

Articles and Sermons :: The Coming Divergence & Purging of the Church

The Coming Divergence & Purging of the Church - posted by docseth1 (), on: 2016/6/4 22:41

This is a sermon that was recently preached at the church I attend. It's lengthy, but appropriate for the time in which we live.

1Tim 4:1-2: Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron

2Thess 2:2 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

- The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word divergence as "a drawing apart (as of lines extending from a common center)." Something happens in a divergence that causes a separation and an abandonment of that common center.

- The Church has always had a common center. That common center has always been on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. His identity, His Incarnation, His Life, His Death, His Burial and Resurrection, His Ascension back to heaven & His Second Coming has been the central theme of genuine Christianity throughout the ages.

- But this common centrality around the person and work of Jesus is more than just a theme! It is more than just a subject for debate or discussion. It is truth! It is the only truth that will set humanity free. It is the only truth that will matter at the end.

- Concerning the person of Jesus, Peter preached that Jesus was a person like no other. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he boldly declared in Acts 4:12 that, "There is no salvation through any other name." He went on to add, "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

- Concerning the Work of Jesus, Paul referred to it as the Gospel that leads to salvation. In verse 16 of Romans chapter one, Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." So the Person and Work of Jesus is more than a theme; it is the only truth that leads to life. Biblical Christianity is about life! It is about eternal life! It is about an Abundant Life that is only possible through Jesus.

- These truths have been the central theme, the central message and the central point of the Christian Church for the last two millennia from its very inception.

Divergence

- But Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines the word divergence as a drawing apart. So when I speak of a coming divergence, I am saying that we are going to begin seeing a separation take place within the Christian community. It will be a divergence that will take many away from that common center of the truth, which is the gospel.

- The Holy Spirit gave to us insight concerning this divergence when He clearly said that "In latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (1Tim 4:1-2). Paul also warned in 2Thess 2:3 about a "falling away" or "apostasy" that would come. He also taught that it would be a divergence away from that common center of the gospel.

- This divergence is already taking place. There has been a measure of divergence that has always been around. Paul wrote of the mystery of iniquity that was at work during his day. John wrote of the spirit of antichrist that was at work during his day. However, both Paul & John, and even Jesus pointed to a particular time in the last days that would be characterized by an apostasy and departure from the faith. We are seeing those days unfold before our very own eyes. We are

we are now living in what some have labeled as the "end times" of the last days. If we are, then we should be on high alert. If we are, then it is time for us to wipe the slumber and sleep from our eyes and shake ourselves so that we do not become part of the divergence that is taking place. A great question that we should be asking today is, "What time is it?"

- As time goes on, this separation will become wider and many will be swept away by the seductive power of this age. We are going to increasingly hear of well-known pastors and ministers abandoning the truths of the gospel. (Church in Tennessee, Rob Bell, Chrislam, universalism,)

- Apostasy does not always mean a swapping out the Christian faith for a pagan or cultish religion. More often than not, apostasy seeks to keep Jesus, the bible and the gospel. It just wants to tweak them a bit or adapt them to fit certain lifestyles, preferences or viewpoints. It starts with being accommodating toward sin. It often begins with a cry for relevance within the church "but a relevance that is strictly worldly in its application. It prefers political correctness to what is right scripturally. In the end, you will have a different Jesus and a different gospel. Neither will save you.

What's Driving This Divergence? There are THREE THINGS that I believe are greatly influencing this divergence.

1. PRESSURE

In the human body there are these sensitive nerve areas that are called pressure points. If enough pressure is applied to that area of the body, it can produce great pain. Martial Arts students are trained to locate these areas on the body and to exploit them in order to bring about the submission of their opponents. It is called submission by pain. In both practice-training and real prize-fighting, fighters are trained to do what is called a "Tap Out." If they find themselves in a position where they can no longer stand the pain, they will begin to tap the ground or the thing nearest to them as a sign of surrender and defeat.

There are those within the Christian community who have begun to Tap Out spiritually. Under the weight of the pain and pressure of this world, they are beginning to succumb to the pressure of this age.

Just as there are many pressure points in different areas of the body, there are different pressure points that are being squeezed within the church causing and will continue to cause this divergence. An axe to the wood will cause the wood to split. A sledgehammer to the concrete will cause cracks to form.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THESE PRESSURE POINTS?

THE PRESSURE OF SUCCESS: Pastors & Ministry Leaders are especially vulnerable to this pressure point. Very often, pastors and ministry leaders have a tendency to carry the weight of the success or failure of a church solely on their shoulders. This can be so for several reasons: 1. A minister's ego. This means that pride can be a driving force behind their desire for success like Nebuchadnezzar. 2. Responsibility: They are told that they are responsible for the success or failure of a church. They are praised if it succeeds and blamed if it fails (by their Members/Denominational Leaders/Board/Elders, etc). Rarely is it taken into account the kind of people that are in a church. 3. A minister's self-esteem & self-worth can be behind their desire for success: Their blood, sweat & tears are involved. No one wants to work hard for nothing. Although the bible tells us that our labor is not in vain, in the ministry, it will often appear as though it is. Satan will be there to tell them that they are insignificant. No one wants to be insignificant.

