

2010 Vision Message

Selected Scripture

Introduction

The third Sunday in March has been used in the past to deliver a state of the church address as we look toward our new budget and the steps of faith involved. It is a good time to rehearse what the church is supposed to be and what it is not supposed to be.

More and more churches and their leaders are abandoning biblical faith for what they call an emergent brand of genuine Christianity. It may indeed be emerging, but it has little to do with genuine Christianity.

In his latest book, entitled *A New Kind of Christianity*, emergent church leader Brian McLaren says that we need to understand that Jesus did not come to save people from hell, but to identify with the weak and oppressed. Never mind that Jesus Himself said,

. . . [I have] come to seek and to save that which was lost. (Luke 19:10)

Also never mind that nearly everything we hear about hell comes from the preaching of Jesus – as we have recently learned in our studies together.

McLaren teaches, as well, that Jesus was never violent. This redefines Jesus' actions with His homemade whip in the temple as He, I guess, kindly asked the money changers to move to a better spot.

The problem with churches and pastors like ours, McLaren says, is that we take the Bible as some disclosure of absolute truth rather than taking it like a conversation – it is just a story.

McLaren also says that the gospel is not a message about how to be saved, but an announcement about a new way of life. We, in this church, would agree that it is, for those who get saved and therefore want a new life.

According to the emergent church, our mission is not to evangelize the world. Brian McLaren says, "Christianity has a nauseating, infuriating, depressing record when it comes to encountering people of other religions . . . Jesus accepted everyone and so should we."

McLaren is not an isolated church leader in this thinking. He happens to be quoted and commended by the Willow Creek Association of churches, for

one, as well as other church leaders around the country. These churches and their leaders are enthusiastic about this "new kind of Christianity".

The basic underpinning of this popular thought line is the belief that doctrine should be developed and changed to meet the needs of contemporary thought.

In other words, doctrine needs to change as culture changes. That which is right yesterday is not necessarily right today.

This is why McLaren wrote that although the older, traditional church condemned the gay lifestyle, "it now should be welcomed fully into a new kind of Christianity."

The original fall of man in the garden was not degradation into sin, but, McLaren writes, "a coming of age – a childhood lost, an adulthood gained."

This man also argues for a universalism in which everybody gets into heaven because God eventually wins.

Evidently McLaren, and others who have similar beliefs, have not studied the great white throne and the Bible's definition of God's wrath and holy judgment.¹

Jude verse 3 has this to say:

. . . I . . . [appeal to you to] contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

In other words, our doctrine is not under revision to match the corruption of the twenty-first century any more than it should have been shifted around to make room for the corruption of the medieval church.

Jude goes on to write in verse 4,

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness...

In other words, these people take the grace of God and turn it into a license to sin. They think people can sin all they like and still be welcomed into a new kind of Christianity.

Jude continues in the last part of verse 4,

. . . and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

In other words, they believe Jesus is not the only way to heaven; He is not the only one to worship. As a result, they corrupt the gospel.

The danger sign is in thinking that scripture is a changing document that needs to fit with the morals and popular beliefs of modern culture.

Threats to the purity of the church's doctrine and practices are not new. As the apostle Paul got on the ship to sail from Ephesus to Jerusalem, he warned the Ephesian elders that as soon as he was gone . . .

. . . from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the [flock] . . . (Acts 20:30)

The solution, in part, is to contend for the faith – the body of truth – that was once and for all delivered to the church by our Lord and the apostles.

The primary reason our church is built around the hub of Bible exposition is not because our elders think people should sit through long sermons. It is to reinforce the truth that in the same way the early church, as recorded in Acts, focused on the teaching of the apostle's doctrine (Acts 2:42), we, today, continue to measure our church, not as much by our departments, developments, and demographics as by our doctrine.

Paul wrote this statement of absolute fact with irrevocable implications:

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for doctrine [what we believe], for reproof [where we are wrong], for correction [where we are right], for training in righteousness [what is right];

so that the man of God may be [thoroughly] equipped for every good work.

(II Timothy 3:16-17)

The word "equipped" was used in Paul's day for a completely prepared rescue vessel as it set sail to rescue a ship in distress.

The church without doctrine, correction, and reproof is a church unequipped to perform this part of her mission. Imagine what a tragedy it would be for sailors in a rescue ship that has no life lines to pull up alongside a sinking vessel and shout to the passengers, "We just wanted to encourage you!"

