives and dishonor God, we are to judge (“call into question”) behaviors, choices, and lifestyles that lead people in a dangerous direction, especially if these issues are to become social policy and legally sanctioned.

On another note, within the church itself we are to judge, but this is often misunderstood, and we can easily become “wrongfully” judgmental. Failure to recognize diverse gifts may explain why. For instance, many Christians have different ministries, but all fall under the umbrella of Christian service. Within each of us, God creates varying desires, talents, and levels of interests. If God has called a man to preach His Word, that will be his passion. If God has called a Christian to pursue politics, that will be their passion. God established the concept of government; therefore, He desires godly leaders who govern according to His standards. If God has called a Christian to concentrate primarily on feeding the poor, that will be their passion. If God has called a Christian to the mission field in Africa, that will be their passion, and so on.

Problems arise when we fail to respect different gifts. For example, those who believe that Christians should not mention controversial topics contradict the most basic of principles. From time to time, God clearly calls us to do just that—to confront, rebuke, and challenge. I encourage you to read Jesus’ words to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, to the religious leaders of His day, and to the cities that did not repent.

Those who have been called to preach, much like the prophets of old, will confront compromise, condemn social digression, and powerfully denounce sin in the hope of reconciling man to God—they speak the truth in love. This is why the prophets were primarily statesmen, reformers, authors, and preachers. They ruffled feathers, and so will we from time to time. However, people called to the position of pastor/teacher often have a shepherd’s heart—love, compassion, and kindness are marks of their ministry. **In a sense, one is called to break the heart, and the other to mend it; one concentrates on repentance; the other, restoration.**

There is often a clear difference between teachers and preachers. Teachers aim for the mind; preachers aim for the heart, will, and emotions—to stir and to convict. Often...

- The pastor builds—the preacher tears.
- The pastor counsels—the preacher convicts.
- The pastor rejoices—the preacher weeps.
- The pastor plants—the preacher uproots.
- The pastor teaches—the preacher preaches.
- The pastor mends—the preacher breaks.
- The pastor is full of hope—the preacher is full of fire.
- The pastor loves to listen—the preacher needs to speak.

- The pastor sees the good in others—the preacher sees the depravity in man.
- The pastor desires to be among the people—the preacher desires to be alone with God.

Often, there's a mixture of both preacher and teacher in a person. We should not expect everyone to share the same passions for specific ministries, but instead, we should thank God for diversity. Again, assumptions, presuppositions, background, and experience all play a role in our decision-making process, but truth is truth. Opinions and life experiences are diverse, but Scripture clearly defines absolutes so that background and personal experiences will not skew them. God's Word is profound truth for all men for all time.

If the Scriptures are not clear on certain issues, don't allow preferences and personal convictions to develop into judgmentalism (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:5-6). As a practical example, I know people who won't watch any R-rated movies, and I know others who just avoid movies with excessive sexual content and/or extreme violence. I have my boundaries as well. **Liberty has limits—the key is to ask, “Will it build me up spiritually or pull me down? Will it harm others?”** Each person will have their own convictions in gray areas not clearly outlined in Scripture. Allow them that freedom. *When arrogance influences faith, we can become judgmental. But at the same time, judging “rightly” means that we filter everything through God's Word.*

Absolute truth transcends our human fallibility and reasoning. Sadly, many today are using language and cultural differences to validate postmodernism and to deny absolute truth. But gravity is still gravity whether in America, China, or the deserts of Africa, and truth is still truth whether someone speaks Swahili, Aramaic, or English.

Again, a spirit of compassion and understanding should move us, not judgmentalism. It's often not what we say but how we say it that tilts the scale. Admittedly, I've failed in this area because I did not exercise grace at opportune times. We should not excuse sin in exchange for tolerance—extending grace does not mean approving of sinful behavior, but it does mean extending compassion.

You've heard the expression “Love is blind,” but a critical, judgmental spirit also blinds clear thinking. This is why it's vital to seek feedback from those you trust. Invite their thoughts about the situation from their perspectives, which can be a tremendous help. Proverbs 15:22 confirms that plans can go wrong simply because we fail to ask for godly advice. For example, I sent excerpts of this book to dozens of pastors, Christian leaders, and friends for feedback. After the final editing process, I felt confident that the book was well balanced. Granted, this won't prevent criticism, but there's peace of mind because godly counsel was sought.

Wise counselors offer guidance and correct observations. We need them, or we might be inclined to lean on our emotions, insights, thoughts, and cultural trends. But don't find someone to simply confirm your views. **You may ask for advice until you hear what you want to hear and not what you need to hear.** Additionally, don't alter the truth in order to manipulate an answer. When we are honest and open, others can make an accurate assessment. As an example, the emergent movement promotes humility and seeking godly counsel, yet they challenge the constructive criticism and counsel of Christian leaders such as John Piper, Albert Mohler, John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, D. A. Carson, James McDonald, Chuck Smith, Norman Geisler, and so

on. Postmodern and emergent leaders alike should cherish guidance from these leaders and correct misguided theology. It's wise to demonstrate the same humility that we promote.

### ***Why Vilify Just Two Issues?***

With that said, let's move on to a few important issues regarding "making judgments" within our society. Some time ago, I read an article featuring a postmodern author who asked, "Why do many Christians choose just two issues to vilify—abortion and gay marriage?" He added that we should not make judgments in these areas. He was reflecting the view of many. But I don't believe that Christians are magnifying certain issues at the expense of others—rather, we are underscoring the enormous importance of them. **Even though "sin is sin," all issues cannot be equal. If everything is a priority, then nothing is.** God referred to some sins as "abominations" in the Old Testament. Offering children, for example, to the god Molech by burning them to death (much like abortion today), was clearly an abomination.

Those who are bold and strongly contend for biblical truths are often seen as "always against something." But if we're for marriage between a man and a woman, then we must be against gay marriage. If we're for the sanctity of life, then we must be against abortion. If we're for equality, then we must be against the slave/sex trade. If we're for absolute truth, then we must be against relativism, and so on. Speaking the truth in love often results in being "against" some controversial things. This can't be prevented, nor should it be. We must contend for foundational issues: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3).

On the issue of abortion and sexual sin, there is really only one position—God's position. I'm not being judgmental; I'm being honest. Topics such as the environment, health care, and poverty are all affected by the stability of society, which is dependent on the stability of the family as God designed it. We should be concerned about the environment. However, how can we truly be concerned about the environment but not saline abortions where a salt solution is injected into the mother's sac for the baby to swallow? Once the solution is swallowed, the baby begins to experience a violent, slow death—so violent that the mother can actually feel the baby in her womb fighting for his or her life.

How can we truly be concerned about health care and not D&E abortions where a large crushing instrument is inserted into the uterus as the physician grabs the baby with this instrument and pulls off pieces (limbs) until he or she is completely removed from the mother? To ignore these facts at the expense of focusing on less important issues makes no sense.

The reason many don't want to address this issue is because it's controversial and unthinkable. They don't want to "offend" others. If a person can read the following description of a partial-birth abortion and honestly say that we shouldn't make judgments about this issue, then they are clearly confused. Obviously, we should all strive to prevent unintended pregnancies through education and other means, as few question this. Some even argue that legal restrictions on abortion are not the most effective deterrent, but to allow these types of procedures is inexcusable. Judge for yourself.

Partial-birth abortion is a process where an unborn, often healthy (near full term), baby's body is delivered feet first, until only the head remains inside the womb. The head remains in the womb so that the abortion is not considered murder. Once a baby is fully delivered, his or her life

cannot be terminated. One minute it's a fetus and legal to kill, while the next it's a baby, and it is murder. How absurd.

The physician then punctures the back of the child's skull with a sharp instrument and removes the child's brains before delivering the dead baby. Christians will never be reconciled with one another in this area until we acknowledge that the sanctity of life is a top priority that comes before preference and personal liberty.

This type of information is extremely difficult to write, but I cannot, and will not, remain silent, nor should you. To my shock, one postmodern leader actually said, "The topic of abortion is so 1980s. We need to get over it." Did I miss something? When a physician can legally puncture the back of a child's skull before delivering the baby, and when people carelessly fill trash cans with mutilated babies day after day in medical facilities without concern from the public, consciences have been seared. "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20). **When human life is devalued, atrocities such as the holocaust, the slave/sex trade, and abortion occur. God help us when we destroy what He has created.**

It is extremely painful to mention any of this. I wish this message could be positive and uplifting, but abortion is a travesty, and our nation has the blood of innocent children on its hands. If you think otherwise, I'd encourage you to research this topic. The truth will change your life. It's been estimated that hundreds of these types of abortions, including D&E and saline abortions, are performed every day in America after the third month of pregnancy. **We can no longer remain silent while silent screams go unheard—we are to judge ("to call into question") this atrocity.** Martin Luther King Jr.'s words still echo with resounding clarity: "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people." I hold the same opinion today.

Fortunately, as of 2012, the Supreme Court still upheld the ban on the grisly form of abortion known as partial-birth abortion, yet there are still loopholes and alternate methods such as dismembering the fetus in the uterus. Sadly, this is legal and available. There are also those in leadership who will seek to reverse the Court's ban, perhaps by the time you read this. This is a shame to America and a mockery before God who said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5). Psalm 139:13 says, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb."

Again, on the issue of abortion, there is only one position—God's position. But there is also hope for those who have participated in or who have had an abortion. If this is you, I encourage you to read Psalm 51. Both personal experience and the Bible have taught me that God's unfailing love and compassion will see you through.

### ***Before You Leave Your Church***

Let's shift gears and discuss another important aspect of judging or "calling into question." In America today, a significant number of people are switching churches or leaving altogether. I've found that judging "rightly," as well as unwarranted criticism, both play significant roles.

The following pages are notes from a possible future book: *Before You Leave—Ten Biblical Principles to Consider before Leaving Your Church*. Before reading, ask God for guidance and wisdom. He's faithful to guide those who will follow.

a) **Do the leaders and the pastors view the Scriptures as inerrant—the final authority?**

This is stating the obvious, but it's worth stating: If pastors, teachers, or preachers challenge the authority or authenticity of the Word of God, they should step away from leadership. I'm not referring to differences over non-essential issues: I'm referring to those who disregard the clear commands of Scripture. Read Jeremiah 23 to gain a sense of God's thoughts toward leaders who lead the people astray. If the leadership is not solid in this area, there are biblical grounds to fellowship elsewhere.

Some may ask, "But what if the pastor is no longer studying and his teaching reflects it?" Or, "What if the church is leaning toward legalism or compromise?" These are clearly points of prayer. Pray specifically that hearts are changed. Spirit-led teaching is vitally important to spiritual growth, and legalism and compromise drain spiritual life from the church. But be careful not to confuse legalism with wisdom and compromise with change. There is a clear difference. Legalism reflects a self-righteous attitude; wisdom reflects a humble attitude that is committed to God's Word. Compromise often reflects turning from the truth; whereas, some change or turning from tradition is often necessary. Never underestimate the influence of faithful leaders who value and uphold the Word of God. Instead, be thankful for them.

b) **Is God's Spirit truly leading you to leave?** Psalm 32:8 declares, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye." Again, God guides those who are willing to follow (John 7:17). If God seems distant, Bible study boring, and church irrelevant, or if legalism, judgmentalism, and dead formalism are setting in, it may be that the work of the Holy Spirit is being suppressed. More change will be seen outwardly as the Holy Spirit is given more power to rule inwardly. **Sanctification is God's job, but obedience is ours.** Brokenness, humility, and full surrender provide fertile ground for the Spirit. But don't confuse a Spirit-filled life with sheer emotionalism or an emotional experience. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones cautions: *Never interpret Scripture in the light of your experiences, but rather, interpret your experiences in the penetrating light of Scripture.* For instance, we shouldn't make decisions, such as leaving a church, based on emotions alone. Emotions aren't necessarily a reflection of a right decision, but a right decision can affect emotions, such as feeling peace once a decision is made. We should thank God for our emotions, but they are the caboose, not the engine of the train, so to speak. They follow, but rarely should they lead.

It's been said that if the influence of the Holy Spirit were removed from the early church, 90 percent of the work would have ceased. Unfortunately, it appears that if the Holy Spirit were removed from the church today, 90 percent of the work would continue. Sadly, the only thing holding many churches together today is social activity, not the activity of the Spirit. When we fail to embrace the Spirit's power, we become powerless. Personally, I wouldn't want to be part of a church that suppresses the work of the Spirit whether through compromise, judgmentalism, indifference or disbelief.

The conviction of the Holy Spirit is a true gift from God. Sadly, many people ignore it, yet they say that God is leading them to do this or that. But all too often, they find that they made a very poor decision. What happened? The Holy Spirit didn't lead them—human nature, pride, and emotions probably did. For instance, we all know people, perhaps ourselves, who mistakenly jumped into a dating relationship or marriage, spent money frivolously, moved, or left a church believing that God's Spirit was leading. **I'm amazed at the number of people who don't have a servant's heart, who don't read the Word, who don't spend time in prayer, who don't**

**display humility, and yet think the Spirit is leading them.** Let me be clear: God directs us to make “wise” decisions that correspond with His Word. Disobedience leads to disappointment.

Please understand, I’m not suggesting that God doesn’t lead people to leave their churches, because He does. That’s why it’s important to first ask, “Is God truly guiding me?” before making an important decision. One of the best ways to know if God is truly guiding you is to stay, pray, and obey—stay in His Word, pray for guidance, obey His principles. Again, the conviction of the Holy Spirit is an indispensable gift from God. We must listen to Him. (Note: For more insight into the work of the Holy Spirit, refer to [Chapter 8: Revival—Seeking to Clear the Confusion.](#))

c) **How will leaving affect the local body of believers?** Leaving a church can have social ramifications. Friendships often end when someone leaves. When this happens, new believers and others are frequently baffled and confused. As a result, they start asking questions. Depending on whom they ask, the church’s reputation may be damaged by gossip. We should consider how leaving will affect others, and, when possible, leave on good terms without gossiping or criticizing the leadership. This can be difficult in challenging situations because we want people to know why we left. Our sinful tendency is to pull others down. We may think that somehow this makes us look better. If we are truly concerned about the body of Christ, we will hold our tongue. Self-righteousness has no place here. But I’m not referring to sweeping corruption and deception in the church under the rug. Wisdom is needed here.

d) **How will leaving affect your family?** Most often, the actions of the husband determine the stability of the family. If a company fails, the president is held responsible. If a team fails, the coach is held responsible. If the spiritual health of the family is deteriorating, the father—well, you get the picture. Granted, there are men who, through no fault of their own, experience failure in their home, but for the large majority, there is a critical need for spiritual leadership. Our country is in desperate need of this. It’s generally the wife who encourages Bible study, church attendance, and prayer, while men willingly forsake their God-ordained role as spiritual leaders. There is no greater investment than investing in your spiritual growth and in the spiritual growth and health of your family.

If the family isn’t growing at church, or if it doesn’t seem to be the best environment, then fathers (or single parents) need to ask some hard questions: What can I do to nurture their growth? Is this partly my fault? *The primary mission of the church is to care for others and equip the saints, but as men, we are called to equip the home—to educate, nourish, guide, and instruct. Much of the responsibility falls on us, not the church.* However, if the church is not contributing to the spiritual health of our family, we may have biblical grounds to leave. But be careful here. There are seasons in life. Don’t make an immediate decision without careful prayer and consideration. God may be orchestrating the circumstances to draw you closer to Him. And, as always, seek godly counsel and check your motives before leaving. This leads to the next point.

e) **Do you have a consumer mentality?** Another comment most have heard is “I’m just not being fed at church!” On occasion, this is very valid, but it sometimes deserves a closer look. For example, if someone isn’t growing from food, but others are, it may not be the food or the chef, so to speak. Yes, the pastor has a responsibility to teach the Word, but we also have a responsibility to listen and to apply what is being said. Sadly, many have a “consumer” mentality

when it comes to church. (I've been guilty of this myself.) We come asking, "What can I get?" rather than, "What can I give?" That's why some say, "I didn't get much from the church service today; it seemed dead." I'm not suggesting that this isn't valid from time to time, because it is. We should benefit from the service and the fellowship, but we are called to minister to others, worship God, and pray for one another. Be careful that a move is not prompted by a subtle, self-absorbed motive. *I've noticed that many leave because they are not promoted or allowed to start a ministry or because they don't feel appreciated.* If we're guilty, we need to replace our "consumer" mentality with a "servant" mentality.

f) **Ask, "Am I seeking to be used or recognized?"** Another reason people leave is because they feel that they are not being "used." Unfortunately, this can be the catalyst for resentment, bitterness, and gossip. They are, in fact, being used—that's not the problem. The problem, many times, is that they're not being recognized, esteemed, or promoted. They're not being given center-stage attention. Their name is not on the PowerPoint or printed in the bulletin. *For them, it's not about being used, it's about being recognized.* God desires humility and servitude, not arrogance and pride—meekness and boasting cannot co-exist. Oswald Chambers said, "God buries His men [and women] in the midst of paltry things, no monuments are erected to them; they are ignored, not because they are unworthy, but because they are in the place where they cannot be seen."<sup>[12]</sup> It's often more desirable to teach, lead, or sing than to pick up trash, clean the restrooms, or change diapers, yet our goal should be to serve, not to be served. We will not be disappointed if we understand that God desires the heart of a servant. "Those who follow Christ must not expect great or high things in this world" (Matthew Henry). "Expect" is the key word. God may promote a person for His glory, but we should never "expect" this.

Am I leaving my church simply because I'm not being recognized or getting my way? Maybe the Lord is teaching humility, patience, contentment, and servitude, or maybe He is directing you elsewhere. **Don't rush when God may be saying wait.** When God develops character, He does so to help us meet the challenges ahead, to prepare us for life, and to mold us into Christ's image. *Trying times are not intended to break us down but to build us up.* The only way to build such qualities as love, joy, peace, humility, and patience is to be confronted with situations that require love, joy, peace, humility, and patience. How do we develop patience if we're not tested? How do we develop forgiveness if we are never wronged? How do we develop humility if we're never humbled? How do we develop character if we are never challenged? James 1:2-4 advises us to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Charles Spurgeon confirmed this as well: "The Lord gets His best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction." Seek to be used, not recognized, and focus on character development, not comfort.

g) **Do you have a critical spirit?** This could also translate into a cynical or negative attitude. This is one aspect of Jesus' words, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). If you have a judgmental attitude, you've already turned a deaf ear to God's leading—it will be difficult to discern His will. Ironically, I've noticed that those highly educated in biblical doctrine are often the most critical, cynical, and negative. We do not practice what we preach. Of all the books I've read, the sermons I've heard, the people I've talked with, and the devastation I've seen firsthand, one common denominator was present: critical, divisive people who do not forgive or release bitterness, anger, and hurt never experience freedom, happiness, or true

restoration. Ephesians 4:31-32 states: “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Simply stated, bitterness, negativity, and anger will lead you in the wrong direction.

