

## The Emergent Church

Let us be aware of an important truth. One vital reason for the Bible being written is *'that ye may know that ye have eternal life'*, (1Jn.5:13). Sadly, we live in an age where even the concept of 'knowing' is itself under attack. You will be asked: 'With so many differing groups all using the Bible, how do you even know what it really means?' This doubt concerning the true meaning of God's Word in Holy Scripture is increasingly being raised by pastors from within the Emergent Church Movement. Although we might not like hearing about it (and believe us we'd love to see this movement go away), the Emergent Church is undoubtedly coming to a church near you as more and more Evangelical pastors come under mounting pressure to go with the flow and increase numbers in their churches. Long ago we in Australia, and elsewhere, surrendered the idea that the concept of church, as taught in the New Testament, is primarily for the edification of believers.

Now, thanks to the proliferation of the *'Purpose Driven Life'*, which has twisted this process and reversed it, more and more churches have become so worldly that unbelievers have been flocking to them. The local pastor is now under tremendous pressure to enlarge his church or to be outcast. It is for this reason that many are now beginning to 'reach out' to teens and young adults using entertainment techniques taught in the developing cult of the Emergent Church Movement.

American pastor and author, Rob Bell, writes giving a clue where his fast growing congregation are led astray: *'I was in an intense meeting with our church leaders in which we were discussing several passages in the Bible. One of the leaders was sharing her journey in trying to understand what the Bible teaches about the issue at hand and she said 'I've spent a great deal of time recently studying this issue. I've read what the people on both sides of the issue say, I've read the scholars and the theologians and all sorts of others on this subject. But then, in the end, I decided to get back to the Bible and just take it for what it really says'. Now please understand that this way of thinking is prevalent in a lot of Christian churches...but this view of the Bible is warped and toxic, to say the least...The assumption is that there is a way to read the Bible that is agenda - and perspective - free...This perspective is claiming that a person can simply read the Bible and do what it says - unaffected by any outside influences...When you hear people say they are just going to tell you what the Bible means, it is not true. They are telling you what they think it means'*.

Now, if that appears to be somewhat out of kilter with your view of the study of scripture - then maybe the Holy Spirit is telling you something? This is the Holy Spirit that has promised to guide us into all truth - apparently that is— until we reached the twenty-first century? In our hip, post-modern western world, we have simply dismissed His function as irrelevant now that we've come to the conclusion that there's no such thing as an absolute truth in the Bible for us to be guided into anyway!

When we hear that no one can really know 'what the Bible means' it is actually a statement that we are expected to believe is true. However, if we can't know for certain what is true in the Bible to begin with, then it also follows that we can't really know if this postmodern philosophy itself is true. This is therefore an infantile way of viewing Holy Writ. We

don't like what God has said. God has revealed the truth about our human nature. It doesn't sit well with us. So we just deny the concept of the fall and all its consequences. It is expedient to the task to hand.

The genuine Christian knows that we can't dismiss the concept of truth as easily as that. But those who champion the philosophy of postmodernism in the Emergent Church would have us do so. Biblically we can do away with this false teaching of theirs once and for all. The Apostle John quotes Jesus as asking God the Father to do something very important for His followers - 'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth', (Jn.17:17). This would not be possible for God to do if there was no way to know what this truth was to begin with. We must also remember that earlier in John's Gospel the Master tells us a few other essential things pursuant to our discussion of the concept of knowing the truth of the absolutes found in Holy Scripture. In John 14:6 Jesus explains to us that *'I Am...the Truth'* and then our Lord says *'he that hath seen me hath seen the Father...I am in the Father, and the Father in me. The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself...'*, (vs.9,10).

It is quite obvious from this that Jesus DOES speak the truth! When He said: *'And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth...But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you'* (Jn.14:16-26) - you can practically guarantee He meant it!

And since these arguments simply cannot successfully be refuted using Scripture, the only recourse left for those who wish to deny this orthodox Biblical teaching is to attempt to circumvent the text of the Bible itself and/or try to get us to doubt the so-called 'western' concept of logic. As if our Creator hadn't revealed His Own logical nature when He established this universe with laws that operate consistently!

The doctrine holds that the Holy Spirit controls the regenerate believer. He is the Spirit of God the Father. Furthermore, we are told that if you are not possessed by the Spirit of the triune God - you are none of His. You are not a member of the Body of Christ in the first place. This is the logical conclusion we arrive at if we are reading scripture in context. Yet the Emergent Church movement has undermined this truth at its very base. By urging its adherents to arrive at their own imaginary interpretation of the text they have jumped the tracks. Satan has sown confusion here by casting doubt on the scriptures and how they were received and written. His suggestion is that they were 'oral traditions' allegedly passed around for at least a generation before being committed to writing - and therefore are not to be taken literally.

This doubt about understanding the truth contained in the Bible is already beginning to sneak its way into the mainstream Evangelical church, but this skepticism is already well entrenched within the Emergent Church. One of the luminaries of this movement, Brian McLaren, considers himself to be a 'post modernist' and free from any constraints of propositional truthfulness. He merely wants the Christian community to embrace a pluriform understanding of truth as a way out of doctrinal conflict and impasse.