The word "equipped" was used of a wagon loaded down with supplies and completely stocked before taking off on a long journey.

Similarly, the church in this metaphor is a wagon fully loaded with saving, sustaining truth, whenever it has the scriptures.

How do we dispense it to those around us?

We do so through a multitude of ways. This is what ministry is all about – translating the word of God into action through every conceivable ministry and method.

Ministries and methods alone are not sufficient, but ministries and methods that apply the word of God to lives are both saving and sustaining.

By the way, when we hand out information and vote in a few weeks on a new budget, keep in mind that a budget is nothing more than a statement on how we pray God will use us and our growing number of ministries and methods to deliver the truth of His word.

Vision of Colonial

I was looking at some old documents related to Colonial recently. I enjoy doing this because it reminds me of how much God has entrusted to us to disciple, nurture, encourage, and challenge.

Our church was six years old before it had given a grand total of \$125,000 to mission outreaches, trips, events, and global staff. Now, we are giving hundreds of thousands of dollars every year to global causes.

As best as can be calculated by our Administration Department, this past year our congregation gave to missionary needs, emergency mission gifts, Shepherds seminary, Wisdom for the Heart's global outreach, mission trips, mission organizations and partnerships, and our own missionary staff over one million dollars.

By 1997, we had given a *total* of one million dollars away. Now, thirteen years later, we are giving one million dollars away every year.

Our outreach ministry is as aggressive as ever. It was exciting to see so many people trained recently to share the gospel through a workshop held on campus, as well as to see weekly training for people in our Flock that reaches out to those in the community who have visited Colonial.

Nearly every week I get a testimony from someone who had the privilege of leading another person to understand the gospel, then watch and listen as they pray to put their faith in Christ.

Right now there are five hundred volunteers in our Flock who are serving in some form of outreach ministry – taking the scriptures to someone else in

need of rescue. It might be teaching English as a second language or coaching in our Sports Outreach.

The Sports Outreach is now impacting a thousand people of all ages, half of whom do not attend Colonial and many who are not going to any church. What an opportunity it is to take the method of sports and use it as a vehicle for the gospel of Christ as each week so many listen to someone give their testimony of accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Our own flock has grown as well.

How is the ministry of the word taking shape and being translated into growth and fruit on this campus?

If you feel like you are having a hard time finding a room to do something here, consider the fact that now, during a typical week, there are 145 unique activities or events taking place at 6750 Tryon Road. That is about 8,000 events a year.

This might be several hundred women meeting for Bibles studies or participating in mentoring and discipleship. It might be an early morning Bible study like Quest Men's Bible Study in which one young father and husband said, "I particularly find value in the ability to connect with older, more mature men in the faith."

This might be related to our Care Ministries, in which this one department handles thirty to forty calls each day regarding needs, hospitalizations, babies born, or loved ones passing away.

Our Care Department has a vision to establish a counseling center to train lay people to handle basic marriage mentoring and biblical counseling. Eventually they are hoping to offer to our community marriage counseling as an outreach to not only save marriages, but to save lives.

This past year, 560 people volunteered 62,000 hours serving Colonial's children. The mission statement of this department is, "To partner with parents as they lead their children to know God, think biblically and live wisely." Currently one thousand children and volunteers are serving, growing, and learning every Sunday morning and evening.

New ministries began for the children this past year including an evangelical Boy Scouts program and a ministry beginning to take shape supporting adoption and orphan care.

Our Student ministries are now ministering to approximately five hundred middle and high school students every Sunday. There is a greater dedication than ever to see these students learning God's word –

in Bible study, in small groups, involved in mission trips and outreach events. Solid preaching and teaching is the hub of this ministry as well, so that these kids can, as they like to put it, "live out their faith".

Music ministries is probably one of the more visible ministries that declare the truths of scripture because we hear them every Sunday. About three hundred behind-the-scene volunteers and singers make it happen. What a blessing they are to so many.

Well over three thousand people attended Christmas Sweet and there were a number of conversions to Christ, as well as attendees who made life-changing decisions.

Choirs grouped by age and grade now include two-year-olds through high school students.

As you may know, the community school system no longer requires young people to take chorus or band. Colonial has stepped in with the Arts Academy where we now train our future musicians and singers.