So what often happens under the pressure of success? Many will begin to change their message, change their doctrinal and theological positions and begin to entertain and implement carnal tactics for growing a congregation. If the congregation is not spiritual, it too will be swept into a distorted view of success that will actually lead it away from its center "the gospel."

THE PRESSURE OF INTIMIDATION

By Political Correctness: Homosexuality is a sin. We are accused of being intolerant, unloving and unaccepting when we preach this. Abortion is murder & murder is a sin. We are told that we hate women's rights and want to keep women enslaved. The message that Jesus is the only way to God and eternal life is considered arrogant. We are charged with damning everyone else to hell, being close-minded, arrogant & intolerant of other faiths. By Hate Speech Laws: "some countries now consider preaching the truth against certain lifestyles to be hate speech and punishable under their law.

Because of this pressure, some will become seeker sensitive and seeker friendly. Meaning, they will adapt their message to whoever attends. This often leads to a silencing of the truth and a changing of the message. In other words, some will become tempted to stray from their center due to the pressure of intimidation. They will become more concerned about self-preservation than preserving the truth.

THE PRESSURE OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION

We have an unhealthy concern for what the world thinks of us. Jesus stated, "You will be hated by all nations for my sake." We are doing everything that we can to keep the words of Jesus from becoming a reality. We have gone to great lengths to convince the world to get along with us "even at the expense of the gospel."

There are a few "isms" that some in the church have begun to buy into as a result of the pressure of public perception

- Universalism eventually, everyone will go to heaven. (We don't want people to view us as the "Hell, Fire & Brimstone" type.)
- Religious Syncretism (mixture): Not wanting to look elitist or arrogant, we make the decision to mix a little Jesus with a little something else. (It's a lot more palatable than declaring Jesus to be the only way to God.)
- Pluralism "There are so many different religions and ideas: (surely all of the different religious groups around the world are not going to hell. Let's just tell everyone, "We are all on the same road.")
- Relativism: There is no absolute truth. Everyone is right! You have your truth, I have my truth and we are all right.

Because of fear of public perception, many actually caving and surrendering to the pull of culture.

2. PASSIVITY

Being passive with the things of God is dangerous. When we don't take the things of God seriously, we can get into real trouble. When we do not study to know the truth and properly communicate that truth, we are in danger of causing others to err. When we fail to pray and stay in the word of God, we fail to know the heart and mind of God. We also lose our strength and vitality. You cannot stay on the straight & narrow while being passive about your walk with the Lord. Men who do not walk with God cannot walk upright.

3. PERSUASION

"You ran well. Who hindered (bewitched kjv) you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you" (Gal 1:7-8). This was Paul's response to the Galatian church after they had been persuaded by religious Jews to go back under the OT Law. In this case, the persuasion came from people. But there are other influences. Paul also wrote a letter to Timothy speaking about this very thing. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2Â speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron"(1Tim 4:1-2).

There is a greater last-day problem that is causing this persuasion that is leading to a divergence. Paul says that "Deceiving/seducing spirits will persuade some to go into apostasy with false teaching. We hear often about false teachers. We rarely stop to consider the demonic activity behind it all. We often underestimate the power of spiritual warfare & the satanic involvement that goes into our spiritual failure. We are warned to be sober and vigilant (1Pe 5:8). We are warned to put on the whole armor of God (Eph 6). We are warned not to be ignorant of Satan's devices, but too often we are

4. PASSION "for worldly things

2Tim 4:9:Â Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10Â for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica.

1Jn 2:15:Â Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

This divergence is often a Symptom of not counting the cost. The cost of following/serving & living is not being presented today. Christ's claim on our life is being withheld in much of today's preaching.

5. Persecution

Mt 24:9Â "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10Â And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. 11Â Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12Â And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. 13Â But he who endures to the end shall be saved. 14Â And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Verse 10 tells us that persecution will literally cause a divide in the community of the believers. Because of fear of persecution, some will be offended and leave. Some will betray other believers.

WHAT DOES THIS DIVERGENCE MEAN FOR THE CHURCH?

The Negative:

- Greater persecution - Not only will many in the church fall into apostasy, the world is going to increasingly become more wicked and vile. The church is going to increasingly be hated.
- Greater strain (We will have to pray harder, work harder & be more determined than ever)

The Positive

- A Refinement of the Church

Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. Daniel 12:10

Some will seek harder after God & holiness. Some will cease fighting and succumb to the pull of the world

- A Remnant in the Church

“That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Eph 5:27

When it is all said and done, God will have a glorious, beautiful bride.

- A Rapture & Redemption of the Church

“Those who endure to the end will be saved.” Mt 24:13

As we approach the dark days ahead, remember the words of Jesus in John 14. "I will not leave you comfortless." We are not alone. He also said, "I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am, you may be also."

Conclusion

More than ever before, we must fix our eyes upon Jesus. Though the storms may intensify, we have an anchor for the soul - the unchanging power of God.