As stated in the last chapter, avoid being a “divisive” person who is proud, unteachable, and eager to dispute. As we learn the Scriptures, we can become filled with pride and easily see the flaws in others. Knowledge puffs up. Blinded by pride and convinced that God has called us to critique others, we might think that we’re more knowledgeable, holy, and in tune with the Spirit, and that God has obviously given us the “gift” of criticism, when indeed, no such “gift” exists! **Be careful here—it can be a critical attitude, not God, that is leading.**

Oswald Chambers said, *When God reveals the faults and flaws in others, it’s not for the purpose of criticism, but for intercession.* It takes a great deal of humility to admit that we may have a critical spirit. I’ve been guilty of this myself. The key is to acknowledge, repent, and revisit the purpose of love. A critical spirit rarely guides us in the right direction. James 3:17 reminds us that God’s wisdom “is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

I’m reminded of a news story that aired years ago about an enormous oil tanker that sprung a leak off the coast of Spain, and millions of gallons of oil gushed into the sea. The disaster was a horrific sight and an environmental disaster. **In the same way, when we’re “struck,” what’s inside spills out.** Is anger, pride, unforgiveness, or selfishness exposed, or does adversity reveal patience, humility, forgiveness, and self-control? We can choose whether to have a critical attitude. On that note, it seems that those who have been greatly humbled by life, and who are broken as a result, are often the most forgiving and patient people. The lesson: humble yourself, and God will exalt you—exalt yourself, and He will humble you (cf. 1 Peter 5:6).

h) **Are your expectations of the church and/or pastor realistic?** Your pastor may not be a motivational speaker, the worship may not descend from the portals of heaven, and you may not be greeted with hugs and smiles from everyone, but these are not reasons to leave. As a matter of fact, we should be thankful that we live in a nation where we can worship God and faithfully preach the Word without fear of death or imprisonment (at least for now). It’s not realistic to think that all the messages and worship services will meet our every need. As in marriage, it’s vitally important that we don’t enter into things with unrealistic expectations. *Without humility and a teachable spirit, it’s difficult, if not impossible, to get clear direction.* Humility does not mean that we become passive observers, but that we live in total surrender to God and align our expectations with His. Allow the Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to transform you, rather than pastors and others. Again, I do believe there should be passion in a true spirit-filled church. After all, “Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire” (Lloyd-Jones). Passion and unction should resonate from the pulpit and the church. Excitement is often the by-product of a radically changed life.

i) **Is preference influencing your decision?** When it comes to preference, the questions are endless: “Why is the worship music so loud? Why is the worship so subdued? Why don’t we sing the old hymns? Why do we sing the old hymns? Why are we using a band? Why aren’t we using a band? Why do we have a choir? Why don’t we have a choir? Why are they sitting? Why are they standing? Why are they raising their hands? Why aren’t they raising their hands? Why

aren't the pastor's messages topical? Why are they topical? Why are they wearing suits and ties? Why aren't they wearing suits and ties? Why do we have so many guest speakers? Why don't we have guest speakers? Why aren't the services charismatic? Why are the services so charismatic? Why don't we take communion every week? Why do we take communion every week?" The list never ends. I remember telling a pastor that I really enjoyed the worship service that morning. He smiled and said, "A few others commented just the opposite." Preference plays an enormous role in our lives, but this isn't always a bad thing.

Personally, I think that what many are referring to as racism or division within the church has nothing to do with racism or division at all but preference. We all "prefer" certain settings and styles of worship. Ethnic groups, as well as age groups, generally have preferences that are based on experience and upbringing—on what is familiar and comfortable. This may be another reason why God has granted us denominations. There's nothing wrong with having preferences, but there is something wrong when our preferences become the standard by which we judge others. Enjoy your God-given preferences, but don't allow them to become the standard by which you evaluate others.

j) **Love and grace should be the driving force behind motives.** In closing, it may appear that I'm siding with the church on these issues. I'm not. My goal is for the reader to examine motives and make the right decision. Wayne Grudem reminds us, "There were no perfect churches at the time of the New Testament and there will be no perfect churches until Christ returns." He is referencing the Westminster Confession of Faith that says, "The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error" (25.5). Mr. Grudem continues, "This means that Christians have no obligation to seek the *purest* church they can find and stay there, and then leave it if an even purer church comes to their attention. Rather, they should find a *true church* in which they can have effective ministry and in which they will experience Christian growth as well, and then should stay there and minister, continually working for the purity of that church."

This doesn't mean that we overlook the spiritual health of the church; we need wisdom. Grudem concludes, "But we must realize that not all churches will respond well to influences that would bring them to greater purity. Sometimes, in spite of a few faithful Christians within a church, its dominant direction will be set by others who are determined to lead it on another course. Unless God graciously intervenes to bring reformation, some of these churches will become cults, and others will just die and close their doors. But more commonly these churches will simply drift into liberal Protestantism."[\[13\]](#)

It's been said that people don't care how much we know until they know how much we care. Again, love and grace should be the driving force behind our motives, not winning arguments or proving a point. An attitude of constant criticism is not a positive character trait—it often reveals an inner drive to exalt oneself. Get rid of it. Before making an important decision, always ask, "Is love truly guiding me?" **Furthermore, if you're not in the Word, the Word won't be in you.** Again, one of the best ways to know if God is truly guiding you is to stay, pray, and obey—stay in His Word; pray for guidance; obey His principles. "God is more likely to direct me through wise teaching than through inner voices" (J. I. Packer). Packer isn't discounting the work of the Holy Spirit, but he is cautioning against "inner voice" impulses fueled by man's sinful nature and desires.

Don't let discouragement and failure stand in your way. I could write an entire book on my failures, but instead I try to follow the apostle Paul's advice, and I encourage you to do the same: "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Philippians 3:13). Forget your past mistakes, but remember the lessons learned because of them.

With a clearer Scriptural base now of truth, unity, and confrontation, we can address another important controversial issue confronting our culture—sexual relationships and behavior.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Group Study Questions/Responses**

1. Have you witnessed misapplications of Jesus' words, "Judge not"? List examples.

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2. Give examples of when we should "call into question" certain behaviors, choices, and lifestyles that lead people away from the truth. Are there times when we should say nothing? Explain.

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3. Do you agree that failure to recognize diverse gifts may explain why some become judgmental? Why? Why not?"

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4. Extending grace does not mean that we approve of sinful behavior, but it does mean that we are sensitive to others. Give examples of when you can extend grace.

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5. Proverbs 15:22 says that our plans can go wrong simply because we fail to ask for godly advice. Discuss examples, personal or otherwise.

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6. All issues cannot be equal—if everything is a priority, then nothing is. What issues should be a priority based on cultural trends and the Scriptures? Why?

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7. Which discussion, if any, was the most thought-provoking in the section entitled *Before You Leave*? In your opinion, what are the top three reasons people leave a church?

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### **Reflection & Journaling**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights

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Prayers & Practical Application

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### **Recommended Resources**

*Who Are You to Judge? Learning to Distinguish Between Truths, Half-Truths, and Lies*, by Erwin W. Lutzer, questions the church for its tolerance of secular values and lifestyles and challenges believers to be a force for what's right. Learn how to make godly decisions concerning doctrine, entertainment, conduct, character, and more.

*Love: The More Excellent Way*, by Chuck Smith, takes a closer look at genuine love, what it is, what it does, and how it transforms everything it touches. *Why Grace Changes Everything* is another helpful resource by Pastor Chuck.

*Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, by John MacArthur, offers a biblical response to today's most controversial issues—and how to judge “rightly.” MacArthur tackles tough

questions on in-vitro fertilization, radical terrorism, homosexual marriage, environmentalism, the economy, and more.

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*Don't confuse hate-speech with loving confrontation  
or intolerance with biblical truth.*

*No matter what you have experienced,  
you have the ability to turn  
to Christ and start anew.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

# SEXUAL SIN

### Extending Compassion— Not Compromise

**M**y hope is that readers will read this entire chapter before drawing conclusions. I have nothing but compassion for those trapped in sexual sin. Those who strongly believe in the Bible and God's will regarding sexual behavior also strongly believe in unconditional love and forgiveness. To say that authentic Christians hate or fear those trapped in the homosexual lifestyle demonstrates a gross misunderstanding of the Christian faith. To "confront in love" simply comes from a desire to honor God and to truly love and care for others.

The ability to relate to people on their level, show genuine concern, and love them regardless of their lifestyle is the mark of true Christianity. Unfortunately, Christians often embrace one of two extremes. At one extreme are those who insult or who are violent toward those trapped in this lifestyle. Homosexuality appears at the top of their sin list. With this group, there is very little love or compassion. The other extreme excuses this sin and looks the other way. Both extremes are wrong and offer a false impression of genuine Christianity—we must extend compassion but without compromise.

Warning, confronting, challenging, advising, and admonishing are all characteristic of genuine love. Parents warn, confront, challenge, and admonish daily. Truly misled or self-serving individuals would wrongly attribute these traits to "hate-mongers."

Let's be careful not to confuse hate speech with loving confrontation, intolerance with biblical truth, and rights with sexual preferences. As we read in the first chapter, certain "rights" and "wrongs" called absolutes are given by God to save man from himself. In the same way that a foundation supports the entire structure, house, or skyscraper, foundational biblical truths support the social structure. Nearly all our social issues are related to the stability and structure of the God-ordained family.

Ironically, as I was writing this chapter, a postmodern leader made headlines by suggesting that those who embrace the homosexual lifestyle can live in harmony with biblical Christianity.[\[14\]](#)

Consider this, and please be sincere: Many say that we cannot take a position on homosexuality because all positions will hurt someone. Here's my question: "Are those who defend homosexuality or who say nothing truly loving the homosexual, or are they simply seeking to avoid conflict?" For instance, if they are more worried about being liked than being truthful, do they really care for homosexuals more than those who are willing to risk their reputation, and quite possibly their safety, to speak the truth in love? The answer is obvious. Authentic Christians love the truth and others to the degree that they are willing to risk the consequences of confrontation in order to help others. This is genuine love, not hatred. **"When we become so tolerant that we lead people into mental fog and spiritual darkness, we are not acting like Christians—we are acting like cowards"** (A. W. Tozer).

Would we say, “I believe that those who embrace pornography can live in harmony with biblical Christianity”? Or, “I believe that those who embrace adultery or fornication can live in harmony with biblical Christianity”? Of course not. Unfortunately, one of the greatest mistakes in our culture today involves not being able to discern between right and wrong. The battle cry is focused on “individual rights” rather than obedience to God’s Word. For example, pornography and other similar forms of so-called “personal expression” that harm individuals as well as society do not fit within the perimeters of exercising personal rights—logically, biblically, or historically.

Sadly, many cases of sexual violence and adultery can be traced directly back to pornography. **Personal rights were intended to operate freely but only within the framework of God’s Word and social responsibility.** For example, few can dispute the significant relationship between STDs and promiscuous sex, AIDS and homosexuality, broken homes and adultery, and so on. But those in support of gay marriage often claim that it’s about “rights.” However, when we speak of Constitutional rights, we are referring to “God-given” rights. God orchestrates these rights—their definition and their perimeters—and they correspond with His nature, His will, and His Word. *When we replace “God-given rights” with “man-given rights,” we create an environment where there is little recourse and no end to what man could advocate. Yes, we will always have the freedom to choose what we do, but no one has the “right” to do what is wrong.*

God’s Word is very clearly opposed to fornication, adultery, homosexuality, pornography, and other sexual sins. If our sexual preferences run contrary to God’s Word, we must change our preferences, not redefine truth. Same-sex marriage is not about “rights”—it’s about sexual “choices.” But can we legislate morality? No, we cannot change hearts by forcing laws or rules on them, but we can uphold statutes that protect the health and welfare of society, such as preserving marriage between a man and a woman. Although times change, God’s standards do not. No matter how many laws are passed in favor of same-sex marriage, it will not change God’s mind. Again, His principles are guardrails through the canyons of life. They don’t prevent us from enjoying life; they protect us from falling.

If being labeled narrowminded, bigoted, judgmental, and intolerant is the cost of speaking the truth in love, so be it. If we know there is a roaring lion waiting to devour, we should lovingly speak the truth. Again, how can we warn if we never confront, correct if we never challenge, and contend if we never question?

### ***Five Biblical Points to Consider***

Many believe that Jesus did not address homosexuality, when the opposite is true. Consider the following:

1. Every “moral” law in the Old Testament is valid in the New. Jesus referred often to the Old Testament. He said that He didn’t come to abolish it, but to fulfill it. The ceremonial and dietary laws of the Old Testament do not necessarily apply today; however, the “moral” laws of the Old Testament (kill, steal, lie, adultery, bear false witness, etc.) are as significant today as they have been throughout history. Leviticus 20:13 states, “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.” To suggest that this verse is invalid today is to advocate the dangerous practice of redefining or deleting what God has said.

One Hollywood actor made the following statement regarding this issue: “The Bible encourages slavery, and it says that certain foods are an abomination. Therefore, homosexuality is obviously okay now!” First, the Bible doesn’t say that slavery is “right”—it merely references a time when people had slaves and what those conditions were. Second, the word “abomination” can mean loathsome, detestable, something to avoid, and so on. I see no conflict whatsoever with using the same word, but to compare the two is like grasping for the wind. **The consequences of wrong actions may have changed, but the moral implications remain the same.** For instance, even though we no longer stone to death those who commit adultery, this does not mean that adultery is acceptable or any less dangerous to the family. Adultery is wrong even though there aren’t legal consequences. That’s why we can say that every moral law in the Old Testament is valid in the New.

2. Jesus condemned *all* sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and woman. In Matthew 15:19, Jesus said, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications. . . . These defile a man.” He was implying that all sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman is harmful and immoral. The word “fornication” in the Greek is *porneia*—where the word “pornography” comes from, and it includes all illicit sex. Jesus understood that sexual sin often results in the death of a family, a marriage, and the integrity of an individual—the entire family, and society, loses. The Bible is crystal clear on this issue. Homosexuality, like all sexual sin, is harmful and morally wrong.

3. An argument cannot be based solely on silence. To suggest that Jesus approved of homosexuality simply because He did not use the term “homosexual,” is to imply that He approved of necrophilia, pedophilia, incest, and bestiality. But, of course, we know better.

4. The New Testament is clear on this issue. Romans 1:18-32 and 1 Corinthians 6:1–20 are good places to start. In short, mankind did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer; therefore, God gave them over to a depraved mind—to do those things which are not proper. Homosexual behavior is comparable with dishonoring the body and turning from God. John Piper said, “The sexual disordering of the human race is a judgment of God for exchanging Him for the creature.”[\[15\]](#)

Jesus said that since the beginning of creation, God created them male and female in order that they would be joined together and become one flesh. He adds, “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:9).

5. Recognize the biblical difference between a “lifestyle” and a “struggle.” The following analogy applies to sin. A pig and a lamb both find their way to the mud. The mud represents the sin that we all fall into. The pig wallows in and enjoys the mud and may even lead others in, whereas the lamb hates its condition and cries out. That’s the difference—Jesus speaks out against those who continually return to and enjoy wallowing in sin, but His love and mercy reaches out to those who regret and hate their condition. Jesus tells us that forgiveness is a mark of genuine faith. He understands the power in forgiving and being forgiven. It’s not about perfection but direction.

We should have compassion for those who struggle with sexual sin, but at the same time, we should not condone or excuse this type of sin any more than we condone or excuse any other sin. Again, no matter how many laws are passed in favor of same-sex marriage, it will not change

God’s mind: “For I am the LORD, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6). Marriage between a man and a woman is a foundational truth that should not be degraded, changed, or altered. With the influence of the media and the promotion of recreational sex through movies, TV, music, and the internet, we would do well to carefully monitor our own thoughts and actions before casting the first stone.

As a final word of encouragement, if you’re searching and not finding, hurting and not healing, and living but not loving, I encourage you to look to the One who has the answers and commit your life to Him. No matter what you have done or have experienced—from sexual abuse and abortion to promiscuity and homosexuality—you have the ability to turn to Christ and start anew. One famous quote captures it well: “A true measure of a person is not who they were, but who they will become.” It’s all about Whom you know!

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Group Study Questions/Responses**

1. Christians strongly believe in unconditional love. To say that authentic Christians hate those trapped in the homosexual lifestyle demonstrates a gross misunderstanding of the Christian faith. Agree? Disagree? Explain.

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2. Do you believe that Christianity teaches us to love the truth and others to the degree that we are willing to risk confrontation? Explain.

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3. Do you agree that every moral law in the Old Testament is valid in the New? Why or why not?

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4. Did Jesus condemn *all* sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and woman? Explain.

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5. If marriage between a man and a woman is a foundational truth, why is it degraded, changed, or altered? Explain.

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6. Is the New Testament clear on the issue of homosexuality? List examples.

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7. *If you're searching and not finding, hurting and not healing, and living but not loving, I encourage you to look to the One who has the answers and commit your life to Him.* Does this apply to you?

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**Reflection & Journaling**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights

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Prayers & Practical Application

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**Recommended Resources**

*Love Wins Out: Addressing Homosexuality in Our Culture* (DVD), by H. B. London Jr., offers perspectives from past homosexuals. You'll learn how to reach out, how to respond to the "born that way" argument, and how to extend compassion without compromise.

*Desire and Deceit: The Real Cost of the New Sexual Tolerance*, by Albert Mohler Jr., offers Christians a wide-angle view of the dramatic and disastrous shift that has taken place in our culture concerning sexual issues.

*The Truth about Same-Sex Marriage* (on CD), Erwin W. Lutzer, sorts truth from spin and takes on some tough questions such as: How did we get to this point? Why is marriage as God intended better and healthier? How can I talk to my kids about this? And many more.

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*The quality of our government depends more upon the character of our leaders than upon our laws.*

*It would seem that we are attempting to be “one nation above God,” rather than “one nation under God.”*

## CHAPTER FIVE

# POLITICS

### Politics—The Great Divide

Some time ago, I sat speechless as I listened to a man recount his trip to a holocaust museum with his young daughter. As they walked by photos of the death camps, gas chambers, and countless bodies piled one upon another, his daughter silently contemplated the horrors that were unfolding before her eyes.

When the tour ended, they drove home without saying a word. The father wondered if she truly understood the significance of the event. Was she too young to view such depravity? Was she too fragile to cope with the truth of the holocaust? Would it make a negative impact on her life? Would it leave her fearful? Would she begin to doubt God? His questions were answered nearly two hours later when his daughter finally spoke. She looked at her father and asked, “Daddy, why didn’t someone do something?”

Will we hear those same haunting words from our children and grandchildren? If we fail to contend for what is right, we may see a time in our history when our children will ask, “Why didn’t someone do something?” Sadly, we may not be able to answer.

As I complete this book, war rages in the Middle East, and the potential for nuclear war intensifies. America is divided on many fronts. Where are the answers? How will our future and security unfold in the days to come?

My intention in this chapter is not to elevate politics above the gospel, nor am I seeking to endorse a political party or elevate America’s Founders. My goal is to point to the power of Scripture to shape an individual as well as a nation. Who we are in our personal lives will reflect who we are as a nation.

In the last few decades, we have seen the destruction of the institution of marriage between a man and a woman, the removal of God’s Word in several areas, and the aborting of millions of babies. Ironically, many of the men and women who died for our freedoms did not die for what we are becoming today. They understood sacrifice—duty to Country was duty to God. Many gave their lives in order that we would be “one nation under God,” not above God. **A Fifth Division graveyard sign in Iwo Jima, Japan, states it well: “When you go home, tell them for us and say, ‘For your tomorrows we gave our today.’”**<sup>[16]</sup> What a travesty when we fail to honor those who gave their lives for the freedoms we now enjoy.

In the words of a famous quote attributed to Father O’Brien (who served in World War II), “It is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us the freedom of the press. It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us the freedom of speech. It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, who gives us the freedom to demonstrate.” The quote continues: “It is the soldier who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the protester to burn the flag.”<sup>[17]</sup>

Let's be very clear on this: "A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both" (Dwight D. Eisenhower).<sup>[18]</sup> Historically, we know that God judged those nations who continually rejected His principles—wrong choices had devastating consequences. Arnold Toynbee, who wrote *A Study of History*, in 1961 said, "Of the 22 civilizations that have appeared in history, 19 of them collapsed when they reached the moral state America is in today."

