

Scriptures and Doctrine :: A Brother's Road to Reformation**A Brother's Road to Reformation, on: 2007/11/11 1:56**

I found this posted by a brother at this link:

<http://peculiarpilgrim.wordpress.com/2006/12/20/road-to-reformation-part-1/>

For 10 years I cruised down the smooth asphalt highway of free-will theology. Gradually I began to take notice that the pristine world scrolling past my vision started to lose its luster. The rolling green hills and bright blue sky had become washed out, dull and lifeless; a barren winter landscape. It was then I noticed it wasn't the environment that had changed, but it was the Lord removing the rose-colored spectacles perched on the end of my nose. Spectacles, that up to that point in my spiritual walk, I had been blissfully unaware I was even wearing. For the first time in my born-again life I saw the modern church from a perspective outside my own limited worldview. I began to question doctrines and church traditions I had firmly believed in for a decade. I marveled at methodologies that didn't spring from the pages of scriptures, but were fermented in the minds of well-meaning modern evangelicals. Thump! Thump-Thump! Where did all these potholes come from! Oh my. This highway, I've discovered, has a toll booth. The price, I fear, is too high to pay.

The past two years at the Assembly of God church I attend have been trying. Disquieted in my spirit over several events the church has endorsed, coupled with the habit of chasing every fad that has come our way (Promise Keepers, Purpose-Driven Life) I feel the direction of the church has changed, and not for the better. What is happening to my church is indicative of what's happening to evangelical churches nation wide. Some call it the Mega-Church movement, but I've come to identify it by a more revealing title, the Market-Driven Church movement. Note: the name is not my invention. There are several books floating around that use this terminology. The strange thing is, this movement has been going on for more than 15 years, but having been birthed in the middle of it, I was unable to discern properly until recently. The Holy Spirit has really been working to bring my slow understanding up to speed. Here are some brief descriptions of the trends in my local church that began to wake me up to the truth.

* John Maxwell teachings invaded our church. I did not care for any of his books, of which I only perused a couple. His teachings all seem based on business models of leadership and self-esteem. I don't remember a lot of details concerning his materials since I tended to avoid his stuff like the plague. His teachings, in my humble opinion, were so devoid of central biblical truth that I wondered what business (Unintentional pun) our church had in presenting it to the sheep.

* Let me just say first, I have a great deal of respect for our pastor. He has a heart for evangelism and most of all, for supporting missions around the globe. He is a good leader and has helped our church to expand over the years. However, I'm not a big fan of his 'messages' anymore. In the toddler stages of my Christian walk I thought they were pretty good but never great. I didn't think much of it but over time my discernment radar has pointed out some things to me. His messages are for the most part, practical, life-affirming appeals to the felt-needs of the congregation. He has embraced the ideals put forward by men like Rick Warren who think that people will accept Christianity (and eventually Christ himself) through preaching towards the congregation's present and perceived needs. His messages aren't insipid like some modern evangelicals I have heard and read, but I am bothered by sermons themed after pop culture trends that center on man more than on God. Unlike many in this movement he does rely on the scriptures more heavily than is current in the trend, but the scriptures are not the centerpiece of his messages. They are used as springboards or support statements for his man-centric ideas. Little of what he teaches is sweepingly doctrinal. For years I thought his way of preaching was THE way you had to preach to a congregation. I have since discovered the glorious, near-forgotten method of expositional preaching. Oh, how the church desperately needs more of this kind of teaching/preaching today! The centrality of the cross and not the centrality of self is the heart of all true gospel preaching.

* Lack of discipleship training. Our church really has little in the way of teaching new converts the fundamentals of the faith or instructing Christians in the ways of holiness, faithfulness and evangelism among other things. Sunday school at our church for the adults consists of watching a video (Usually Joyce Meyers or Joel Osteen) and a Q&A session after it is finished. Sigh....

* Our church has also embraced to an extent the trend to entertain the masses. This isn't a huge problem here but really, we don't need dramas, dances and loud music to bring people in and retain those already here. Sometimes the kids (and adults) will work for weeks on a play or dance that lasts only a few minutes and accomplishes little to nothing in

the kingdom of God other than entertaining an audience. What a waste of time considering that it could have been used more wisely in training up disciples well versed in the word of God.