The Bible, McLaren argues, is intended to equip God's

people for good works. He rejects words such as authority, inerrancy, and infallibility as unnecessary and distracting. In a previous work, McLaren had argued that the Bible is 'a unique collection of literary artifacts that together support the telling of an amazing and essential story'.

What is being eradicated within the Church is the understanding that no matter how logical and impressive we like to try and present ourselves as scholars, it is only through God the Holy Spirit that we can truly know and understand what these Biblical texts that He inspired actually say. What this means regarding the writings of the New Testament is this: The length of time that these teachings may have remained in an oral fashion is irrelevant, because Christ has just informed us that God the Holy Spirit would teach those who would go on to write these documents, all things – not some, but all things. And furthermore, He would remind them of everything Jesus taught them.

False teachers like Rob Bell and Brian McLaren within the burgeoning cult of the Emergent Church are not going to go away. The Emergent movement represents a significant

challenge to biblical Christianity. Unwilling to affirm that the Bible contains propositional truths that form the framework for Christian belief, this movement argues that we can have Christian symbolism and substance without those thorny questions of truthfulness that have so vexed the modern mind - and repelled the unbelieving. When it comes to issues such as the exclusivity of the gospel, the identity of Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine, the authoritative character of Scripture as written revelation, and the clear teachings of Scripture concerning issues such as homosexuality, this movement simply refuses to answer the questions.

To flee from such teachings is the correct action to take. These heresies may begin in stealth only to explode like wildfire as the Holy Spirit first grieves - then leaves. Church growth mania has assumed gargantuan proportions, and is engulfing once sound assemblies here in Australia and worldwide. It is high time to question our pastors and leaders who propose the methodology of this Emergent Church - and have them attempt to substantiate it's claims from scripture.

Mike Claydon

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## **Danger of Christian Complacency**

*'The times require distinct and decided views of Christian doctrine. I cannot withhold my conviction that the professing Church is as much damaged by laxity about matters of doctrine within, as it is by sceptics and unbelievers without. Myriads of professing Christians nowadays seem utterly unable to distinguish things that differ. Like people afflicted with colour-blindness, they are incapable of discerning what is true and what is false, what is sound and what is unsound. If a preacher of religion is only clever and eloquent and earnest, they appear to think he is all right, however strange and heterogenous his sermons may be. They are destitute of spiritual sense, apparently, and cannot detect error. The only positive thing about them is that they dislike distinctiveness and think that all extreme and decided positive views are very naughty and very wrong!*

*These people live in a kind of mist or fog. They see nothing clearly, and do not know what they believe. They have not made up their minds about any great point in the Gospel, and seem content to be honorary members of all schools of thought. For their lives they could not tell you what they think is truth about Justification, or Regeneration, or Sanctification, or our Lord's Supper, or Baptism, or faith or conversion, or inspiration, or the future state. They are eaten up with a morbid dread of controversy...they live on undecided; and too often undecided they drift down to the grave, without comfort...and, I am afraid, also without hope.*

*The explanation of this boneless, nerveless, jellyfish condition of soul is not difficult to find. To begin with, the heart of man is naturally in the dark about religion - has no intuitive sense of truth - and really needs instruction and illumination. Besides this, the natural heart in most men hates exertion in religion, and cordially dislikes patient, painstaking inquiry. Above all, the natural heart generally likes praise of others, shrinks from collision, and loves to be thought charitable and liberal. The whole result is that a kind of broad religious 'agnosticism' just suits an immense number of people, and specially suits young persons. They are content to shovel aside all disputed points as rubbish, and if you*

*charge them with indecision, they will tell you: 'I do not pretend to understand controversy; I decline to examine controversial points. I dare say it is all the same in the long run'...*

*Now I do beseech all to beware of this undecided state of mind in religion. This is a pestilence, which walketh in darkness, and a destruction that wasteth at noonday. It is a lazy, idle frame of soul, which, doubtless, saves man the trouble of thought and investigation but it is a frame of soul for which there is no warrant in the Bible. For your own soul's sake, dare to make up your mind what you believe, and dare to have positive, distinct views of truth and error. Never, never be afraid to hold decided doctrinal opinions; and let no fear of man and no morbid dread of being thought party-spirits, narrow, or controversial, make you rest contented with the bloodless, tasteless, colourless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity.*

*Mark what I say. If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal religion. If you believe little, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won on distinct doctrinal theology; by telling...of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice, by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross, and His precious blood; by teaching them of justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Saviour; by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit; by lifting up the brazen serpent; by telling men to look and live - to believe, repent, and be converted. This is the only teaching which for centuries God has honoured with success, and is honouring at the present day both at home and abroad.*

*It is doctrine - doctrine, clear ringing doctrine, which, like the ram's horns at Jericho, cast down the opposition of the devil and sin. Let us cling to decided doctrinal views, whatever some may please to say in these times, and we shall do well for ourselves, well for others, and well for Christ's cause in the World. J. C. Ryle*