Historians realize that a government like ours in America cannot last forever. Collapse is caused by moral decay and financial irresponsibility—liberty often leads to abundance, abundance to complacency, complacency to apathy, apathy to a loss of freedom. Based on this, where are we today? Unfortunately, countless people are confusing God's patience with His approval.

**"Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever" (often attributed to Thomas Jefferson).**

C. S. Lewis said, "The safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts." *We're often too smart to take large, deliberate plunges, but we're easily enticed to take one step at a time.* This isn't meant to frighten but to awaken.

One year, with summer approaching, I stepped into my in-laws' swimming pool. My immediate reaction to the piercing cold water was to step out, but I continued down the steps. I stopped when the water reached my knees. After a few minutes, I continued to move slowly down, stopping for brief periods until I was fully submerged. Each step was shocking, but I gradually became comfortable with the cold water—my body accepted what was initially shocking. In the same way, we've become comfortable with sin, and what once alarmed us now amuses us. We continue to hear, "Come on in! It's not that bad. Everyone's doing it!" And we step right in. **America has been desensitized one generation at a time, one court decision at a time, one compromise at a time, and we are drowning in a cesspool of relativism.** *The wicked freely parade and prance about while evil is praised throughout the land* (Psalm 12:8).

A great divide exists in our nation, even among Christians. How would Jesus vote? Would Jesus run for president? Would Jesus authorize war? Aren't there more important issues than gay marriage and abortion? The questions are endless.

One thing is certain. Regardless of our thoughts on politics, God established the concept of government. He desires godly leaders who govern according to His standards, not ours. Granted, there will always be a moral divide in America, but this should not deter us from challenging faulty policies and procedures.

At the time of this writing, it is said that we live in the greatest country in the world, but the success we cherish is not the result of chance. Many early Americans, including most of the Founders, understood that for a nation to thrive and prosper, God's Word must provide the basis for the government and the welfare of society. I'm not suggesting a theocracy, nor were the Founders, but I am suggesting a return to biblical values. Just as water rapidly eroded the banks of the mighty Colorado River and created a vast Grand Canyon, America's current belief system of relativism has eroded her foundation and created a moral void.

There was a time in recent history when America felt secure knowing that her most formidable enemies were abroad. Not so today. **While we are concerned with terrorist attacks, and**

**rightly so, there is a greater threat from corruption within.** We, like the mighty Roman Empire that collapsed centuries ago, are crumbling from within. Historian Edward Gibbon recalls the condition of Rome before her fall: 1) The rapid increase in divorce and “the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home”; 2) More taxation and the spending of public funds on food and entertainment; 3) “The mad craze for pleasure and sport; sport becoming every year more and more exciting and brutal”; 4) The building up of the military when the real enemy is within—“in the decadence of the people themselves”; 5) “The decay of religious faith; faith fading into mere form.”[\[19\]](#)

If this isn't a wake-up call for America, then I don't know what is—from the rapid divorce rate and the disintegration of the family to massive government over spending, from the mad craze for reality shows and ultimate fighting matches to hypocrisy and pride in the church—we are clearly on a collision course. And we, like Rome, are too arrogant to humble ourselves, repent, and ask God for forgiveness. We attempt to be “one nation ‘above’ God,” rather than “one nation ‘under’ God.” Scripture identifies this as foolishness, self-exaltation, and arrogance—the downfall of all nations.

There is a saying that *one generation plants trees for the next generation*. I'm concerned that instead of planting, we are removing and destroying the very covering that protects us. As a result, our legacy as a great and noble nation has all but been forgotten. Most schools no longer teach students about the spiritual foundation that has guided America throughout her history. Additionally, there are people and groups who are strongly committed to the destruction of anything rooted in our nation's Christian heritage. Consequently, America's moral and religious heritage is often deleted, grossly distorted, or revised altogether. As a result, students often miss the critical connection between America's unparalleled greatness, its rise to world leadership, and the spiritual foundation that made it possible. This should concern us. *The ideas of the classroom in one generation will create the ideas of government within the next.*

Although this position may seem radical or extreme, we are living in extremely critical times. Make no mistake about it. We are witnessing the rapid deterioration of a nation right before our eyes. But there is hope, as 2 Chronicles 7:14 calls out from the past with resounding clarity to America today: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” Without question—repentance, prayer, and humility before God are our only hope.

First and foremost, we cannot deny our primary responsibility, which is to encourage people to turn to Christ as their Lord and Savior. This is how America will truly change from the inside out. The number one problem in America is not a political problem but rather a spiritual problem called sin. **The primary goal of the church is not to become a political movement but a spiritual influence.** *Politics won't save America any more than a dumbbell will save someone drowning.* Nevertheless, we cannot ignore our God-given civic responsibility and the enormous impact that politics has on our society. America's leaders play a big role in shaping the direction of the country. Events such as the American Revolution, the abolition of slavery, and the civil rights movement (to mention only a few) happened because Christians took action. Leadership matters!

All political parties are vulnerable to greed and corruption. This is why we should vote for principles, not a particular party. “He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (2 Samuel 23:3). “Ruling in the fear of God” is the key. We need more humble, God-fearing leaders. The Lord hates pride, arrogance, and self-centeredness. Without humility and a teachable spirit, it’s difficult, if not impossible, to govern properly. **Humility does not mean that leaders become passive pawns but that they live in total surrender to God—they’re more concerned with God’s opinion than opinion polls.** It’s been said that the quality of our government depends more upon the character of our leaders than upon our laws. *But be careful—many use “religious talk” and twist the Scriptures to support unbiblical initiatives.* For example, in one setting, leaders will express their religious convictions and quote the Bible, but in another setting, they’ll vote for partial-birth abortion and against protecting babies who survive late-term abortions. Judge what they *do* more than what they *say*.

Why is politics such a divisive issue? In my opinion, the answer is relatively simple. As I said before, in the same way that a foundation supports the entire structure of a house, foundational biblical truths support the social structure. The problem is that foundational truths are no longer important. The damage has been catastrophic. **All social issues are related to the stability and structure of the God-ordained family and absolute truth. Remove these foundational pillars, and the whole structure crumbles.**

Most are divided on what constitutes “foundational pillars.” Are poverty, the environment, social injustice, alternative fuels, economics, and foreign policy foundational pillars? Or, are they gay marriage, sex trafficking, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, nuclear war, and so on? This is why all issues cannot be equal—if everything is a priority, then nothing is. We need to build on the proper foundation and prioritize our priorities. For example, helping those who truly need help should be the goal of every believer. Poverty would be severely curtailed if more people—Republicans, Independents, and Democrats alike—would simply give more. But to suggest that government is the answer or has the answer to poverty is to diminish our responsibility as Christians. Before we look to the government for funding our social programs, consider that only a small percent of Christians actually give to those in need. If we would simply live below our means and give more, we could help to eradicate the government’s involvement.

“What about war?” you may ask. “Shouldn’t we always avoid it?” In answering this question, remember that the institution of government was created by God to govern man—to protect, defend, and administer justice. Did you catch that? The primary responsibility and proper function of government is to protect, defend, and administer justice—to be a terror to those who do evil. Christians are not warmongers, as some suggest, but rather, we recognize that there may come a time when war is necessary to restrain evil. We don’t live in an ideal world or a world based on conjecture and theory—we live in an evil and fallen world.

It was Augustine (mentioned earlier) who is often credited with developing the *Just War Theory* for this very reason. The conditions for war required the presence of legitimate authority, a just cause, and right intentions. The Scriptures clearly support this as well. Therefore it’s extremely unwise to wrongly apply Jesus’ teachings, such as “turning the other cheek,” to the institution of government. Contextually, Jesus was referring to personal affronts and insults, not to the administration of justice. Nor can we apply the Sermon on the Mount to war and the proper function of government. **One of the primary purposes of government is to protect those who obey the law from those who break it.** And this sometimes refers to war. Although war is

detestable, it may be necessary to restrain evil. The God-ordained primary role of government is to be a terror to those who do evil (cf. Romans 13).

Politics that once focused largely on the economy, national security, and the deficit now tackles important moral issues. These major issues have enormous implications. To remain silent actually makes a statement that we are not concerned enough. This is not just about the loss of jobs—it's about the loss of morality! We're not just talking about adding millions of dollars to the national deficit—we're talking about aborting millions of babies. We're not only talking about fluctuations in the housing market, we're talking about creating life simply to destroy it. **Topics that are “too controversial” are often critically important. We can no longer turn a deaf ear.**

### ***Removing God from Government***

The perpetual question that always arises is: “What about separation of church and state? Shouldn't we keep our faith private and our mouths shut? After all, America really isn't a Christian nation.” To adequately evaluate America's heritage requires that we turn back time hundreds of years before 1776, when the seeds of our political system were planted.

The Pilgrims and Puritans, deeply committed to the Judeo-Christian faith and strongly influenced by Christian principles, emerged when the religious climate in Europe changed in the early 1500s. This was a time when many Christians returned to the authority of God's Word and the purity of biblical doctrine. These two groups eventually arrived in America in the early 1600s. Their prayers, journals, and writings, such as the *Mayflower Compact*, indicate that their intent was the furtherance of the *good news* (gospel) of Christ and His teachings. The truth is that America was influenced greatly by Christianity and the Bible. For example, Scripture was referenced often when the Constitution was drafted to ensure that each proposal was biblical.[\[20\]](#) Although far from perfect, the Constitution was grounded in God's wisdom for all men for all time.

With that said, I'm hesitant to label America a “Christian nation.” Christians are followers of Christ, whereas a nation is a group of people who share a common identity, and often, a common origin. Some of the Founders, such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, were not considered Christians. For this reason, America is not a Christian nation in the sense that every citizen or Founder was a Christian or was required to be one. But America is often labeled a Christian nation because her foundation was built on biblical principles and Christian character. For instance, even though “no religious test is to be required as a qualification to any public office,”[\[21\]](#) the Founders still wanted a person's faith to influence policy-making decisions. “No religious test” was only in reference to a federally-established denomination. Individual states had religious tests. Faith was to be encouraged, not forced. This is also one reason why Jesus is not mentioned in the Constitution (other than being referenced in the date)—it was a document to govern, not proselytize.

In light of this, politics takes on a whole new meaning. **It's not about rewriting the Constitution to fit our postmodern views—it's about rethinking our postmodern views to support the Constitution.** Many can manipulate the words of early Americans to fit their ideology, but it's difficult to manipulate their intent. *Their intentions clearly indicated that early Americans were concerned about the government influencing religion rather than religion*

*influencing the government*. They wanted faith to influence policy-making decisions, but they did not want the government influencing religion.

Freedom of religion was not freedom *from* religion—separation of church and state does not mean separation of God and government. National policy was to be shaped by God’s principles. For example, many of the ideas found in the *Declaration of Independence* came directly from John Locke’s masterful work *Two Treatises on Civil Government*. To illustrate the proper function of civil government, Locke cited the Bible approximately 1,500 times. Additionally, America’s three branches of government can be found in Isaiah 33:22, the tax-exempt status for churches in Ezra 7:24, and the reason behind “separation of powers” in Jeremiah 17:9. Additionally, America’s Founders introduced approximately 1,400 official prayer proclamations prior to 1815.

I’m not suggesting that the Founders were without fault or that they were all Christians. They were human and made mistakes. In general, however, most were committed to God’s wisdom when they set forth the foundation for our government and the nation. A brief review of their last will and testaments will confirm this. It’s amazing to see how many of these men acknowledged God and their Savior, Jesus Christ.

At some point, the issue of slavery arises when discussing the Founding Fathers, and rightly so, because it is a formidable mark on our nation’s history. Surprisingly, many Founders were opposed to slavery and diligently fought for abolition. As the President of Congress Henry Laurens explained: “I abhor slavery. I was born in a country where slavery had been established by British Kings and Parliaments, as well as by the laws of the country ages before my existence.” Joseph Reed, governor of Pennsylvania, added, “Honored will that State be in the annals of history which shall first abolish this violation of the rights of mankind.” The list of Founders who opposed slavery is actually quite extensive.[\[22\]](#)

Back to the question of separation of church and state. A monumental debate about the government’s role concerning religion has continued over the years. For those who understand the foundation on which the Constitution was constructed, there really is no debate. Don’t worry, this shouldn’t bore you. I’ll get straight to the point. The misconception primarily surrounds the phrase “separation of church and state.” Although the First Amendment clearly says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” one would think that it reads: *Congress shall prevent religious expression*. The courts have falsely used the infamous “separation” phrase to ban religious activities, primarily those promoting Christian principles. Sadly, many believe that “separation of church and state” appears in the Constitution, when in reality, the phrase does not appear anywhere in the Constitution. Did you catch that? “Separation of church and state” does not appear in the Constitution. So where did it originate? Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, used the phrase in 1802 in a private letter written to the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut.[\[23\]](#)

The Baptists feared that the government might someday try to regulate religious expression. Ironically, we are seeing this today. Remember, that’s one reason why the Pilgrims left England for Holland before coming to America. This is crucial in understanding the spirit in which the First Amendment was written. **In other words, the Colonists, like the Pilgrims, did not want**

**the government imposing a national religion or denomination on the people—they wanted to worship freely.** Mr. Jefferson wisely agreed with them, as did many of the other Founders.

Jefferson assured the Baptists that the primary purpose of the First Amendment was to prevent rivalry among Christian denominations. He said that Congress would neither establish a national denomination nor prohibit the free exercise of religion. His statement was intended to protect religious expression by *building a wall of separation between the church and the state*, solidifying the fact that the federal government could not strike down religious freedoms.

Again, the first part of the First Amendment reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Note the words, “no law respecting an establishment of religion.” The government cannot *establish* a national religion, but it can openly and unapologetically *acknowledge* the sovereign hand of God.

Acknowledgment is not establishment. That’s why arguments such as “if you display the Ten Commandments, you should also be required to display an alternative message” are absurd. **Ten-Commandment monuments can be displayed and prayer can be honored in government offices and in schools without offering alternative messages.**

We can openly acknowledge God in all areas of civil government because our government was founded on His Word, His precepts, and His principles—we must acknowledge Him as the source of our nation’s strength. If you doubt this, simply review the Annals of Congress from June 8th to September 25th, 1789. These Annals contain the official records of those who drafted the First Amendment. These gentlemen certainly had something to say about the issue. The delegate from Massachusetts actually said that the First Amendment would read better if it said, “no religious doctrine shall be established by law.”

Jefferson said that the freedom to express religion was a God-given right. **The federal government was to be restrained in the area of religion. They could not seize power from the states.** However, approximately 150 years later, in 1947, the Supreme Court radically changed the meaning of the First Amendment. In *Everson v. Board of Education*, the Court did something unheard of—they coupled the First Amendment with the Fourteenth Amendment. Therefore, the states could no longer engage in religious activities, and the federal courts could now restrict such activities. This is clearly opposed to the freedom the Framers envisioned. The state and the church were to be separate in their duties and functions but interwoven in their core beliefs and principles. In the Old Testament, God separated the church from the state in relation to these duties and functions. *The state was to protect, administer justice, and defend the nation. The church was to care for the people, guard the Word of God, and serve as the conscience of the government and of the people.* You may want to commit those last few sentences to memory—with that understanding, there’s really no debate.

Those who cry “separation of church and state” the loudest are often those who reject God and His principles—they want the freedom to do what they want, when they want, how they want, to whom they want. I’m not referring to those who desire a healthy debate and/or may disagree with my position—some of the Puritans, for example, preferred a State Church. I’m referring to those who make their own rules and avoid any mention of God. “The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts” (Psalm 10:4). If there’s a God, and there is, then the current direction of America’s morality is wrong, which is something that

few want to admit. This is why many want a complete separation of church and state—out of sight, out of mind.

*Newsweek* magazine, on December 27, 1982, in an article entitled “How the Bible Made America,” made this revealing statement: “Historians are discovering that the Bible, perhaps even more than the Constitution, is our Founding document.” Undoubtedly, the Bible is the solid rock upon which our republic rests. For those who doubt this and believe that statements in the Declaration of Independence, such as “the laws of nature and of nature’s God,” were products of the enlightenment, deism, or secularism, you may want to read quotes from Founders such as Alexander Hamilton, Noah Webster, John Jay, William Findley, Rufus King, and James Wilson. All attested to the fact that “the laws of nature and of nature’s God” refer to laws given by God Himself. *John Quincy Adams stated that the phrase assumes the existence of a God, the moral ruler of the universe, and a rule of right and wrong.*[\[24\]](#)

**Again, if a proposed article for the Constitution was not supported or rooted in the Bible, it was not considered. In their early writings, many of the Founding Fathers quoted or referenced the Bible more than any other source.** No enlightenment, deism, or secularism here—only God and His Word.

For those who say, “I don’t want to get involved,” remember that we are already involved—by saying nothing we say something. Our government is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This means that a believer should be involved in running for office, voting, and/or monitoring those in office to assure that they perform their duties. The welfare of society often falls in the hands of the Christian community.

For those who believe we should remain passive and silent, I challenge you to read the writings of the Old Testament prophets. They lamented, shed tears, and pleaded with the people and the leaders to turn from their sins and to turn back to God—they spoke the truth in love. Even Jesus wept for Jerusalem when He saw that her destruction was near.

You may wonder, “Where is he going with this?” Straight to the point. Think of what this will mean for our children and grandchildren. **If we fail to stand up for what is right—right now—we may see a time in our history when our freedoms and theirs will vanish.** With the acceptance of same-sex marriage and failure to protect the unborn, that time may be close at hand. Psalm 11:3 states, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” And the last half of Isaiah 7:9 affirms, “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all” (NIV). This battle is for the very soul of our nation. It’s our choice—will we stand or fall?

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Group Study Questions**

1. If it’s true that *one generation plants trees for the next generation*, how are we removing and destroying the very covering that protects us.
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2. *One of the primary purposes of government is to protect those who obey the law from those who break it.* How might this influence your view of war?

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3. Freedom of religion is not freedom *from* religion—separation of church and state does not mean separation of God and government. How have we totally missed this in recent years?

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4. The government cannot *establish* a national religion, but it can openly and unapologetically *acknowledge* the sovereign hand of God. Acknowledgment is not establishment. Comment.

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5. Those who cry “separation of church and state” the loudest are often those who reject God and His principles—they want the freedom to do what they want, when they want, how they want, to whom they want. Why is this?

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6. *The arrogant man does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.* How does Psalm 10:4 apply to us today?

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7. *If we fail to stand up for what is right—right now— we may see a time in our history when our freedoms and theirs will vanish.* Do you agree?

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### **Reflection & Journaling**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights

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## Prayers & Practical Application

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### **Recommended Resources**

*Of Plymouth Plantation*, by William Bradford, is an eyewitness account that accurately traces the history of the New Plymouth Settlement in the early hours of American history. It demonstrates why God’s Word must provide the basis for the government and the welfare of society.

*The Light and the Glory*, by Peter Marshall and David Manuel, reviews the providential history of America and shows why early Americans followed God’s design for a prosperous life.

*The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States*, by Benjamin F. Morris, was first published in 1864. This remarkable resource contains more than one thousand pages of original source material, making the case that America was founded as a Christian nation and that early Americans understood the biblical significance of civil government.

*Original Intent*, by David Barton, brilliantly documents the Founders’ own words in relation to forming America’s system of government. *The Question of Freemasonry and the Founding Fathers* is another helpful resource from Mr. Barton. It dispels the myth that the Framers were influenced by Freemasonry.

*One Nation “Above” God*, by Shane Idleman. For those interested, the majority of this chapter was excerpted from this book. It covers a great deal more than what I could offer in this chapter.