* Evangelism methodology. This is a big one. For years we had done altar calls at the end of nearly every service to invite sinners to come up front and "get saved." I accepted this as the norm and never questioned it as a valid means to bring people into the kingdom, until pastor changed up his approach. More than two years ago in lieu of the traditional altar call, Pastor instituted the sinner's prayer approach. At the end of nearly every Sunday morning service he presents a somewhat watered down gospel plea, (at least compared to his earlier appeals) usually avoiding words with a negative connotation such as sin, hell and wrath. He then has the entire congregation repeat a sinner's prayer that mentions repentance from sin in passing and believing upon the Lord Jesus Christ. In closing he confidently claims that "If you said that prayer and meant it in your heart you are now born-again." Even long before I knew about the extreme differences between Arminian and Calvinist theology this quote caused the hair on my arms to stand on end. At the time I wasn't sure I understood why it bothered me so much, but I would end up thinking about it a lot in the months to come.

That is how the road to reformation began. In my next post I will explain how I came to embrace Calvinistic doctrine and discover the purity of reformation theology.

I actually read most of the best-selling book, "The Purpose-driven Life" a couple of years ago. At the time I thought it was a refreshing blast of gospel simplicity. I was thrilled at Rick Warren's approach because, in hindsight, it was reflective of the way my church conducted service. It was a natural synopsis of the philosophies I had been raised upon in my first decade of spiritual growth. Of course I loved it! I heartily recommended it to a friend struggling through a divorce for encouragement, without a moment's hesitation.

However, my suspicions concerning the state of the modern evangelical church continued to grow from that time until just over a year ago. It all came to a head in a prayer I voiced to God in the cool darkness of my backyard one late autumn night. My prayer went something like this: "Lord, my spirit is troubled over the church and the way it is handling the precious gospel of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I fear that error is spreading like a plague through the churches of our land. More than anything, I desire to know the truth, and to live by that truth no matter the personal cost. Humble me that I may choose to follow you, Lord wherever it is you lead me. Open my eyes that I may perceive, unstop my ears that I may comprehend."

Now, that sounds similar to the prayer of repentance of someone just coming to Christ, but I felt I'd lost my sense of direction. I was in motion but not moving forward, only sinking into a bog of confusion and chaos. This prayer was spurred in large part to (oddly enough) a program on TBN I caught one late night as I was channel surfing. It was called Way of the Master. It featured a little mustachioed man named Ray Comfort and his sidekick Kirk Cameron (of Growing Pains fame).

Intrigued by this odd duo, I tuned in and was astonished at the effectiveness of their their straight forward approach to preaching the gospel to a lost and dying world. They would go into the streets with cameras rolling, witnessing to complete strangers passing by. I admired their boldness and faithfulness to Christ's mandate to preach the gospel to every creature. Their approach to presenting the "good news" was completely foreign to me but it made sense in my mind immediately. The premise of their ministry is on the basis of the scripture,

"God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet 5:5.)

Ray uses the ten commandments to humble the pride of man and show him that he stands guilty before a just and righteous God. He first gets a person to openly admit their guilt using the standard of the moral law. He then presents the glad tidings of God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. Ray crushes the pride of man when he has been humbled by the law then offers him grace.

Incredible! This was revolutionary to me and knew it to be biblical. I have long understood why the law was given by God to Moses. The Apostle Paul expounded on that doctrine in his epistles.

"By the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom 3:20)

When a person is confronted with the law he realizes that he is a lawbreaker and must pay the penalty for his actions, which is death. The only hope man has is God's mercy, which is graciously given through the cross of Christ. I just had never applied this balance of law and grace to my evangelical approach. I have developed a great respect for Ray Comfo

rt's ministry and frequently venture to his website at www.wayofthemaster.com. I also watch his program whenever possible. It has been a tremendous blessing and has helped in my evangelism immensely.

As I watched and read more about his beliefs, I caught on to some things that troubled me. Often Kirk and Ray would say something like "but remember, salvation is of the Lord." when wrapping up a telecast. That puzzled me. They also would say man is completely powerless to save himself. Huh? I didn't get that at all. It sounded suspiciously like... (Gasp!) Calvinism. Surely not! These two wonderful evangelists could not possibly adhere to the obviously heretical doctrines of election and predestination!

Curious, I began to look a little deeper into their theology, which, by the way, is never overtly addressed by either Ray or Kirk (that I've found). I noticed Ray and Kirk quoted Charles Spurgeon frequently, so I investigated his teachings to find clues on whether they were indeed "wicked Calvinists". I was vaguely aware that Spurgeon was a renowned 19th century preacher in England who holds the title of "The Prince of Preachers". I quickly discovered that he was a man on fire for God with an undying passion for evangelism. I was greatly impressed by his zeal which was obvious from just reading his sermons. I also was aghast to find that he was indeed a Calvinist, right down to the bone. He even went as far as to say that Calvinism was the gospel! I was crushed. How could people with such great passion for God have their theology so screwed up? But because I had grown to admire Ray Comfort and Charles Spurgeon I was reluctant to just dismiss them as "zealous for God but not according to knowledge"..