We have added hymnals with the intention of encouraging all of us to sing joyfully, whether it is in bass, tenor, alto, or soprano. One blessing of these hymnals is the fact that through this purchase, all our orchestra members can have access to musical scores for their particular instrument. This is a huge time-saver and resource for our musicians.

We are committed to not only singing the great hymn texts that are rich in theology, as we did this morning, but also modern tunes and texts like Keith and Kristyn Getty's work that we sang together and another new text we will sing later today.

Special musical events are ahead for Colonial. We are hosting the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Choir later this year, as well as a duet concert by Steve Green and Larnelle Harris.

Singing and church go hand-in-hand and I want us to be known for our Sunday music that exalts God as we are the Sunday morning sermon.

Obviously more and more people are coming on Sunday.

Our deacon flocks continue to grow with new households being added to their geographical location. In this past year we have added 609 families to our Flock ministry – from Pinehurst to Chapel Hill.

Our GreenHouse new member class is assimilating more folks this year than in any other year – currently a total of 240.

People do not just want to come to church. They want to know if there are supplies in the wagon – if the word of God is truly believed and taught. What a privilege it is to show them our wagon is stocked with the word – with sound doctrine.

People want to know what we believe. We get question cards from GreenHouse new members and I try to get around to answering them. These serve as proof that Christianity does not always answer questions, but sometimes creates even more.

I brought some of these questions today.

- **I just read an article about a specific young man who had past life experiences. What is your thought on this topic?**

Past life experiences presupposes reincarnation. The Bible makes it clear that there is conception, death, and judgment. It is appointed unto man once to die – not three times or thirty times to die, but once – and then the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

- **I have been taught that once you have accepted Christ as your Savior that you can never lose your salvation. However, it's confusing when the person does not walk in the word; they are leading an unrepentant life and have nothing to do with Christ. Is it still true in this case?**

We cannot know the wheat from the tares, Christ said – there will come a judgment that will separate genuine believers from false believers (Matthew 13). However, John wrote in I John about this same kind of people who were part of the church, then abandoned everything and went back into an unrepentant lifestyle of sin with no remorse or concern, when he wrote,

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. (I John 2:19)

- **How does the “keep the Sabbath” commandment apply to the New Testament church?**

The Sabbath commandment was a covenant sign to Israel, not the church. God said through the prophet Ezekiel,

I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

I gave them My statutes, and informed them of My ordinances . . .

I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.

(Ezekiel 20:10-12)

By the way, every moral command is repeated in some way, shape, or form in the New Testament, but the church is distinct from Israel. In fact, the apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians and said that . . .

. . . no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival . . . or a Sabbath day –

things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; for the substance [the true meaning] belongs to [is fulfilled in] Christ.

(Colossians 2:16-17)

In other words, Christ is our Sabbath rest.

- **If the wife has the gift of giving and the husband does not, what should you do as a couple?**

Get marriage counseling, before she gives everything away.

Show mutual respect, talk it out, get counsel, pray, and then allow the other the privilege of serving through their unique desires and talents. Do not stifle your spouse.

- **Is speeding a sin?**

This is a trick question.

We get deep questions, trick questions, and practical questions. Let us look at one more.

- **What was the rationale behind putting both men's restrooms on one side of the gymnasium and both ladies restrooms on the opposite side?**

I have no idea! Our bathroom arrangement is the result of temporary architectural insanity.

Speaking of architects, we are now in the process of beginning discussions with our architects to look down the road at our master plan. We had originally thought we could add seats in this gymnasium by building out a balcony, but found out only a few days ago that this is not feasible.

Please pray for members of our elder team and their discussions concerning how to continue making the necessary developments to accommodate all the Flock that Christ is bringing to serve, worship, and grow with us.

Our kitchen needs expanding, our children's playgrounds and nursery facilities need attention,

many of our adult Sunday school classes are standing-room-only, our 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. worship services are consistently overflowing, and so on. And I am not sure you would agree, but we need more space for parking!

These are great problems to have, are they not?

However, our mission remains the same – to sail our vessel into the churning waters of our world and offer the life line of biblical truth which introduces to them a Savior. Then, to invite them to come on board for fellowship, growth, and service back into lives still caught in the storms of sin and hopelessness.

Our mission remains the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of God unto salvation.

ⁱ Brian McLaren, [A New Kind of Christianity](#), quoted by Kevin DeYoung in “Christianity and McLarenism: Ten Questions and Ten Problems”.