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*If we would make it our goal to know Christ more personally, we would preach Christ more powerfully.*

*“The masses are always wrong. In every generation the number of the righteous is small. Be sure you are among them.”*

*A. W. TOZER*

## CHAPTER SIX

# COMPROMISE

## Compromise—A Very Troubling Trend

Compromise can be well illustrated in a story that I heard years ago. Eskimos in the barren North often kill wolves by taking a razor-sharp knife and dipping it in blood. They allow the blood to freeze to the blade. Then they bury the handle of the knife in the snow with the blade exposed. As the wolf begins to lick the blade, his tongue becomes numb and desensitized due to the cold. As he continues, his tongue begins to bleed, and he licks even faster—unaware that he is consuming his own blood and slowly killing himself.

Within time, the Eskimos return and bring the dead animal home. In the same way, the enemy numbs us through compromise. Within time, we, like the wolves, don't realize that we are dying—dying spiritually. The enemy desensitizes us until we are numb to the things of God.

There is a very troubling trend toward moral compromise in the evangelical church. I've witnessed soft-porn images on Christian websites, questionable movie clips during PowerPoint sermons, and youth pastors talk about their favorite sexually charged TV show or movie with the youth—all under the guise of “relating” to the culture.

For example, many years ago I attended a youth conference, and although the conference was for young women, there were male volunteers present as well. The conference speaker began by showing sexual images on the large screen in the church. These images were taken directly from music videos and magazines and from CD and DVD covers. As I looked up, I saw a cross on one side of the building and a clip of a sexually explicit music video on the other. The speaker continued to show clip after clip of these images. She wanted to create shock value. Although she had a very good message and appeared extremely sincere, I believe that her message could have been compromised. It's hard to justify having the cross of Christ on one side of the church and those types of images on the other.

As W. Graham Scroggie once said, “Light and darkness, right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error are incompatibles . . . when they compromise it is the light, the right, the good, and the truth that are damaged.” **The church should not reflect or imitate the world but lovingly confront it.** Psalm 101:3 warns us not to put anything wicked before our eyes, and 1 Timothy 4:12 exhorts us to be examples of purity and decency.

*We do need to shock people; we need to shock them with the truth of God's Word.* In our pursuit to “relate to others” and to “reach people where they are” in our postmodern culture, we run the risk of serving two masters. But this can be avoided if the messenger truly reflects the message. For example, how inappropriate would it be for the president of the United States to send Elmo to express his sympathies for a family who lost a loved one in combat?<sup>[25]</sup> It would be inexcusable and disrespectful. But that's exactly what we do when we compromise the gospel. There are some things you just don't do out of respect for the message.

Another example that immediately comes to mind was when a Christian organization used a 30-foot-high blow-up male sexual organ to promote a pornography conference. Granted, the need to address the dangers of pornography has never been greater, and I applaud them for taking action, but does a 30-foot male sexual organ really send the right message? Would the apostle Paul and Jesus actually commend this promotional idea? Using inflatable sexual symbols to promote a Christian pornography conference is like using Elmo to speak on behalf of the president. The message and the messenger must be congruent. The ends do not always justify the means. With that said, consider a few practical steps to avoid compromise:

- **Before asking if an event, website, promotional idea, or advertisement is culturally relevant, we should ask, “Does it glorify Christ?”** Is it consistent with our Christian character? Will it send the right message? Will it cause others to stumble or think less of the gospel?
- Make sure, without a shadow of doubt, that God is leading you. For example, it may not be wise for most men to minister inside of a porn convention. Guys are very visual, and the distractions would be endless. God wants us to reach out to our community, but not if we fall when we reach. Use wisdom, think things through, and ask, “Is God truly directing me? Are my actions consistent with Scripture?”
- Seek godly counsel on a regular basis from mature believers who can help direct your steps, examine motives, and offer sincere advice. All that we do and say should reflect the integrity and seriousness of our message (cf. Titus 2:7).
- Look to the Word first and foremost for direction, wisdom, and discernment. Many of the questions about being culturally relevant could be answered if we simply looked to God’s Word instead of the world for the answers. God’s Word is truth for all men for all time.

In general, our culture is looking for authenticity—even they understand that a compromised life sends a compromised message. A. W. Tozer noted, “Where does Christianity destroy itself in a given generation? It destroys itself by not living in the light, by professing a truth it does not obey.” What an insightful perspective, especially for us today. I believe this is one reason why the church has experienced a mass exodus of young people. They are tired of hypocrisy and compromise—they want real answers. Since postmodern and emergent leaders correctly identify one of the problems as being *hypocrisy*, they gain a measure of trust. They appeal to the frustrations that many of us are feeling. This fact helps fuel their movement.

We cannot make excuses and compromise God’s Word under the pretext of relating to our culture. Our culture doesn’t need more of the same. **D. A. Carson, a New Testament research professor, said, “Is there at least some danger that what is being advocated [in the emergent church movement] is not so much a new kind of Christian in a new emerging church, but a church that is so submerging itself in the culture that it risks hopeless compromise?”**<sup>[26]</sup> In John 15:19, Jesus said, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” In short, if we are of this world the world will love us, but if we are truly His followers, the world will hate us.

This begs the question, “Does the world love the way you *do church*”? Do they appreciate that your church never challenges or calls things into question? Do they like the fact that your church never makes them feel uncomfortable or offended? Are they grateful that you never discuss controversial issues? If so, you may want to reconsider Jesus’ words that true disciples will be hated by the world. Obviously, I’m not saying that churches shouldn’t be welcoming, loving, accepting, friendly, warm, hospitable places of worship, because they should. But please don’t misunderstand. They should also challenge, contend, exhort, reprove, and admonish from the pulpit—this, the world will hate. For those who doubt this, read the writings of Paul, Peter, and James. These men incited tremendous controversy, upset the entire religious system, and offended the world so much that it cost them their lives. The key, again, is to balance truth and love, mercy and repentance, grace and holiness, humility and purity.

### ***Who Is Guiding You?***

Why so much compromise in the church? It’s simple: When truth and spirit-led ministry exit, compromise enters. The church, in an attempt to relate to the world, has so popularized the ministry that it’s hard to distinguish the church from the world (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). I’m not suggesting that a church youth group with a skate park has replaced truth with gimmicks. A skate park may be a great idea. *What I am suggesting is that we have become a church that frowns on holiness and finds immorality and sexual perversion entertaining.* We spend very little time with God in prayer and reflection, and there’s very little humility and brokenness. **As a result, the Holy Spirit is not guiding us—Hollywood is.**

Cancer begins with a single cell. In time, this tiny cell consumes the life of the body. The full-blown moral crisis that we are experiencing today began with small compromises. Again, times change, but God’s standards do not. But you may say, “Everyone is doing it—what’s the big deal?” If everyone’s doing it, take a second look. “The masses are always wrong. In every generation the number of the righteous is small. Be sure you are among them”<sup>[27]</sup> (Tozer). We can be “among them” by allowing the Holy Spirit to bless our work. The message and the messenger must both honor Him. (See Titus 2:7-8 for more on this.)

Although we want to relate to others, our lifestyle should reflect our core convictions. This doesn’t mean that we be prudish and judgmental but real, humble, and loving. They’ll know that we are Christians by our love and by our convictions, not by how well we imitate the world around us. I seldom hear non-Christians say, “I’m turned off by Christianity because Christians seek to avoid compromise.” But I do hear “Christians who say one thing and do another really turn me off.” **There’s an enormous difference between witnessing and being a witness.** Guarding against compromise isn’t just a good idea, it’s absolutely necessary when it comes to preserving our testimony. Aside from guarding ourselves, you never know who might be watching. Again, a compromised life sends a compromised message. Proverbs 4:23 says that we should guard our heart because it affects everything we do. Everything? Yes, everything! It’s not about perfection but direction. Is the direction of our heart toward God or the world? “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15 KJV).

Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah who spoke on God’s behalf, the same plea goes out today, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him” (1 Kings 18:21). Oswald Chambers offers this perspective about Jesus: “He never pleaded, He never

entrapped; He made discipleship intensely narrow, and pointed out certain things which could never be in those who followed Him.”<sup>[28]</sup> Chambers also said, “The words of the Lord hurt and offend until there is nothing left to hurt and offend. Jesus Christ has no tenderness whatever toward anything that is ultimately going to ruin a man in the service of God.” **The church does the most for the world when it is least like the world.** Did you catch that? Christians do the most for the world when they are the least like the world. *One reason why Christianity does not appeal to society is because society does not want the Christ that they see in many Christians.*

The gospel, when rightly understood, should motivate us to turn from sin. A disobedient life should raise concerns. Tozer said it this way: “The idea that God will pardon a rebel who has not given up his rebellion is contrary both to the Scriptures and to common sense”<sup>[29]</sup> (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Throughout the Bible we are commanded to remove anything that causes us to stumble—yes, anything. Again, this may sound as if it borders on legalism, and it can when taken to extremes. But when Paul addressed legalism in the second chapter of Colossians, for example, he zeroed in on festivals and Sabbath days and on consuming or not consuming certain foods. Remember, there is a clear difference between legalism and wisdom—legalism is of no value against the lust of the flesh, but wisdom is. King David said, “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set nothing wicked before my eyes” (Psalm 101:2-3). Although he severely failed at times, David was saying that integrity and moral uprightness should be pursued, especially in the home. Being discerning has nothing to do with legalism; it has everything to do with spiritual integrity, wisdom, and moral purity. Colossians 3:17 declares that “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

### ***Do All Things to the Glory of God***

The door of temptation swings both ways—we can enter or exit. It’s extremely important to be selective in what we watch and listen to and how we spend our time. Why would we willingly walk into the enemy’s camp? Why would we feed wrong desires and thoughts? Feeding the flesh does nothing but bring war against the spirit. The sinful nature opposes the Spirit, primarily through our desires. These opposing forces are constantly fighting each other, and our choices are never free from this conflict (cf. Galatians 5:17). The pull of sex, for example, is everywhere, and like a fishing lure, we don’t notice the hook until we take the bait. Scan the TV and the internet, view the covers of most magazines, listen to the radio, glance at the billboards that line our freeways and at the movies we view—sex surrounds us, and it’s not getting any better. **Consequently, the more we feed this desire, the more we’ll have to fight this desire.** Don’t fight sexual desires; flee them (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:18).

Holiness is not a strange, outdated word. Holiness is being set apart or separated from anything that causes us to sin, whether mentally (in what we think) or physically (in what we do). Holiness begins in the heart. We should continually strive for holiness in all that we do and say. “The Holy Spirit is first of all a moral flame. It is not an accident of language that He is called the Holy Spirit, for whatever else the word holy may mean it does undoubtedly carry with it the idea of moral purity” (Tozer).

Ironically, one youth pastor told me, “I don’t worry about what I watch, or listen to, as long as my heart is right.” But this is a very dangerous view. Most will admit, however, that this

statement is really just an excuse to cross the line when it comes to entertainment. Let's be honest. We rationalize watching and listening to very questionable material because we enjoy it. This is nothing new. Throughout history, God's people turned from serving Him to worshipping gods associated with lust and sexual perversion. This preoccupation often meant the eventual destruction of the nation. "They became an abomination like the thing they loved" (Hosea 9:10). The good news, however, is that restoration often follows repentance.

What we watch and listen to affects the heart—it's impossible to separate the two. If we would make it our goal to know Christ more personally, we would preach Christ more powerfully. For example, if a pastor (or Christian leader) fills his mind with the world all week and expects the Spirit of God to speak boldly through him from the pulpit, he will be gravely mistaken. "The gratification of the flesh and the fullness of the Spirit do not go hand in hand" (R. A. Torrey). E. M. Bounds said, "The sermon cannot rise in its life-giving forces above the man. Dead men give out dead sermons, and dead sermons kill." Bounds continues, "**Everything depends on the spiritual character of the preacher.**" Who he is all week is who he will be when he steps to the pulpit—the passion and conviction of his message is only as strong as the passion and conviction within him. The same is true with you and me: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). What goes in ultimately comes out. A paraphrase of a story that I once heard helps to illustrate this truth:

A young man in need of help for his troubled life walked to a neighboring church. He told the pastor that his life was meaningless and in constant turmoil. He wanted to make better choices but couldn't.

He described the conflict: "It's as if I have two dogs constantly battling within me. One dog is evil, while the other is good. The battles are long and difficult; they drain me emotionally and mentally."

The pastor asked, "Which dog wins the battles?" Hesitantly, the young man admitted, "The evil dog." Without a moment's thought, the pastor looked at him and said, "*Son, that is the one that you feed the most—you need to starve that dog to death!*"

The pastor realized, as should we, that the source of our strength comes from the food that we choose. *What we feed grows, and what grows becomes the stronger force within our lives. Sin has a life cycle—it either grows or withers depending on whether we feed or starve it.* Which dog wins the battle in your mind? Entertainment plays a huge role in this. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." *What you think can provide the framework for who you become—thoughts become words; words, habits; and habits, a lifestyle.* To be completely honest, the list of acceptable entertainment is small—very small. For some, the best policy may be out of sight, out of mind. You'd be amazed at what a week or two of no television would do for your spiritual life.

If you think about it, just a few decades ago, most of today's television programs and movies would have shocked the public. Programs that never would have aired then receive the highest ratings now. You may say, "Times change." And you are correct. But God's standards do not. The sin that once amazed us now amuses us. **When sin begins to amuse us, we are dangerously close to the edge:** "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20).

No wonder families are disintegrating—it's evident to me that we've embraced an attitude of compromise in our nation, and more sadly, in our homes. *Culture reflects our religion*. In other words, the culture around us reflects who and what we value. How we dress, what we view, who our friends are, what we listen to, and how we spend our time all speak volumes as to what we cherish. Are we cherishing the things of God or the things of the world?

The Scriptures are crystal clear on the issue of entertainment—there's really no debate. Philippians 4:8-9 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” Ephesians 5:1-20 also addresses this issue, and enough is said in 2 Timothy alone to silence any debate: *Everyone who names the name of Christ should depart from anything that goes against His standard of holiness*. We must be pure vessels that God can use (cf. 2 Timothy 2:19-21). A pure vessel cannot come from a polluted mind. Years of feeding the flesh will leave us spiritually weak—what goes into our mind ultimately comes out in our actions.

When it comes to entertainment, it's not about following rules. Let your freedom in Christ, and a relationship with Him, guide you. James 1:27 says that Christians are to remain “unspotted” from the world—which literally means to be free from the world's corruption. We should continually ask, “Are we ‘affecting’ the world, or is the world ‘infecting’ us?” We've all watched questionable material and have made wrong choices. Don't live with ongoing regret, but don't justify wrong behavior by thinking that God doesn't care about what you watch or listen to. He does care—we serve and love God with our mind. (cf. Romans 7:25 and Luke 10:27). What we view and listen to clearly affects our relationship with Him. If we find dozens of hours a week to watch movies and television programs but have little time for God, our relationship with Him will suffer—period. Liberty has limits—the key is to ask, “Will it build me up spiritually, or pull me down?”

Again, on the flip side, far too many of us have forgotten about grace. As a result, legalism often surfaces. Legalism has been known to condemn all music, movies, and television programs. It can be defined as a self-righteous attitude that rates spirituality by how well a person follows rules. A legalist often has a sliding scale mentality—the more rules and regulations a person follows, the more spiritual he or she becomes. The legalist often forgets that we are saved because of what Christ did, not by what we do. He or she may have the tendency to view struggling Christians as counterfeits because they don't measure up to a certain standard. Most Christians will struggle with legalism from time to time, and that's why it's important to discuss it and avoid it.

It's been said that grace is one of the most misunderstood of all Christian doctrines. If grace is abused, a person may continue in sin and see nothing wrong with it. If grace is neglected, one may never experience true freedom in Christ. Chuck Swindoll stated it this way: “The liberating truth about our freedom in Christ flies in the face of do-it-yourself religion and challenges Christ's followers who are enslaved to man-made rules and regulations to break free.” He adds, “At the same time, grace promotes a powerful devotion to Christ and obedience to His Word, not to someone's guilt-giving list.”<sup>[30]</sup> Some matters must be determined by an individual's own conscience (cf. Romans 14:1-15). However, we must learn to recognize what glorifies Christ and what clearly does not, and then choose accordingly. **Grace does not relieve us of responsibility.**

**We actually live under a higher standard when grace, not rules, guides our decisions.** We who are living under grace should not want to continue in sin.

When we give our hearts to Christ, read and study the Word, and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us, questionable things should no longer amuse us; we have a different Spirit guiding us—the Holy Spirit, not Hollywood. The last half of Galatians 6:14 states this well: *Because of the cross, my interest in this world died long ago, and the world’s interest in me is also long dead.* Romans 8:5 adds that *those who live according to their sinful nature set their minds on the things that excite that nature, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on what the Spirit desires.* We are free to choose what we allow to enter our minds—but if it begins to control us, we are no longer free but bound. Compromise is often the first step in the wrong direction (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:23).

Let me leave you with this thought: If you are a young adult, are you willing to do what it takes to protect your mind and your relationship with the Lord? If you are a pastor or leader, are you willing to do what it takes to protect your congregation against compromise? If you are a parent, are you willing to do what it takes to protect your family? It’s your choice. Drawing a line can be out of step with the mainstream, but like Joshua, we too must say: *Choose this day whom you will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord* (Joshua 24:15).

It’s never too late for a new beginning. God continually calls His people back to Him. Yes, there are consequences for past mistakes, but it’s best to live in God’s arms redeemed than to live broken outside of His will. Which way will you run?

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Group Study Questions/Responses**

1. “Light and darkness, right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error are incompatibles. . . . When they compromise it is the light, the right, the good, and the truth that are damaged.” Comment.

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2. Before asking if an event, website, promotional idea, or advertisement is “culturally relevant,” we should ask, “Does it glorify Christ?” Do you agree, or disagree? Explain.

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3. Do you agree that our culture is looking for authenticity? How does a compromised life send a compromised message? List examples.

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4. Comment: *If we spend little time with God in prayer and in reading and following His Word, the Holy Spirit is not guiding us, Hollywood is.*

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5. The sin that once amazed us now amuses us. When sin begins to amuse us, we are dangerously close to the edge. In what areas are we often “dangerously close to the edge”?

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6. Comment: Liberty has limits—the key is to ask, “Will it build me up spiritually or pull me down?”

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7. Drawing a line can be out of step with the mainstream. Recall Joshua 24:15: *Choose this day whom you will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* List examples of how Christians should be out of step with the culture.

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### **Reflection & Journaling**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights

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Prayers & Practical Application

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## **Recommended Resources**

*The Strategy of Satan*, by Warren W. Wiersbe, zeroes in on Satan's attacks as deceiver, destroyer, ruler, and accuser. He emphasizes that conquering the enemy comes by obeying God's truth.

*T.V.: The Great Escape*, by Bob DeMoss, combines humor, eighteen years of research, and feedback from more than fifty families who turned off their TVs for a month.

*The Root of the Righteous*, by A. W. Tozer, will help the reader develop an intense longing for spiritual intimacy and true worship.

*Battle Cry for a Generation*, by Ron Luce, offers statistics and additional information regarding the media's influence on today's culture.

*Don't Waste Your Life*, by John Piper, encourages readers to make the glory of God their primary passion and not spend their time on trivial pursuits.

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*“He should be sure of what he means to say. And be ready to stake body & soul, goods & reputation, on its truth.”*

*MARTIN LUTHER, Commenting on Preaching*

*“Preaching, in one sense, merely discharges the firearm that God has loaded in the silent place.”*

*CALVIN MILLER*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# PREACHING

### “He Gave Them Authority” *Luke 9:1*

A few years back, I listened in astonishment as postmodern leaders talked about replacing “preaching” with “having a conversation.” At first, I thought that they might be confusing individual conversations with how we should speak to the masses, but I was wrong. They felt that we should stop “preaching” from the pulpit and start being more passive and less confrontational. Never mind the fact that Jesus said, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent” (Luke 4:43). But according to many postmoderns it’s time to replace the pulpit with a couch and preaching with conversing.