Note: To this day I'm still not absolutely 100% sure Ray and Kirk are 5-point Calvinists. Sometimes they sound like flaming Calvinists then at other times... not so much.

I remember Ray on his television program contrasting his evangelical style to what he called the "modern gospel." I soon realized the "modern gospel" he criticized sounded suspiciously like the same gospel I had been adhering to for so many years. Yet everything he said resonated true in my ears. My conscience, which had been troubling me for so long, finally had found a voice through Ray Comfort's teachings. I started Googling "modern gospel" and found no shortage of excellent material chronicling the downward spiral of modern evangelism. Prominent in the critical scope of these discerning believers was the ministry of Rick Warren and his two best-selling books "The Purpose Driven Life" and "The Purpose Driven Church".

As I read article after article chronicling the watered down gospel presentation that Warren and his contemporaries adhere to, my spirit soared, as if just released from the crushing weight of 10,000 iron chains. I had been duped. Myself along with the majority of Evangelical Christianity had bought into the methodology that catering to a crowd's wants and needs provided the best means of planting their butts in the pews and saving their souls. In truth, this brand of evangelicalism is spiritually devastating, manufacturing easy-believism while creating false converts across the land.

Now, with Ray gaining more credibility by the minute, I decided I would investigate why on earth Calvinistic theology appealed to him and his contemporaries.

I was stunned when I found a website that listed several pages of Calvinism proof texts. As I read through them I quickly discovered that this was a theology built around the scriptures and not simply by the whims of some ancient heretic. I rolled up my sleeves, knowing it wasn't going to be as easy as I thought to dismiss this heresy. I studied the TULIP doctrine. For those new to this theology, TULIP is an acronym for the 5 points of Calvinism. They are as follows:

Total Depravity

Unconditional Election

Limited Atonement

Irresistible grace

Perseverance of the Saints

I will go into the full meaning of these points in future posts. In a nutshell I decided the entire TULIP doctrine stood or fell upon the first point; Total Depravity. I studied intently for a couple of months to discover the answer to the burning question in my heart: Is man so lost in sin that he is totally unwilling and unable to repent and believe the gospel apart from God's saving grace? The conclusion I came to after my long study in the scriptures left a bitter taste in my mouth. Yes, ind

eed, man is a ruined creature, totally depraved in the sense that every part of his being is affected and dominated by his sin nature. Man has no little 'island of righteousness' left within him that allows him to come to his senses and decide contrary to his own nature to turn towards God and receive the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Since I discovered this to be true I was forced to believe that if man can't come to God, He must come and save us by his own sovereign grace. This grace is not bestowed by any meritorious act or thought man can muster in himself, but only by God's good pleasure and purpose. Sola Gratia! God unconditionally elects some people to salvation while leaving the rest to perish in their sins. This was, at first, very difficult for me to accept (and still is). Then, slowly, I began to see the glory of God in these doctrines.

Man, in his corrupted state, has turned his face away from his Creator, is openly hostile and rebellious to God's laws and statutes. He has absolutely no desire to turn away from his own lusts. But God, under no obligation whatsoever to save even one worthless sinner's hide, because of his great mercy and compassion,

'commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' 'We love Him because He first loved us.' (Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:19).

For me, the gospel once again has become Christocentric. It's all about the grace of God. I'm discovering that the gospel isn't about me at all, but about Christ expressing God's love towards his church. I've been set free from the bondage of legalism and works-based acceptance. I no longer believe that I came to Christ by producing within my corrupt and deceitful heart the pure, acceptable faith and repentance required to become a child of the Most High God. I reject the notion that I obtained grace by my own faith and must produce good works to retain that grace. I've realized that I'm not working out my salvation by striving for God's continued approval but resting in the magnificent arms of his grace, which he freely and lovingly wrapped around my sinful, unworthy soul. I could go on for pages gushing about the wonder and glory of these doctrines of God's sovereign grace, but this post has dragged on too long already. Enough about my testimony. The road to reformation is still ongoing and while I've embraced the 5-points of Calvinism I still have many questions to ponder about God's sovereignty and other aspects of Reformation Theology. The journey down this new road is exciting and fresh, but it won't be smooth, as I already can attest.