Don’t get me wrong. If a church wants to replace pews with couches, that’s their option. Again, I’m not questioning cosmetic issues such as styles of worship, ambiance, lighting, and mood. I’m challenging the dangerous practice of removing foundational principles—Spirit-empowered preaching is foundational. “Preaching is God’s great institution for the planting and maturing of spiritual life. When properly executed, its benefits are untold; when wrongly executed, no evil can exceed its damaging results” (E. M. Bounds).

I’m also not suggesting that we never converse with people. Quite the contrary, personal conversations and testimonies are fundamental to witnessing. Jesus often took time to sit and talk with people. We also should listen to others and show genuine concern—slow to speak and quick to listen. But when we are called to preach, a whole new dynamic takes place—the Spirit of God speaks, convicts, draws, heals, breaks, restores, wounds, and rebuilds. In the book *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, the author said, “It must be understood that the preacher does not share, he declares. . . . Preaching is not a little talk. It is not a fireside chat. To substitute sharing and discussion for preaching is to risk the integrity of the gospel itself.”[\[31\]](#)

“What does this chapter have to do with me? I’m not a pastor or a preacher,” you might ask. It has a great deal to do with any Christian regardless of his or her calling. Let me explain. There is a very troubling trend in the evangelical church as a whole. Foundational doctrines such as the cross, sin, judgment, and repentance were declared openly in the early hours of church history as well as in American history—when revivals and awakenings spread across our landscape.

Today, these foundational truths are often neglected, watered down, or avoided altogether in the hope of “not offending,” “securing an audience,” or being “user-friendly.” Judgment is never mentioned, repentance is never sought, and sin is often excused. **This leaves people confused and deceived because they believe in a cross-less Christianity that bears no resemblance to Jesus’ sobering call to repentance.** Even though not all are called to preach, we all are called to share God’s Word with others—especially the difficult truths. Through this, we are able to offer hope.

“To convince the world of the truth of Christianity, it must first be convinced of sin. It is only sin that renders Christ intelligible” (Andrew Murray; 1794-1866). In other words, the crucifixion only makes sense in light of the consequences of sin. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15), yet we’re not allowed to mention sin, repentance, or judgment? Again, the good news about Christ can only be appreciated with the bad news as the backdrop. *There are times when the saints must be fed, and there are times when the sinners must be warned* (C. H. Spurgeon). Preaching, witnessing, and teaching are to be done with God-given authority to truly be effective. When we fail to proclaim God’s Word faithfully, we run the risk of “encouraging sin” and “perverting the words of the living God” (cf. Jeremiah 23).

If there is doubt that we need authority in our pulpits, we should heed the following declaration. It’s often found in books, speeches, lectures, and sermons from the past. Even though it is not found in his works, the quote is often credited to Alexis de Tocqueville (a Frenchman who authored *Democracy in America* in the early 1800s). Whoever the author, it’s clear that much of America’s success was attributed to the pulpits being aflame with righteousness, authority, and power from God. The impact of America and its international influence was so great that world leaders as well as historians traveled from abroad to study and contemplate its success:

I looked throughout America to find where her greatness originated. I looked for it in her harbors and on her shorelines, in her fertile fields and boundless prairies, and in her gold mines and vast world commerce, but it was not there. It was not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her success. America is great because she is good, and if America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.  
(Paraphrase)

I’m not praising America; I’m illustrating the fact that we must lovingly proclaim the whole counsel of God’s Word, even the difficult truths, if we are to experience genuine revival. This is why we cannot replace preaching from the pulpit with having a conversation. Jesus preached and proclaimed the truth because of His love for the lost—we should seek to do the same.

I’m an avid reader of books about revivals and spiritual awakenings written by those who actually experienced them. Ironically, many (if not all), say that we must preach and proclaim God’s Word with authority if we are to experience true revival. The New Testament also bears this out—without authority and power from on high, words are lifeless. There is nothing to fear when preaching the truth. God ordained it, and He blesses it. He desires that all men “come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Samuel Chadwick (1840-1932) in his book *The Way to Pentecost* made this powerful proclamation: “**Truth without enthusiasm, morality without emotion, ritual without soul, makes for a Church without power.**” Authority is not a dreadful, unpleasant word—it’s a powerful word. When God gives people authority to passionately and lovingly proclaim His Word, souls are converted, lives are changed, and families are restored. Sadly, this is lacking in our day.

Where are the Isaiahs and Jeremiahs calling nations to repentance? Where are the Peters and Pauls, who spoke with such authority that martyrdom did not silence them? Though they are dead, they still speak! Where are the Wycliffes, who stood so unyielding for the truth that he was

called *The Morning Star of Reformation*? Where are the Tyndales and Husses, who were burned at the stake for simply declaring the truth? Where are the Luthers, who, when asked to recant or face possible execution, said, “Here I stand; I can do no other”? Where are the John Calvins who shape the religious thoughts of our Western culture? Where are the John Knoxes, who cried, “Give me Scotland [for the cause of Christ] or I die”? Where are the Whitefields, who shook continents? Where are the Howell Harrises, the Daniel Rowlands, and the Griffith Joneses, who preached with such passion during the Welsh revivals of the eighteenth century that we still honor them today?

I say again, “Where are they?” Where are the John Wesleys, who said, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and we will shake the gates of hell?” Where are the David Brainerds, who spent so much time in prayer that even the great Jonathan Edwards was convicted? Where are the Robert Murray McCheynes, who, even though he died at age twenty-nine, was one of Scotland’s most anointed preachers—causing people to weep before even preaching a word (not emotionalism but anointing)? Where are the Martin Luther King Jrs., who gave his life for a worthy cause? Where are the Spurgeons, who spoke with such authority that his sermons are read more today than ever before? Where are the D. L. Moodys, who brought America to her knees? Where are the Evan Robertses who, during the Welsh Revivals of 1904-1905, preached so powerfully against sin that people cried out, “No more, Lord Jesus, or I’ll die”? Where are the Puritans like Richard Baxter, who said with such humility, “I speak as a dying man to dying men”?

Where are men with uncompromising power and authority in the pulpits today? Granted, there are some, and I appreciate their ministry, but as a whole, the church is lacking. The one thing that all the great men previously mentioned had is the one thing that many are lacking—authority and the power of the Holy Ghost. They were also men of extraordinary prayer, brokenness, and humility, men filled and clothed with power from on high. *The men who do the most for God are always men of prayer.* “Preaching, in one sense, merely discharges the firearm that God has loaded in the silent place” (Calvin Miller). **“Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire”** (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

Need more examples from the past? E. M. Bounds, who was born in 1835, began his three-hour prayer routine at four o’clock in the morning. To him, prayer was not a short prelude but an empowering priority. Edward Payson, who ministered during the Second Great Awakening, was said to have worn grooves into his hardwood floor as a result of prayer. It was said of John Hyde, who left for the mission field in 1892, that he would stay on his face before God until the answer came. William Bramwell, a powerful Methodist circuit rider, often spent hours a day on his knees until his death in 1818. Adoniram Judson attributed his success in Burma as a missionary to a life of prayer, as did J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission. George Mueller, who never asked for a dime, petitioned God for millions of dollars to fund his orphanages in the 1800s. It was not uncommon for the great Scottish preacher, John Welch, who died in 1622, to spend four to six hours in prayer. John Fletcher, one of the leaders of the Methodist movement, stained the walls of his room with the breath of his prayers until his death in 1785. “When faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live” (E. M. Bounds).

At this point many will say, “Wait a minute. Who has that much time to pray? We’re all too busy.” You’re right. But let me be frank: **If we’re too busy to cultivate a prayer life that places God first—we’re too busy.** We should never allow our relationship with Him to suffer

because we're too busy. Contrary to what many think, reading the Bible and praying actually help with the utilization of time. They instill into our lives discipline, commitment, patience, peace, joy, and contentment. We're often too busy because we're doing too much. "We must spend much time on our knees before God if we are to continue in the power of the Holy Spirit" (R. A. Torrey).

If you truly want to build intimacy with God, you'll have to remove lesser priorities from your life. Years ago, I realized that if I wanted to grow spiritually, some things would have to go, or at the very least, be minimized. I needed to reprioritize my life. Instead of watching hours of television a day, I began to devote my time to activities that strengthened my relationship with the Lord. I cannot begin to tell you how much of a difference that made. Although far from perfect, I began to put first things first. As a result, I began to hunger for God's Word and spiritual truth like never before. **I learned that it's impossible to develop a deep respect and desire for God if we repeatedly fill our mind with things that oppose Him.**

The depth of your relationship with God is in direct proportion to the depth of your commitment to Him: great commitment, great relationship—poor commitment, poor relationship. Prayer matters. *The prayer closet equips, anoints, and empowers.* It was said of Jesus, "No man ever spoke like this Man" (John 7:46). He had great authority and spent much time in prayer. Mark 1:22 adds, "And they were astonished at His teaching: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes." Luke 4:36 records, "For with authority and power He commanded the unclean spirits, and they come out." **God-given authority and prayer go hand-in-hand. You can't have one without the other.**

Many postmoderns, on the other hand, often espouse a different kind of prayer known as "contemplative prayer." Instead of broken, humble petitioners seeking the face of the Father, contemplative prayer often involves repetitive chanting, breathing in a controlled manner, and reaching an altered state of consciousness. Granted, not all of those who practice contemplative prayer see it this way; nevertheless, the basis of contemplative prayer involves these practices. It also teaches that all of us have a "divine center"—it's definitely not a biblical approach to prayer. "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words" (Matthew 6:7).

Regarding authority, postmoderns argue that we can't preach with authority because we need to have a flexible approach to all aspects of theology. By "flexible," they mean accommodating all beliefs, but truth is not "flexible" when it comes to absolutes—it's solid and unyielding. Truth liberates. Truth rebuilds. Truth restores. Truth heals. Truth transforms. Truth prevails. You don't change truth—truth changes you!

During the *Yale Lectures on Preaching* (1891) by James Stalker, Stalker rightly noted Martin Luther's list of qualifications for being a minister. Two of the top ten were: 1) "He should be sure of what he means to say"; and 2) "Be ready to stake body and soul, goods and reputation, on its truth." Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and many more flamed the fires of reformation with the truth.

God has clearly called preachers to preach. **"Preaching is never something that a man decides to do. What happens rather is that he becomes conscious of a call"** (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones). When God calls a person, He gives them authority and power to proclaim His truth—the

kingdom of God is not only in word but in power. For example, in the classic book *The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales*, the author says this about the famous preacher Griffith Jones, who preached during the Welsh revivals of the eighteenth century: “The tears [of the congregation] began to flow in streams down their cheeks. Soon, they wept openly, and cried out, ‘What shall we do to be saved?’” It was also not uncommon for people to weep profusely as they sought Christ and shout for joy when they found Him under the anointed preaching of George Whitefield (1714-1770), who was the primary evangelist during the Great Awakening that occurred in the mid-1700s.

Without the unction of the Holy Spirit, preaching has little effect on the hearer, and we may find ourselves in the same place as Samson—*he knew not that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him* (cf. Judges 16:20). I’ve heard sermons from many postmodern and emerging leaders, and I’ve heard countless sermons from people such as John Piper, James MacDonald, Alistair Begg, Paul Washer, David Jeremiah, Jack Graham, John MacArthur, Ravi Zacharias, and so on. It’s amazing to hear the difference. The former speak as “advocates”—dialoguing, discussing, and pondering everything, while the latter speak as “witnesses” overcome by the magnificent power of God’s Word. Authority matters!

The church has always served as the moral compass to confront, challenge, and contend for the truth. But through the years, we’ve drifted from being confrontational to being popular. Richard Owen Roberts believes that “the Lord has been so deeply grieved by the refusal of the church to faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of His word in the power of the Holy Spirit that He has largely withdrawn from the church and left her to her own devices.”

Recall what was said earlier: God’s churches and His leaders are to be pillars who support truth, not who oppose it. We’d do well to revisit Jeremiah 23 regularly:

“‘Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!’ Says the LORD. . . . They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns back from his wickedness . . . and to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, ‘No evil shall come upon you.’ . . . I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied . . . but if they had stood in My counsel, and caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way. . . . Therefore, they shall not profit this people at all, says the LORD.” (Jeremiah 23:1-32)

These leaders, like many today, have “perverted the words of the living God” (v. 36) by not warning, instructing, challenging, and contending for the faith. *Again, let it not be said of us today: And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD because leaders failed to proclaim the truth of God’s Word* (cf. Judges 2:10). The burden of responsibility rests squarely upon our shoulders. It’s our choice—stand, or fall!

### ***What, or Whom, Are You Filled with?***

At this point, you might ask, “Why are many questioning preaching, authority, inerrancy, and truth? And why are the pulpits not ‘afire with righteousness?’” In my opinion, the problem is two-fold.

1. True conversion (surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ) is simply not occurring in many claiming to be Christians. J. I. Packer, in his introduction to the book *The Preacher and Preaching*, reveals this powerful truth: “By their questions, it has been said, you shall know them. Honest questions reveal what ignorances, doubts, fears, uncertainties, prejudices, and preconceptions lie within the questioner’s mind.” The reason many question and seek to remove foundational doctrines is because they are not genuinely following Christ. Granted, there’s nothing wrong with having legitimate questions, but there is something wrong when we use our questions as a means to lead others away from the truth. For example, there’s a vast difference between someone seeking to understand the virgin birth and another saying, “Was Mary really a virgin? The Scriptures could mean ‘young woman,’ not a virgin.” One seeks to understand, while the other seeks to confuse. One wants answers, while the other wants people to question their faith.

2. Brokenness and humility are missing. Many are unprepared and unwilling to give up all to gain all. Leonard Ravenhill’s son David tells of a time prior to his father’s death when seminary students would request to see his father “for the sole purpose of having him lay hands upon them in order to receive his mantle.” In the same way that Elijah passed his mantle/calling to Elisha, these students apparently desired the same. Leonard Ravenhill would simply respond: “Everyone wants to have my mantle, but nobody wants my sackcloth and ashes.” His statement is profound—many want the recognition but not the brokenness; the honor but not the humility; the limelight but not the loneliness.

**We are in desperate need of broken, humble men—men who are not afraid to admit that they need God**, men who are more worried about prayer than about status and recognition, men who “petition” God rather than “position” themselves, men who plead, not posture, contend, not complain. The great preacher C. H. Spurgeon once said, “I would rather teach one man to pray than ten men to preach.” We have plenty of preachers but very few prayer-warriors.

*To be candid, it takes broken men to break men.* Brokenness, true brokenness, is humiliating and painful, but it is the only way to truly be filled and led by the Spirit. An analogy that comes to mind is that of a shepherd. I’m not sure of the validity, but the principle applies. Perhaps you’ve heard, in times past, that a shepherd might break the leg of a lamb that continually wandered from the flock and, thus, from the shepherd’s protection. The shepherd would then splint the broken leg and carry the lamb on his shoulders for weeks until the leg healed. As painful as this was for the lamb, it was necessary to protect it from being ravished by wolves or other predators. In time, through the broken and dependent relationship, the lamb learned to walk and to remain in the protective presence of his shepherd.

What will it take to bring us back to the Shepherd? “Life-giving preaching costs the preacher much—death to self, crucifixion to the world, the travail of his own soul. Crucified preaching only can give life. Crucified preaching can come only from a crucified man” (E. M. Bounds). To be filled with the Spirit, we must be first emptied of pride and arrogance. Humility and brokenness allow His power to flow freely.

This is another area we often miss. Postmoderns and others believe that the church can be so focused on the “spiritual needs” of people that they forget the “social needs.” Their answer: Pull away from the spiritual needs and focus primarily on the social needs. **But what good is feeding**

**the stomach without regard for the soul? Both are important, but the soul is eternal.** Not surprisingly, being broken and humble before the Lord produces a desire to reach out to others.

In short, Spirit-filled believers make a difference. The solution isn't to move away from truth and spiritual needs—it's to draw closer to them. Family dysfunctions, poverty, and systemic injustice (e.g., suffering caused by economic exploitation, political oppression, etc.) would be severely curtailed if more people surrendered their lives to God and to the work of His Spirit. **The problem isn't absolute truth and the answer, relativism. The problem is a lack of power, and the answer is surrender.**

A century ago, if a man desired to be a preacher, the governing body would ask one simple question before granting him permission to preach. The question wasn't "Does he have a PhD in theology or biblical studies?" It wasn't "Is he well read in church history, eschatology, hermeneutics, and homiletics?" Nor did they ask, "Does he use an inductive or deductive approach to sermon preparation?" or even "Is he a gifted speaker?" All these things may be important, but the question was "*Has he received his baptism of fire?*" Period!

I'm not debating the baptism of the Spirit; I'm underscoring the enormous importance of the Spirit's power in our preaching and in our daily lives. It's possible to be "Bible-taught" but not "Spirit-led," thus making spiritual issues boring and dry. **The Scriptures, to be understood, must be read with the same Spirit that originally inspired them.** Understanding God's Word and living a victorious Christian life can only be achieved by the power of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, and Jesus and the apostles began their ministry in the power of the Spirit, we would be wise to ask for His guidance as well.

As Christians, we are given the Holy Spirit, but what we do with Him is largely up to us—we can quench and grieve Him, thus causing Him to withdraw, or we can truly surrender our life to His influence (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:19; Ephesians 4:30). Often, the only thing standing between us and the work of the Holy Spirit is our will. The Holy Spirit will not empower you to do what you want to do, but He will empower you to do what God wants you to do. Align your will with His. Pray for the Spirit's influence, desire it above all else, and continually live a life that glorifies Christ—*the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God* (Acts 5:32).

If you doubt the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian, simply read the New Testament book of Acts. If God seems distant, Bible study boring, and church irrelevant, it's probably because the work of the Holy Spirit is being suppressed. More change will be seen outwardly as the Holy Spirit is given more power to rule inwardly. "*The number one goal of the church is not to spread the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth—her number one goal is to be spiritually worthy to spread it*" (A. W. Tozer). Leonard Ravenhill, in his compelling book *Revival Praying*, wrote: "Since something is obviously stopping the Spirit's inflow to us Christians, the same thing is stopping His outflow from us. With the Spirit's help we need to search for this hindrance." In my opinion, the hindrance is often pride and/or disbelief.

I sincerely believe that the greatest need in the lives of Christians today is to remove pride so that the power of the Holy Spirit can flow through us. We can't be full of the Holy Spirit if we're full of ourselves. Sadly, the only thing holding many churches together is social activity, not the activity of the Spirit. It's been said that if Christianity today (as a whole) were a poison, it would harm no one, and if it were a medicine, it would cure no one. As incredible as this sounds, it may

be true, at least to some degree. **When we ignore the truth, frown upon spiritual authority, and neglect the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, we become powerless.** So the question is, “Are you willing to be completely obedient to the Spirit and surrender your life to Him?” If so, it will require a rejection of the postmodern mindset. There’s no nice, unoffensive, way to say it—that’s the truth in love.

The solution is to fill ourselves with the things of God. As He increases, we decrease. The desire to be filled with the truth of God’s Word must be a priority. Every area of our life should be affected as we surrender to His influence. This is why some people are more sensitive to the things of God—they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Am I concerned that terms such as sin, blood, repentance, truth, judgment, and so on are being avoided under the guise of “relating to the culture”? Absolutely! I’m concerned that people are having their ears tickled more than having their lifestyles challenged. I’m concerned that they’re hearing what they want to hear and not what they need to hear. I’m concerned that they’re learning about blessings, love, and happiness but not repentance, sin, and longsuffering. We’re not living in the year 1517, and most of us are not in Wittenberg, Germany. But would be to God that another Martin Luther would nail a revised *Ninety-Five Theses* to the church doors calling for prayer, humility, and repentance before God—turning us back to absolute truth and away from relativism, back to Christ and away from the broad road that leads to destruction. We must repent, ask for forgiveness, and seek restoration. We should not apologize for preaching God’s Word, redefine what He meant, or back down from conflict. We are in the middle of a spiritual battle. We will be hated for following Christ, mocked for believing in truth, and challenged for promoting righteousness. We are called to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him. **We must lovingly preach truth in our pulpits again.** “You can be certain that at the forefront of every significant recovery from backsliding . . . the doctrine of repentance has been among the precious truths that God has quickened and used” (Richard Owen Roberts).

As the church falls deeper into self-reliance and further from reliance on God, our need for God-given authority in the pulpit has never been greater. Change will only occur when there is a strong conviction of sin, genuine faith, humility, and sincere repentance. May God grant us the wisdom and strength to proclaim these truths.

It’s been said that one of the greatest mission fields in the world today is the United States. This is largely because awe and respect for the Lord have been forgotten in America. There’s very little brokenness and humility today. There are times to encourage, motivate, and uplift, but there are also times to confront, challenge, and contend for what is right—that time is now. The time for Spirit-filled preaching and authority in the pulpit has never been greater.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Group Study Questions/Responses**

1. Why is preaching, as God ordained it, important?

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2. Today judgment, repentance, and sin are rarely mentioned. Might this leave people confused and deceived because they believe in a cross-less Christianity that bears no resemblance to Jesus' call to repentance? Elaborate.

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3. "To convince the world of the truth of Christianity, it must first be convinced of sin. It is only sin that renders Christ intelligible" (Andrew Murray). Do you agree? Explain.

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4. The depth of your relationship with God is in direct proportion to the depth of your commitment to Him. How can you begin or continue to build this relationship?

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5. *If we're too busy to pray and seek God first, we're too busy.* If this describes you, how can you begin reprioritizing your life?

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6. Explain Richard Owen Roberts words "The Lord has been so deeply grieved by the refusal of the church to faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of His word in the power of the Holy Spirit that He has largely withdrawn from the church and left her to her own devices."

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7. The problem isn't absolute truth and the answer, relativism; the problem is a lack of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, and the answer is surrender. Comment.

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### **Reflection & Journaling**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights

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## Prayers & Practical Application

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## **Recommended Resources**

*Prayer—Asking and Receiving*, by John R. Rice, *Power Through Prayer*, by E. M. Bounds, and *How to Pray*, by R. A. Torrey, are three fantastic books on prayer. They will encourage, equip, and help cultivate a powerful prayer life.

*The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales*, by John Morgan Jones & William Morgan, is a tremendous resource for the serious reader. It's a narrative of how Wales was spiritually transformed in the mid-1700s; it offers brief bios of men such as Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland. The late D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones treasured this two-volume set.

*He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, by Albert Mohler Jr., explains why the church cannot survive without the public exposition of the Word of God.

*Preaching with Passion*, by Alex Montoya, is an interactive guide to passionate preaching through spiritual power, conviction, compassion, authority, urgency, brokenness, and imagination.

*Spirit Empowered Preaching*, by Arturo G. Azurdia II, is a powerful and practical resource for anyone desiring the Spirit's power. I gained much insight for the chapter of compromise from this helpful resource, especially as it relates to the messenger reflecting the message.

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*“Dead formality and the false fire of fanaticism are both Satan’s counterfeits, and he does not care into which extreme the soul plunges.”*

*GEORGE D. WATSON; 1845-1923*

*In our zeal to defend the Holy Spirit, we sometimes run the risk of defending wrong behavior.*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# REVIVAL

### Revival—Seeking to Clear the Confusion

Principles unfold throughout—therefore, it’s my hope that readers consider this entire chapter before drawing conclusions. The need to address revival and the vital role of the Holy Spirit is as relevant today as it has been throughout church history. The key, as Augustine said, is to be united in the essentials, allow liberty in the non-essentials, and let love guide in all things.

“The true saints of God, who have clear heads, and pure, warm hearts, have in all generations had to walk between the two extremes of cold formality on the one side, and wild, ranting fanaticism on the other. Dead formality and the false fire of fanaticism are both Satan’s counterfeits, and he does not care into which extreme the soul plunges, just so he can prevent it from having that scriptural type of holiness which is ‘full of faith,’ and ‘full of the Holy Spirit,’ and ‘full of wisdom,’ and of a ‘sound mind’” (George D. Watson).[\[32\]](#)

Watson masterfully describes how God’s Spirit can be suppressed or misrepresented. To clarify, the Holy Spirit is not some weird, mystical force. He is part of the triune nature of God. The Bible says that the Spirit intercedes, leads, guides, teaches, and so on (cf. Romans 8:26; Acts 8:29; John 16:13). He enables and empowers us to hunger and thirst for righteousness and to boldly live for Christ. God’s Word becomes living and active in the life of the believer who is continually filled with the Holy Spirit. Charles Spurgeon adds, **“What can a hammer do without the hand that grasps it, and what can we do without the Spirit of God?”**[\[33\]](#)

By age twenty-eight, my life was filled with what the world offered, but I was empty inside. I was at a turning point. I could choose to turn to God or continue to reject Him. By God’s grace, I repented and put my complete trust in Christ. Although far from perfect, God radically transformed and redirected my life through the power of the Holy Spirit. He can do the same for you. Acts 1:8 identifies this experience: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me.” The power of the Holy Spirit is like dynamite that ignites a hunger for God so intense that every aspect of life is changed—we become bold, not passive; stable, not fanatical; and committed, not wavering.

Within the months that followed this experience my passion and purpose for life became clearer than ever. I then understood Acts 3:19: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing [revival] may come from the presence of the Lord.” I truly experienced this infilling of the Spirit that is seen throughout the Scriptures (e.g., a transformed life resulting in a love for God and His Word). From this experience came books, articles, speaking engagements, and ultimately, a church.

I, like many Christians, tend to be “safely” conservative when considering the power of the Holy Spirit; however, Scripture clearly supports the miraculous work of the Spirit today. I’m open but cautious. We need sound doctrine and the power of the Holy Spirit. As I said earlier, it is possible to be “Bible taught,” but not “Spirit led”—straight as a gun barrel theologically but just

as empty. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:6). Don't get me wrong. Theological and expositional teachings are essential to Christian living, but how often are theology students encouraged to fast and pray as well as study? How often are they taught brokenness and repentance in addition to translating the Greek language? How often are they taught the surrendered life? We can sometimes be more concerned about a master's degree than a degree from the Master.

The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures and empowered Jesus and the apostles. We are desperately remiss if we fail to recognize His vital role in our lives. I agree with Leonard Ravenhill: "We need to close every church in the land for one Sunday and cease listening to a man so we can hear the groan of the Spirit which we in our lush pews have forgotten." Granted, we have gifted leaders who are led by the Spirit, but we, individually, need to spend serious time searching and listening to God.

Sadly, we often pray on the run and scurry through a five-minute devotional, yet we devote hours to television, movies, and the internet, and we wonder why we know little of the power of the Spirit. Recall what R. A. Torrey said: "We must spend much time on our knees before God if we are to continue in the power of the Holy Spirit." The only thing holding many churches together today is social activity, not the activity of the Spirit.

I knew a pastor who instructed his worship leader to remove most of the songs that mentioned the Holy Spirit, and another pastor who removed songs about the blood of Christ. How sad—in their zeal to avoid charismatic excesses and offensive truths, these pastors actually quenched and grieved the Spirit. A. W. Tozer insightfully said, "If the Lord's people were only half as eager to be filled with the Spirit as they are to prove that they cannot be filled, the church would be crowded out." *I sincerely believe that the greatest need in the church today is to confess our sins, obey the Word, and to be filled with the Spirit.*

Christians can embrace one of two extremes concerning the word "revival." At one extreme are those who embrace pure emotionalism and hysteria—"if it's odd, it's God"—all weird behavior is excused. The other extreme lacks a living, vibrant spiritual life. The church feels dead, cold, and lifeless. Talk of reviving the things of God (revival) is either dismissed or ridiculed. **Both extremes can hinder the work of the Holy Spirit and genuine Christian growth.** I will primarily address the first extreme where I have viewed videos of people supposedly "getting high," "toking," and "drunk" on the Holy Ghost. This is not the same as being filled with the Spirit of God (cf. Ephesians 5:18). I've attended conferences where questionable things have occurred, and I have seen video footage of people being led around like dogs on a leash and acting like animals. Yes, I'm serious. Bizarre and grossly unbiblical manifestations are not reflective of one filled with the Spirit. Those truly filled with the Spirit seek to reflect the personality and nature of God.

When questioned about extremes in this type of odd behavior, there are no answers that find support in Scripture. Common responses are "I know it seems bizarre, but..." Or "I know it's weird, but..." Or "You're quenching and grieving the Spirit by not being open." These are not biblically sound responses for such bizarre manifestations. The Holy Spirit is not quenched when we honor God's Word and "test the spirits, whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). He is quenched and grieved when we do not test and discern—when we allow the Holy Spirit to be

misrepresented. The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:15, said that we are to judge, or discern, all things.

Scriptures are often used in an attempt to support very odd behavior. For example, Acts 2:15 states, “For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day,” and John 18:6 records that men “drew back and fell to the ground” when Jesus surrendered Himself shortly before His death. These Scriptures, when used to validate wild, ranting fanaticism, are incorrect exegetically (uncovering the literal meaning of a text) and misleading.

Granted, we cannot dismiss the truly miraculous works of God that happen daily, nor can we minimize the incredible power of God to radically change lives through the power of the Spirit. However, in our zeal and excitement we often minimize the need for discernment. A discerning person considers supernatural experiences in light of God’s Word, nature, and character. They ask, “Is there genuine fruit? Does the experience align with God’s Word? Is the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5 present: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?” A true, genuine experience with the Holy Spirit will produce godly fruit and obedience to God. It seeks to promote those things that are pure and righteous. A word of caution here: Even those in the New Age movement experience powerful feelings of love and euphoria, but it doesn’t draw them closer to Christ or lead to repentance or surrender to the true God.

Although sincere, we can be sincerely wrong and seriously misled. **Having an experience or being enlightened can create “feel-good” emotions, but it does not necessarily mean that it is right.** *Even though there is flexibility and freedom, our experiences must align with the Scriptures and the character of God.* “We should not interpret Scripture in the light of our experiences, but rather, interpret our experiences in the penetrating light of Scripture” (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones).<sup>[34]</sup> Feelings can be good and God-given; however, we cannot forget the prophet Jeremiah’s words, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (17:9). Profoundly moving experiences do stir emotions, and they may “feel” right. However, emotions are primarily a vehicle for expression, not a gauge for Truth.

Sadly, some of the disturbing behavior mentioned earlier has been excused, and some of the leaders of these movements are rarely challenged. They can divorce their spouses and remain in leadership using 1 Chronicles 16:22 as a proof text: “Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.” This is an abuse of grace at the highest level and a twisting of Scripture. We should forgive, but reinstatement raises several questions. In our zeal to defend the Holy Spirit, we sometimes run the risk of defending wrong behavior. *One can rise to the top because of ability, but plummet to the bottom because he or she lacks character.* Throughout the Old Testament, God gave people the opportunity to be leaders, but it was their character and their humility, not their position, that determined their outcome.

To counter this criticism, some of the followers of this movement say that those who oppose them will suffer the judgment of God. When in reality, those who refuse God’s offer of salvation will suffer judgment. Not everyone who says to Jesus “Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). God’s will is that people truly repent of their sin, and turn to Him as Lord and Savior. The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). **A person is not judged for seeking discernment; they are judged for rejecting the truth** (cf. Romans 1:18).

Although some well-intentioned Christians are anxious to hear from God, many seek signs and wonders rather than seeking the Lord. We can become unstable, confused, and deceived when spirituality hinges only on signs, wonders, and manifestations. Instead, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else will fall in place (cf. Matthew 6:33).

Please understand that it's not my intention to paint experience-oriented movements with a broad brush—God wants us to experience Him. The presence and the power of the Holy Spirit can provoke overwhelming feelings, and rightly so. When truth penetrates the heart, excitement, passion, and enthusiasm often follow. These emotions can be good and God-given. *My goal is not to limit the gifts, power, and presence of the Spirit but to seek balance and discernment.* God often requires obedience whether we feel it or not.

One of the reasons why people embrace unbiblical experiences is because they are not in the Word seeking balance, confirmation, and discernment. Simply stated, if we are not in the Word, the Word will not be in us. We can easily be deceived. Searching for spiritual fulfillment isn't wrong, but where we search can be. Spiritual hunger is good, yet we can be so hungry spiritually that we'll consume anything. Eagerness to consume can lead to "experience" oriented movements with no Scriptural basis, especially when we begin to look to experiences to validate truth. Conversely, your pastor may not be a motivational speaker, the worship may not always descend from the portals of heaven, and you may not "feel" something at every event, but that does not mean that God is not moving.

Some of the events where oddities occur can feed sinful desires rather than challenge them. Granted, there are those who attend these events who are truly seeking God. I'm not minimizing that. I applaud them for seeking, but the "signs and wonders" gospel is not the real gospel, nor is the "prosperity gospel" the real gospel. God may prosper us, and miracles do happen, but these are secondary—Christ is primary.

Granted, Christians can look odd to the culture, and revivals are not predictable, but this is not what I'm referring to. Again, I'm referring to bizarre occurrences such as people appearing drunk at the pulpit, toying with the Holy Ghost, acting like animals, and screaming as if they were on fire. Can we honestly believe that Jesus, Peter, and Paul would endorse, or worse yet, partake in weird behavior? Would godly men and women be led around like dogs on a leash, run around jerking and acting as if they are on fire, or slur as if drunk while speaking?

We should be concerned about actions and reputation as well as having sincere faith. We all sin and fall short, but the important question to ask is what is the condition of the heart—is there true repentance and a belief in Christ as Lord and Savior, or are we trusting in experiences? The apostle Paul warns against false professions of faith. He also warns against confusing and immature behavior that compromises the gospel. *Falsehood and confusion often go hand-in-hand.* In his epistles, Paul often corrected error in the church, and in 1 Corinthians 14:40 he concludes, "Let all things be done decently and in order." Rather than quenching and grieving the Spirit, Paul is pleading for sound action and for decency and order within the church when possible. The church is to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (cf. I Timothy 3:14-15).

There are incidences of odd behavior in the Bible, such as the man from the country of the Gadarenes who was possessed, but after He met Jesus he was "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind" (Luke 8:35). We also have an account of a man who brought his possessed

son to Jesus: “And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father” (Luke 9:42). In these cases, very odd behavior is the result of people needing Christ. His presence and deliverance bring peace and order.

As a student of revivals, I understand that being controversial isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Again, revivals are not predictable, and odd things do happen. As I read the journals of George Whitefield, the Welsh Revivals, and the firsthand accounts of the First Great Awakening in America, I found that Pastor Jonathan Edward’s words were true. He observed that a work of the Holy Spirit would be evident: 1) It would elevate the truth, 2) exalt Christ, 3) oppose Satan, 4) point people to the Scriptures, and 5) result in love for God and others. Genuine revivals focus on preaching the totality of God’s Word, calling out sin, and correcting error—holiness is sought, not hysteria. **The result is genuine fruit, not ungodly fanaticism.**

Some suggest that today’s battle is not so much against liberals in the church but against those who are “not open” to new prophecies and visions—those who “religiously hold to the written Word alone.” This statement concerns me because it can be used to promote anything done in the name of the Lord, such as prophecies, visions, and words from the Lord. Granted, Acts 2:17 is relevant for us today: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.” This Scripture is balanced with 1 John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Not everything done in God’s name bears His approval.

Jesus warns, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). False teachers will be within the church. We are encouraged to pray for wisdom and discernment. “Words from the Lord” cannot supersede the Bible but, rather, confirm it. “Prophecy involves not authoritative Bible teaching, and not speaking words of God which are equal to Scripture, but rather reporting something which God spontaneously brings to mind” (Wayne Grudem). **We hold religiously to the written Word because it is our guide, to test what is being said:** “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (1 Corinthians 14:32). The speaker should be careful since his words must be under, or subject to, God’s Word.

A “prophet,” as mentioned in the Bible, can be anyone in a position of spiritual authority or claiming to be. They are not to be elevated or idolized. We follow Christ, not men. False teachers aren’t ostentatiously dressed in red, armed with a pitchfork. They often look credible and talk convincingly; however, they bring destructive teachings into the church. They tend to avoid difficult truths such as sin, judgment, and repentance, and focus on what people want to hear rather than what they need to hear. (Refer to Jeremiah 23.)

As stated earlier, false teachers provide layers of truth mixed with error, but even a broken clock is right twice a day. Today, when the truth of God’s Word is spoken, people are often offended because they’ve been conditioned to hear “feel-good” messages that do little in calling out sin. As a result, churches are filled with people whose lifestyles reflect little change. William Still said it well: “Many, who for the first time come under the sound of Holy Ghost preaching, are mortally offended . . . because they have never been exposed to the white light of the Spirit.”

The white light exposes sin and calls for repentance, holiness, purity, and righteousness—topics that are rarely discussed in many churches across our landscape. Not surprisingly, 2 Timothy 4:3 echoes throughout the ages with resounding clarity: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

How do we “test every spirit” and avoid false teachers? As stated before, determine if what they are teaching agrees with Scripture. For example, if one claims to be drunk in the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 14:40 tells us otherwise: “Let all things be done decently and in order.” If one lacks control, remember that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. If a claim is made that a “messenger of light” appeared with a new revelation, point to 2 Corinthians 11:14 where we find Satan transforming himself into an angel of light. **If those who look to the Word are accused of quenching and grieving the Spirit, we are reminded that Jesus used the Word of God for finality, discernment, and power.**

*As with any move of God, wisdom requires that we examine what is being sought and taught—what is the focus?* Repentance, holiness, obedience, and purity should be primary rather than boasting, blessings, abundance, and prosperity. The very thing that we need may be the very thing that we are not discussing—repentance: “The Church must first repent; then the world will break! The Church must first weep; then our altars will be filled with weeping penitents” (Leonard Ravenhill). Without holiness we will not see the Lord (cf. Hebrews 12:14).

Not all recent moves lack authenticity—what many have experienced are valid moves of God. Small and large revivals occurring throughout the world are truly that. While revivals may grow from pure motives and humble beginnings, they can be quenched by bizarre behavior or by leaders who lack character or who take the glory and promote themselves. God calls us to be concerned, prayerful, and surrendered to Him. Matthew 7:22–23 again reminds us, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” Jesus is referring to those who “think” they know Him—these people prophesy, cast out demons, and do wonders “in the name of Jesus.” This Scripture should cause all Christians to search their hearts as to whether they have been truly converted—do they truly know Him? Paul encourages this as well: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We easily ignore Scripture when we embrace views outside of God’s revealed Word. We default to our old nature or cultural trends and can be easily led by false teachings. Jeremiah 23:16 sheds even more light on the need to discern: “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD.’”

We are to discern truth from error, light from darkness, and right from wrong—but how? Jeremiah 23:17 offers one answer: “They continually say to those who despise Me, ‘The LORD has said, You shall have peace;’ And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, ‘No evil shall come upon you.’” False teachers often don’t warn, confront, or convict. They offer comfortable messages and a false sense of peace, or they mislead with rules

and regulations as found in 1 Timothy 4:2-3: “speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” Jesus said in Matthew 24:24 that “false Christs and false prophets will appear and deceive many.” *Deception comes in many forms but centers around false hope or legalism.*

Not all leaders in experience-oriented movements are false and misleading. Many are sincere and open to the work of the Holy Spirit and understand that visions, dreams, prophecies, and wonders cannot supersede the Word. God’s Word is the foundation on which all truth stands (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15).

What is true revival then? Simply stated, a genuine revival is God reviving His people—“Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee?” (Psalm 85:6 KJV). Repentance is often a mark of true revival. Recall what was said about Griffith Jones, who preached during the Welsh revivals of the eighteenth century: “The tears [of the congregation] began to flow in streams down their cheeks. Soon, they wept openly, and cried out, ‘What shall we do to be saved?’” Further, it was not uncommon for people to tremble and weep or shout for joy under the anointed preaching of George Whitefield, who was the primary evangelist during the Great Awakening that occurred in the mid-1700s. During this time, old grudges and debts were forgiven, morality improved, many were added to the church, and there was a greater sense of the fear of the Lord.

Those who use past revivals in an attempt to validate odd events today perhaps have not truly researched revivals. In reading Charismatics and Calvinists, Pentecostals and Puritans, Acts and Azusa, as well as countless biographies of leaders such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, Charles Spurgeon, and D. L. Moody, and Puritans such as Thomas Goodwin, John Bunyan, John Owen, and Richard Baxter, nowhere do these leaders encourage the hysteria or the outright weirdness that we sometimes see today. Granted, there were times of strong conviction such as when people held on to trees thinking that they were falling into the abyss of hell during the famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” by Jonathan Edwards. And people did cry out to God and fall on the ground under the strong conviction of sin during the revivals of George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Evan Roberts, but this is because sin, righteousness, and holiness were preached—“falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you” (1 Corinthians 14:25). This is true revival.

Perhaps a balanced end to this chapter is found in an excerpt from Duncan Campbell’s book *The Price and Power of Revival*:

How is it that while we make such great claims for the power of the Gospel, we see so little of the supernatural in operation? Is there any reason why the Church today cannot everywhere equal the Church at Pentecost? I feel this is a question we ought to face with an open mind and an honest heart. What did the early Church have that we do not possess today? Nothing but the Holy Spirit; nothing but the power of God. Here I would suggest that one of the main secrets of success in the early Church lay in the fact that the early believers believed in unction from on high and not entertainment from men. . . . How did the early Church get the people? By publicity projects, by bills, by posters, by parades, by

pictures? No! The people were arrested and drawn together and brought into vital relationship with God, not by sounds from men, but by sounds from heaven. . . . The early Church cried for unction and not for entertainment. Uncion is the dire and desperate need of the ministry today.

**There is a desperate need to preach and proclaim God’s Word with genuine power if we are to experience true revival.** Without God’s authority and power, words are lifeless. Where are those with uncompromising power and authority in the pulpits today? The one thing that all the great revivals in church history had is the one thing that we often lack—the genuine power of the Holy Spirit. The very thing that we need is the very thing that we are afraid of. Many do not truly want revival because of fear of what it may involve.

As I was completing this book, I prayed, “Lord, bring revival to the churches”—I was not ready for the response that followed. I felt impressed with these words: “You don’t want revival—it will ruin your schedule, your dignity, your image, and your reputation as a person who is ‘well balanced.’ Men will weep throughout the congregation. Women will wail because of the travail of their own souls. Young adults will cry like children at the magnitude of their sin. With the strength of My presence, the worship team will cease playing. Time will seem to stand still. You won’t be able to preach because of the emotions flooding your own soul. You’ll struggle to find words, but only find tears. Even the most dignified and reserved among you will be broken and humbled as little children. The proud and self-righteous will not be able to stand in My presence. **The doubter and unbeliever will either run for fear or fall on their knees and worship Me—there can be no middle ground. The church will never be the same again.**”

Do you truly want genuine revival?

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **Group Study Questions/Responses**

1. “All generations of Christians have walked between the two extremes of cold formality on the one side and fanaticism on the other.” Do you agree or disagree with George Watson’s statement? Is it possible to find the middle ground?

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2. Do you tend to be “safely” conservative when considering the power of the Holy Spirit? Does Scripture support the miraculous work of the Spirit today? Explain.

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3. The greatest need in the church today is to confess our sins and to be filled with the Spirit. Do you agree? Is this an area you struggle with?

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4. Have you witnessed Scriptures being used to support odd behavior or sinful lifestyles? Give examples. Why is this dangerous?

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5. Although sincere, we can be sincerely wrong and seriously misled. Having an “experience” or being “enlightened” creates emotion, but it does not necessarily mean that the experience is right. Comment.

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6. One way to discern a genuine revival is to examine what is being done and said. List examples.

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7. The very thing that we need is the very thing that we are afraid of. “The Church must first repent; then the world will break! The Church must first weep; then our altars will be filled with weeping penitents” (Leonard Ravenhill). Why aren’t we experiencing revival on a broader scale?

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### ***Reflection & Journaling***

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights

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Prayers & Practical Application

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### **Recommended Reading**

*The Baptism and Gifts of the Spirit*, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, is a well-balanced resource for those desiring to know more about the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Jonathan Edwards on Revival*, published by Banner of Truth Trust, includes a narrative account of the famous revival at Northampton in 1735 and a Scriptural view of the work.

*Revival God's Way*, by Leonard Ravenhill, is a passionate and urgent appeal for the church to seek revival.

*Why Revival Tarries*, also by Leonard Ravenhill, offers a no-compromise call to the principles of biblical revival. “This book comes as a voice from above. . . . Ravenhill is a man sent from God who appeared at a critical moment in history” (A. W. Tozer).

*Lectures On Revivals*, by W. B. Sprague, is a comprehensive and detailed book on revival —“The result is a volume of outstanding merit and exceptional worth” (D. M. Lloyd-Jones).

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*There is always a link between genuine faith  
and sincere repentance.*

*If your religion has not changed your life—  
change your religion!*

## CHAPTER NINE

# REPENTANCE

## A Life-Changing Experience

Is it possible for people to *say* that they are Christians and still not be saved? The answer is a resounding yes. In William Martin’s book *A Prophet with Honor—The Billy Graham Story*, Mr. Martin wrote of young Billy’s conversion at a revival service. Martin added that although Billy was a “mental storehouse of Scripture” and “vice-president of his church’s youth group [before his conversion] . . . he probably never imagined that he was not a Christian.” But the sermon that he heard at the revival service convicted and convinced him that he had not yet truly repented and surrendered his life to Christ.<sup>[35]</sup> For young Billy, and for us, “knowing” about Jesus is not enough.

“Why a chapter on repentance?” you might ask. For the very reason listed above: Countless people can relate to Dr. Graham’s story. Unfortunately, it’s not until after a genuine conversion experience that many realize they were never saved to begin with—they had religion but not a relationship. Titus 1:16 and James 2:14 both conclude that many people “say” that they know God but deny Him by their lifestyle. 1 John 2:19 suggests that those who acknowledge Christ initially but deny Him later are not saved to begin with. We are reminded again of this truth in Matthew 7:22. Many will come to Jesus and say, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And He will say to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (7:23).

Repentance is vital to genuine faith. Jesus will deny a relationship with those who thought they “knew” Him. Several years ago, I applied these verses to my life: “But Lord, I attend church and pray from time to time, and I’m basically a good person.” The answer was the same: “I don’t know you.” That realization transformed my life (more on this later).

Knowing “about” someone is not the same as knowing someone personally. Unfortunately, many of us who call ourselves Christians fall into this category. Matthew 7:19–21 also confirms this: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

These Scriptures are not promoting a works-based religion; they’re demonstrating the importance of having a genuine relationship with Christ—a relationship that produces godly fruit. Genuine faith is reflected in a transformed life, a love for God and His Word, sincere humility, selfless love, true repentance, and a disconnect from the world. Does your life reflect these characteristics? As you can see, a correct definition of repentance and genuine faith is vitally important. This will be the focus.

Believe it or not, many postmoderns are seeking to replace the word “repent” with “rethink.” Apparently, we need to rethink our narrow view of the gospel and our restricted view of biblical hermeneutics, so they say. Their rescripting seems ridiculous, but it’s true. They argue that “repentance” may not actually mean what we think. It’s no surprise that they take this position—

in order for Christianity to appear palatable and less intrusive to our culture, most postmoderns feel that we need to rethink, redefine, and rename difficult truths, including repentance.

Whether the word for repentance is *nocham* in the Old Testament, or *metanoēō* in the New, biblical repentance involves turning from sin and turning to God—it's a condition of the heart. Acts 3:19 unapologetically confirms this: "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Jesus said that "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). The influential Baptist evangelist John R. Rice (1895–1980) said, "There is no way you can please God, no way you can have the sweet communion with Him to get your prayers answered if you are in rebellion against the known will of God." Failing to turn from sin and to turn to Christ results in rebellion against God.

When Mark 6:12 records that "they went out and preached that people should repent," Jesus wasn't suggesting that the disciples rethink their narrowmindedness, redefine their view of sin, or reinterpret the meaning of repentance. He was saying that people need to turn from sin and turn to God. Even early church leaders such as Clement, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and others all understood and agreed with this definition of repentance.

To suggest that everyone from the Old Testament prophets to Christ and the apostles and from the early church fathers and the Reformers to present day scholars and theologians misunderstood the real meaning of repentance is the height of arrogance and deception. **I'd respect postmoderns more if they'd just say that they don't like the concept of repentance rather than trying to reinterpret its already crystal-clear meaning.**

Repentance is a true gift from God that affects everything in our lives. If our priorities, our passions, our goals, our dreams, and our desires are not changing—are we changing? I only say this because so many today have religion and not a true relationship with Christ. They are simply going through the motions. They have never truly repented. It's been said that if your religion has not changed your life, change your religion. Of course, there are hobbies, activities, and certain friendships that will continue, but if our overall *nature* is not changing, or at least heading in that direction, we should reassess our commitment: Was it genuine? Did we truly repent and turn to God? Do we truly "know" Jesus Christ (relationship), or do we only know "about" Him (religion)?

"The gospel, when rightly understood and received, sets the heart against all sin" (Matthew Henry). 1 John 2:15 declares, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." A disobedient life should raise concerns. A. W. Tozer said it this way: "The idea that God will pardon a rebel who has not given up his rebellion is contrary both to the Scriptures and to common sense."<sup>[36]</sup> (See 2 Thessalonians 1:8.) I'm aware that I'm really driving this point home as well, but I'd rather err on the side of speaking too much about repentance than too little.

1 John 2:3–4 says, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him [Christ],' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." The word "keep" here means to *keep watchful care of*. **In the same way that a ship's captain is committed to keep his course to reach his destination, the sincerity of our commitment to Christ can be measured by how well we follow the scriptural course.**

From time to time, we, like ships, will drift off course. I'm not excusing sin, but I am making a distinction between perfection and direction. Perfection is not the answer—a commitment to keep the course by *loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind; this is the greatest commandment* (Matthew 22:37–38).

*Repentance* is not an outdated, irrelevant word—it's a very relevant word from the heart of God. Isaiah 59:2 reveals that “your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” Psalm 66:18 adds: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Jesus as well as John the Baptist both began their ministry by proclaiming “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). They openly encouraged people to turn from sin and to turn toward God. However, for Christianity to appear enticing and less intrusive to our postmodern culture, difficult truths, including repentance, are minimized or avoided altogether. **They fail to realize that repentance opens the line of communication between God and man. This is the lifeline for our dying world.** It's not our hold on God but rather God's hold on us that secures us.

Jesus compared those who did not repent with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, saying that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for those who did not repent (Mark 6:7–12). No guesswork here. Again, the literal meaning of repentance is apparent throughout the Bible. How can anyone miss this? It sounds more like *eisegesis*—allowing one's ideas and opinions to interpret the Bible rather than *exegesis*—uncovering the true meaning of a passage. By redefining repentance, many postmoderns are leading people in the wrong direction.

Some even suggest that repentance is self-improvement or a call to fulfill our natural potential. When we repent, we do improve, and our God-given potential becomes more apparent, but repentance is not about self-improvement—it's about renouncing sin and turning from it. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change in action—brokenness, genuine sorrow over sin, and humility are marks of sincere repentance. *Lasting hope and joy are also by-products of a right relationship with God, beginning with repentance.* This is nothing to fear but should be cherished. There is always a link between genuine faith and sincere repentance.

Unfortunately, many confuse sorrow with repentance. It's possible to be sorry but not repentant. A penitent person sees sin as God sees it and turns from it. He or she does not want to continue in hurtful or harmful behavior. They accept full responsibility for their actions. At this point, tears often follow, and rightly so. The danger comes when arrogance and a hard heart prevent us from turning to God. “The proud, self-justifying, self-reliant, self-seeking self has to come simply as a lost, undone sinner, whose only hope is a justifying Savior” (Norman Grubb). Take time now and ask God to help you remove those things that are hindering your relationship with Him. Genuine repentance is a life-changing experience. Don't run from it—run to it! Is there anything that you need to repent of?

### ***A Living Testimony—the Power of Repentance***

As a Southern California corporate executive for the fastest growing fitness company in the world in the mid-1990s, I had the opportunity to experience the devastating effects of life in the fast lane without rules or boundaries. As a result, I often went with the flow of society and focused on everything that the world had to offer.

Throughout my '20s, I continued to run from God, searching for identity and truth in everything but His Word. By age 28, I had climbed the corporate ladder. Money and success became my gods and ultimately controlled my life. I was driven—but for the wrong reasons. I felt a sense of purpose—but it often left me empty. I was passionate—but for the wrong things. Strength, to me, meant bench-pressing over 400 pounds, drinking a 12-pack of beer, and winning most of the fights that I was in. What I failed to realize was that I was weak. I was dying spiritually. I didn't have control of my life—my life had control of me. As a result of my misguided focus, my life took several unnecessary turns for the worse. By then alcohol, anger, and arrogance had taken their toll. My life was crumbling around me.

Depressed and desperate for direction, I began to thumb through the pages of my Bible that was shelved long ago. Two Scriptures seemed to jump from the pages: *What does it profit you to gain the whole world but lose your soul?* (Luke 9:25), and *When you hear God's voice, do not harden your heart against Him* (Psalm 95:7–8). I suddenly realized just how far I had drifted from the truth. I was at a turning point. I could choose to humble myself and turn to God or continue to reject Him. By God's grace, I put my complete trust in Him—joy, happiness, and peace filled my heart. Within the months that followed, my passion and purpose for life became clearer than ever.

Looking back, I realize that I may have had religion but not a relationship. I lived in a Christian home, attended a Christian school, went to a Christian church, and read the Bible and prayed from time to time, but I was confusing religion and rules with a true relationship with Christ. I would “say” that I believed in Jesus when asked, but I'm not convinced that I ever truly repented and put my trust in Him. I thought I was a Christian because I was basically a “good person.” This is a major distinction between religion and a relationship. Religion focuses on what “we” do, but a relationship with Christ focuses solely on what “He” did.

- Religion says, “I have to follow rules.” A relationship with Christ says, “Because of the price that He paid for me, I want to follow His plan for my life.”
- Religion says, “I have to go to church.” A relationship with Christ says, “I want to position myself to learn more, worship Him, and benefit from fellowship.”
- Religion lacks assurance, whereas a relationship with Jesus offers unfailing guidance and assurance.
- Religion is man's attempt to reach God, whereas a relationship with Christ is God reaching down to man.

Again, religion focuses on what “we” do—a relationship with Christ focuses on what “He” did. We are declared right before God when we put our trust in Christ, not in our “good” works. This is often referred to as justification by grace through faith alone.

Is your current belief system producing assurance, purpose, and peace, or is it bringing discouragement, disappointment, and despair? Jesus said, *Wisdom is shown to be right by what fruit results from it* (Matthew 11:19). Is your faith leading you in the right direction? Are you producing godly fruit? If not, consider who or what is leading you—religious tradition or a relationship with Jesus Christ?

When people misunderstand and become dissatisfied and discouraged with Christianity, it's often because they confuse "religion" and "rules" with a true relationship with Christ. Or they base their opinion of Christianity on how they see other Christians act. This can be dangerous. Don't base your opinion of Christianity solely on the actions of others. One of the greatest threats to Christianity is not in our failure to proclaim it but in our inability to live it out.

Why do many leave church services no differently than when they arrived? In many cases, it's because they have religion and not a true relationship with Jesus. No wonder Jesus said, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Matthew 15:8). A. W. Tozer states it best: "Millions of professed believers talk as if [Christ] were real and act as if He were not. And always our actual position is to be discovered by the way we act, not by the way we talk."

The mark of genuine faith is not found in religious involvement, visible acts of kindness, knowledge of Jesus, or even in the conviction of sin. Again, genuine faith is reflected in a transformed life, a love for God and His Word, sincere humility, selfless love, disconnection from the world, and true repentance. As they say, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, is there enough evidence in your life to convict you?" Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). Charles Spurgeon adds, "We cannot follow two things. If Christ be one of them, we cannot follow another." If He's not Lord, it may be because we have not yielded. Change occurs when there is a strong conviction of sin and genuine repentance. This shouldn't be discouraging but very encouraging. God has provided the way. It's our choice to accept or reject it.

In the New Testament, Jesus had harsh words for those who appeared to be religious but inwardly had not changed. Our actions, not our words, reveal the authenticity of our relationship with Christ. I don't say this to promote a performance-based religion. I say this to demonstrate the importance of having a genuine relationship with Jesus and a proper perspective of biblical repentance. "There is no peace until we see the finished work of Jesus Christ—until we can look back and see the cross of Christ between our sins" (D. L. Moody).

Who is Jesus? How we answer this question is the difference between right and wrong, light and darkness, heaven and hell. When asked this question, the apostle Peter gave the correct response: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus Himself confirmed this by saying: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Seriously consider who and what you choose to follow. We are sinners who need a Savior. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Hebrews 9:22 says that *without the shedding of blood, there is no removal of sin*. His blood was shed for our sins. We should be forever thankful. Jesus isn't an option. He's the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

We hear a great deal about God's judgment and what can keep us from heaven, and rightly so, because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). But we also need to reflect on God's goodness, love, mercy, and grace. It's difficult to transmit my love for Jesus on these pages. He healed my brokenness and restored my life, and He can do the same for you. If you only take one thing from this book, I hope that it is this: There is a deep longing inside all of us that cannot be satisfied until we recognize our need for a Savior and turn to Him.

If you feel that your relationship with Christ is not genuine, or if you've never repented and trusted in Him as your Lord and Savior, now is the time to take that step and fully commit your entire life. This is often referred to as being "born again." Romans 10:9 states that "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Check out John 3:1–21.)

If current statistics hold true, many will continue to reject Christ, never to return, or they will embrace a glamorized Christianity, both to the same end. Life is a battleground, not a playground! My goal, therefore, is not to be politically correct—it's to inspire you to change from the inside out. If you've never sincerely repented and trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there is no better time than now. Many who are trapped in religion go through life lacking passion, direction, and purpose, often living with a sense of remorse and guilt. They wonder, "Have I been good enough?" A relationship with Christ changes that. 2 Corinthians 5:17 states: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." *Your past is forgiven, your present secure, and your future certain.* Through Christ, you are a brand-new person. If you truly grasp hold of this truth, it can motivate and encourage you beyond measure. **Though the road ahead may be uncertain at times, the solid ground beneath will never shift. It's all about Whom you know.**

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **Group Study Questions/Responses**

1. Why would anyone seek to replace the biblical definition of repentance? What would be the motive behind this type of thought?

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2. Do you agree that many today have religion but not a true relationship with Christ? Why? Why not?

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3. Both Jesus and John the Baptist began their ministries by preaching repentance. Does this change your view or make you think more seriously about repentance, including your own?

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4. Repentance is not about self-improvement; it's about renouncing evil and turning from sin. Comment.

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5. Name a few distinctions between religion and a relationship with Jesus Christ. What's the primary difference between the two?

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6. Genuine faith is reflected in a transformed life, a love for God and His Word, sincere humility, selfless love, *true repentance*, and a disconnect from the world. Do you agree? Why? Why not?

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7. If you've never sincerely repented and trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there is no better time than now. It's the most important decision that you'll ever make. (Check out John 3:1-21.)

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### **Reflection & Journaling**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Thoughts & Chapter Highlights

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Prayers & Practical Application

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## **Recommended Resources**

*Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel*, by Richard Owen Roberts, unfolds the nature and necessity of true biblical repentance. Mr. Roberts also identifies the fruit that accompanies genuine repentance.

*The Best of A. W. Tozer*, compiled by Warren Wiersbe, taps into the bedrock of true spirituality. Wiersbe adds, “If a sermon can be compared to light, then A. W. Tozer released a laser beam from the pulpit, a beam that penetrates your heart.”

*The Grace of Repentance*, by Sinclair B. Ferguson, looks at the biblical definition of repentance and the necessity of reformation. Ferguson believes that it is not only essential for salvation but is also the concrete expression of divine regeneration.

*Calvary Road*, by Roy Hession, profiles the nature of religious revival and lays out the prerequisites and consequences of the activity of God in the heart of the hungry seeker.

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## WISDOM WORTH REPEATING

*“The Church has lost the note of authority, the secret of wisdom, and the gift of power through its persistent and willful neglect of the Holy Spirit of God.”*

*SAMUEL CHADWICK (1840-1932)*

*“There is no doubt that things are as they are in the Christian Church throughout the world today because we have lost our authority.”*

*D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES (1899-1981)*

*“One of the main secrets of success in the early Church lay in the fact that the early believers believed in unction from on high, and not entertainment from men.”*

*DUNCAN CAMPBELL (1898-1972)*

*“The person who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day.”*

*E. M. BOUNDS (1835-1913)*

*“When people find that after being in the church for years they are not making much progress, they ought to examine*

*themselves and wonder whether they have been truly converted.”*

*A. W. TOZER (1897-1963)*

*“If a comfort which you think you need, and which appears to you to be very sweet, does not glorify Christ, look very suspiciously upon it.”*

*CHARLES SPURGEON (1834-1892)*

*“Do not put yourself at odds with the Word of God. For truly it will persist as surely as the Rhine [River] follows its course. One can perhaps dam it up for awhile, but it is impossible to stop it.”*

*ULRICH ZWINGLI (1484–1531)*

*“There is no worse screen to block out the Spirit than confidence in our own intelligence.”*

*JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564)*

*“There can be no happy, successful prayer life for a rebellious child of God.”*

*JOHN R. RICE (1895-1980)*

*“Just as water ever seeks and fills the lowest place,  
so the moment God finds you abased and empty,  
His glory and power flow in.”*

*ANDREW MURRAY (1828-1917)*

*“It must be kept in mind that Christ taught  
the world’s preachers more about praying  
than He did about preaching.”*

*E. M. BOUNDS*

*“The preachers who are the mightiest in their closets with  
God are the mightiest in their pulpits with men.”*

*E. M. BOUNDS*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shane Idleman is the founder and lead pastor of Westside Christian Fellowship in Lancaster, California, where he currently resides with his wife and children. Whether speaking nationally or at home, he continually encourages believers to be pillars who support absolute truth. Shane's resources can be found at [WCFAV.org](http://WCFAV.org) or [ShaneIdleman.com](http://ShaneIdleman.com).

Today, as we drift away in a current of moral decay, many believe the battle is too advanced and that we cannot make a difference. Shane, however, believes we can and offers this book as a contribution to that commitment. His other books include:

*One Nation 'Above' God* serves as a wake-up call to Christian Americans that sitting on the sidelines is no longer an option for those who love their country and their God. It makes a compelling case that almost all of America's current troubles are rooted in the growing abandonment of Judeo-Christian values. (173 pages)

*What Works for Young Adults—Solid Choices in Unstable Times* answers the top questions on the minds of young adults today such as: What is truth? How can I know God? Do all paths lead to heaven? What is God's will for my life? and many more. Group study questions included. (190 pages)

*What Works for Men—Regaining Lost Ground* is a challenging, biblically based resource for men. (160 pages)

*What Works for Singles—for Relationships, for Marriage, for Life* is a motivational, biblically based resource for those divorced, those marrying for the first time, and those currently single. (200 pages)

*What Works When "Diets" Don't* will prepare you for the weight-loss process, motivate you to continue, and empower you to succeed while helping you reach your weight-loss goal in the shortest, safest amount of time. (232 pages)

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## APPENDIX 1

Both appendices contain two of the best concise articles that I've read on the subject of the emergent church. I don't know of anyone better than Jason Carlson who approaches this subject with humility, honesty, and truth. His perspective has been a tremendous blessing to me and countless others as well.

Although these articles were written some time ago, and the emergent movement has evolved, the truths are timeless. Times change—truth does not.

### **My Journey Into and Out of the Emergent Church**

*By Jason Carlson*

The growing influence of the so-called emergent church movement has generated much interest and debate in recent times. As a columnist for the Christian Worldview Network, people often ask me for my take on the emergent church movement. Thus, the purpose of this article is simply to offer my humble perspective on the emergent church movement, based upon my unique firsthand interactions with many of its leaders, many of whom I count as friends in spite of my disagreements with them.

My initial entrance into the emergent church conversation came about six years ago while I was a student in seminary. One of the key figures in Emergent, the official title of the organization that is the primary voice for the emergent church movement, Doug Pagitt (Pastor of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis), is a close friend of mine. Doug had a profound influence on my life during his time as my youth pastor when I was in high school. Between my years in youth group and my entrance into seminary, Doug became intimately involved with many of the key movers and shakers who would eventually form the organization, or "generative friendship" as they call it, which is now Emergent. During these formative years of Emergent (actually, back then it was called The Terra Nova Project), Doug invited me to many of the early gatherings of this group. It was at these events where I was introduced to and spent much time with people like Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Pagitt, and others.

During my interactions with my friends from Emergent, I was challenged both intellectually and spiritually through what I encountered, and I was really forced to wrestle with what I believe and hold dear. Over the course of about three years of fairly regular interaction with members of Emergent and participation in many of their gatherings and events, I became increasingly concerned over what I believe are serious deviations from biblical truth taking place within the Emergent "conversation" (how they refer to the movement). Many other commentators have drawn attention to these dangers within Emergent, but here are some of the key errors that I observed, errors that eventually led to my disengagement with the movement:

- A highly ambiguous handling of truth.
- A desire to be so inclusive and tolerant that there is virtually no sense of biblical discernment in terms of recognizing and labeling false beliefs, practices, or lifestyles.
- A quasi-universalistic view of salvation.

- A lack of a proper appreciation for biblical authority over and against personal experience or revelation.
- Openness to pagan religious practices like Hindu Yoga and incorporating them into the Christian life and Christian worship.
- Openly questioning the relevance of key historical biblical doctrines such as the Trinity.
- An uncritically open embrace of the Catholic and Orthodox churches.
- An unbridled cynicism towards conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism.
- A reading of Scripture that is heavily prejudiced towards a social gospel understanding.
- Little or no talk of evangelism or saving lost souls.
- A salvation by osmosis mentality, where if you hang out with us long enough, you're in.
- And many other things that I won't get into...

Needless to say, today I no longer actively participate in the Emergent conversation. While I do maintain my friendships with many people involved in Emergent, I cannot openly participate in or support this movement due to my spirit's uneasiness with the errors I listed. I am not ashamed to call the people I mentioned my friends, but friends don't always have to agree, and sometimes the best thing a friend can do is to point out the error in the other's ways. So, for now, you could call me a friendly critic of Emergent.

How did I make it out of my time in Emergent to return to a solid Christian worldview? I owe it all to my parents who raised me with a deep appreciation and respect for God's Word and the truth it reveals. For as far back as I can remember, my parents trained me in a biblical Christian worldview. I was taught from a very young age to test all things by God's word, and I was regularly exposed to the writings and teachings of great Christian apologists and theologians like Josh McDowell, Norman Geisler, Ken Ham, and Walter Martin. Through reading solid Christian scholars and attending numerous high quality Christian worldview-training conferences, I was equipped with the tools I would need later in life to discern truth from error.

Parents, you cannot take lightly the influence that a godly, biblically based upbringing can have on your children! Each generation will be faced with their share of trials, tribulations, and errors which threaten the integrity of the church, but when our young people are raised up with a firm foundation in God's truth, they will be able to discern truth from error and will have the tools they'll need to overcome any challenge to their faith.

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## APPENDIX 2

### Emerging vs. Emergent Churches: Clearing up the Confusion

*By Jason Carlson*

What is the difference between the “emerging” church and the “emergent” church? In recent years these two terms, often used interchangeably, have raised much confusion, consternation, and debate within the Christian community. Are these terms synonymous? Should we differentiate them? And should the movements they represent concern us?

To answer these questions I would like to briefly describe some of the key differences, as I see them, between these two terms—“emerging” and “emergent.” I will propose that distinctions can and should be made between these two terms, and I will attempt to make these clear in this article. I will also share with you some of my personal thoughts in regard to the positives and negatives of both of these terms and the movements that they describe.

A brief disclaimer at the outset: The descriptions I will give are meant to provide a broad and general overview of these two movements. These descriptions are based solely upon my personal interaction and experience with a number of emerging and emergent churches. I am fully aware that exceptions to these portrayals do exist.

#### ***What is the emerging church?***

The “emerging” church movement is basically a generic term. It typically refers to any church or organization that sees as its primary mission reaching today’s postmodern culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are thousands of these emerging churches in our country today, and they span a multitude of denominations.

Churches and organizations that would describe themselves as part of the emerging church generally have evangelical tendencies. They tend to hold to and defend theological positions that have been widely accepted and embraced by the wider evangelical community. Emerging churches generally recognize the reality of absolute truth, many have a high regard for the authority of Scripture, and most will unashamedly proclaim the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Socially and politically, people who attend these emerging churches will come from a diversity of backgrounds. Culturally, however, it is no stretch to say that the majority of emerging churches would tend to be predominantly white and suburban. At the same time though, many of these emerging churches place a high value on social activism and concern for the urban poor.

Where these emerging churches most differ from their more traditional, evangelical counterparts is typically in their methodology. They generally are more cutting-edge in their use of music, media, and other art forms as tools for communicating the message of the gospel. They may meet in traditional church sanctuaries, but often times you will find them in settings that are better suited for a multi-sensory worship experience, settings such as coffee houses or nightclubs.

#### ***What is the emergent church?***

The “emergent” church movement, on the other hand, is a much more specific term. It refers to those churches and organizations that align themselves, whether formally or informally, with the vision and philosophy of an organization officially named *Emergent*. The Emergent organization can be found online at [www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com). Emergent identifies itself as, “a growing, generative friendship among missional Christians seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” This organization was founded and is led by prominent spokesmen like Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, and others.

Churches and organizations that would fall under the emergent label come from a diversity of Christian traditions. Many of these churches have evangelical roots, but you will also find Catholic, Orthodox, and Mainline protestant denominations allied with the Emergent group. Accordingly, the theologies found within the emergent church are as diverse as the traditions that make it up. This theological diversity is widely celebrated within the movement and is the primary reason behind the emergent church’s disinterest in producing statements of faith, which are viewed as constricting and limiting to ongoing dialogue and theological imagination.

Socially and politically, the emergent church is also a diverse group. However, most commentators point out a greater propensity towards liberal interests and causes. Emergent churches also tend to be predominantly white. At the same time, while not necessarily a rule, emergent churches are often found in urban settings. Emergent churches also place a high value on social activism and concern for the urban poor.

As for the style and methodology of the emergent churches, you will find a tremendous amount of diversity here. Again, reflecting the diversity of traditions that make up Emergent’s “generative friendship.” Some of these emergent churches will resemble settings like coffee houses or nightclubs, settings geared towards a multi-sensory worship experience. But others will take the opposite approach, favoring a more contemplative or liturgical feel in their worship gatherings. And some will blend both.

### ***Reflections on the emerging and emergent church***

While I would never offer a blanket endorsement of all things “emerging,” the evangelically inclined emerging church movement can generally be viewed as a positive force within the church. Wherever we find emerging churches remaining faithful to the authority and truths of Scripture, the wider evangelical community should embrace and support them as co-laborers for the Kingdom. The goal of spreading the gospel to the entire world, including the postmodern world, is a clear biblical mandate, and the emerging church movement is helping to carry out this task.

The church must recognize that throughout history the tactics we’ve used in communicating the gospel message have regularly changed. The medium for delivering the message, as long as it does not clearly violate biblical norms, should not be our primary concern. Rather, the advancement of the message of the gospel should be paramount. When sharing this goal, the emerging church movement can be viewed as an ally of traditional evangelicalism.

The emergent church movement, on the other hand, has given traditional evangelicals more cause for concern. As I have observed the evolution of the emergent church over the past few

years, I have noticed an increasing trend towards theological revisionism, theological liberalism, and an open embrace of postmodern philosophy.

The emergent church has moved beyond the practice of simply adapting the methods we use in order to reach the postmodern world for Jesus Christ. By and large the emergent church has adopted an uncritical embrace of the postmodern worldview. And postmodernism is a worldview that in many regards is antithetical to biblical Christianity. Prominent leaders within the emergent church are on record denying objective truth, promoting relativism, and questioning a number of the core doctrines of biblical Christianity. All of these facts greatly disturb me and should concern all discerning believers.

One last thought regarding the more evangelically inclined emerging church. I would encourage any evangelical church or organizations currently identifying with the label of “emerging church” to strongly consider dropping the use of this term. As I stated above, having a ministry focused towards reaching the postmodern world for Jesus Christ is an awesome goal. However, why not simply focus on being the church? Why “emerging”?

Why would evangelically inclined churches or organizations want to associate themselves with a term that is so easily confused today with a movement (Emergent) that is causing so much concern within evangelical circles? Are the confusions, false labeling, and attacks associated with calling yourself an emerging church worth it?

For example, it’s like when you’re throwing a party... you don’t send out invitations that say, “Come to my gay party.” You might be throwing the happiest, most joyous party in the history of the world, but in today’s culture you just don’t use certain terms because of their “perceived” meaning.

Not only is the use of the term “emerging” confusing and for many people loaded with negative connotations, it’s also just plain cheesy. When are we evangelicals going to get over our penchant for jumping on the bandwagon of the latest fad movement to come along? We’ve got seeker-sensitive churches, purpose-driven churches, and now Emergent comes along and suddenly everybody wants to be an emerging church. It’s getting ridiculous.

Again, if you want to focus on ministering to postmoderns, that’s great, do it. But just be the church to them. We’ve got enough labels to explain to non-believers already, we don’t need to add another one into the mix.

In conclusion, I trust that the descriptions and distinctions offered in this article have proven helpful in terms of understanding the “emerging” and “emergent” churches. At the same time, if you would like to explore these matters further, let me encourage you to visit our ministry’s website and check out our video and audio resources for more information on postmodernity and the emergent church ([www.jude3.com](http://www.jude3.com)).

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## ENDNOTES

- [1](#) Oswald Chambers, *The Complete Work of Oswald Chambers* (Discovery House Publishers, 2000), excerpted from September 27th; My Utmost for His Highest.
- [2](#) John MacArthur, *The Truth War*, (Nelson Books, 2007), 2.
- [3](#) A.W. Tozer, *The Best of A.W. Tozer II*, (Christian Publications, Inc., 1961), 21.
- [4](#) Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, (W Publishing Group, 2000), 50.
- [5](#) John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*—specifically Matthew 7.
- [6](#) John Gill, *John Gill's exposition of the entire Bible*—specifically Matthew 18.
- [7](#) John Wesley, *John Wesley's Bible commentary*—specifically II Thessalonians 3.
- [8](#) Mike Yaconelli, ed., *Stories of Emergence—Moving from Absolute to Authentic* (Zondervan, 2003).
- [9](#) John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*—specifically Matthew 7.
- [10](#) John Gill, *John Gill's exposition of the entire Bible*—specifically Matthew 7.
- [11](#) *The Geneva Study Bible* (1599) was the Bible of the Pilgrims, Puritans, and Reformers. It was printed before the *1611 King James Bible*.
- [12](#) Chambers, *The Complete Work*, 3.
- [13](#) Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 763–764.
- [14](#) “Tony Jones Blesses Gay Marriage & Ordination.” Jones said on his blog that he now believes “that GLBTQ can live in accord with biblical Christianity (at least as much as any of us can!) and that their monogamy can and should be sanctioned and blessed by church and state” (*GLBTQ* stands for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning).
- [15](#) John Piper, from the sermon “The Other Dark Exchange,” (Desiring God ministries, October 11th, 1998).
- [16](#) The actual sign can be seen on *The League of Grateful Sons* DVD by Vision Forum Ministries, 2005.
- [17](#) This quote is often attributed to “Father Denis Edward O’Brien, USMC.” O’Brien was in the Marines in World War II, but he became a priest after his discharge.
- [18](#) Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Inaugural Address*, January 20, 1953; 34th president of US, 1953-1961.
- [19](#) Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; published in 6 volumes.

[20](#) The reference for the Bible’s influence on the Founders can be found in Donald Lutz’s work, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 141. Additionally, see David Barton’s *The Role of Pastors & Christians in Civil Government* (WallBuilders, Inc., 2003), 17.

[21](#) *The No Religious Test Clause* is found in the United States Constitution (Article VI, paragraph 3), and states, “The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”

[22](#) Frank Moore, *Materials for History Printed From Original Manuscripts, the Correspondence of Henry Laurens of South Carolina* (New York: Zenger Club, 1861), 20, to John Laurens on August 14, 1776. Benjamin Rush, *Minutes of the Proceedings of a Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States Assembled at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, 1794), 24.

[23](#) Jefferson, *Writings*, 16:281–282, to the Danbury Baptist Association, dated January 1, 1802.

[24](#) John Quincy Adam’s quote can be found in *The Jubilee of the Constitution* (New York: Published by Samuel Colman, 1839), 13–14.

[25](#) Arturo G. Azurdia II gave a similar example in his book *Spirit Empowered Preaching*. He deserves credit for this analogy.

[26](#) D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, (Zondervan, 2005), 44.

[27](#) A. W. Tozer, *Reprint from The Root of the Righteous*, (Christian Publications, Inc., 1950, 1978, by Lowell Tozer), 5.

[28](#) Chambers, *The Complete Work*, 16, excerpt from “Approved unto God.”

[29](#) A. W. Tozer, *The Best of Tozer*, 116.

[30](#) Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights* newsletter, August 2004 (Plano, TX: Insight for Living), 1–2.

[31](#) Arturo G. Azurdia II, *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 88.

[32](#) George D. Watson, “True and False Fire,” article published at the beginning of the 1900s.

[33](#) Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Holy Spirit’s Chief Office”—sermon number 2382 delivered July 26th, 1888 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

[34](#) D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, from his sermon series on the “Gifts and Baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

[35](#) William C Martin, *A Prophet with Honor—the Billy Graham Story*, (Quill, 1991), 63.

[36](#) Tozer, *The Best of Tozer*, 116.

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