

Redefining the Gospel

by Jacob Prasch

The sermon warns against redefining the gospel to fit a particular culture or worldview, and instead calls for recontextualizing the gospel in a way that is faithful to its original meaning.

Duration: 48:20

Scripture: Joel 2:20, Matthew 16:24, Acts 16:31, 2 Timothy 3:16, James 2:17, Revelation 1:1

Topics: "Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the negative impact of consumerism and media on the preaching of the Gospel. He highlights the obsession with instant results and the constant need for gratification in today's society. The speaker also criticizes the trend of turning Christianity into a consumerist religion, where people are encouraged to 'name it and claim it' and focus on material possessions. He emphasizes the need to recontextualize the Gospel and bring it into the lives of people who are influenced by media, while cautioning against turning Christianity into an electronic religion that imitates the world.

Transcript

Hello dear friends, this is Jacob Katz coming to you. You know, in the book of Revelation, chapter 3, Jesus gives a letter, an epistle, to a church in Asia known as the Church of Laodicea. Laodicea in Greek has to do with a church of people's judgments or people's opinions.

It is a lukewarm church that is actually blind to its own spiritual state, thinking because it is well-off materially and financially, it is blessed spiritually, but it is not. Now, Laodicea, again, is people's opinions. It is a church that runs on people's opinions.

And Jesus appeals to this church, saying, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone opens, he'll come in and sup with them and them with him. He is trying to get inside this church.

We apply this verse, I stand at the door and knock, evangelistically and witnessing to unsaved people. And it is not wrong that we do. However, in its context, that is not what Jesus is saying.

I'd like to introduce you to two words today used in the field of missions or missiology. One is called re-contextualize and the other is called re-define. Re-contextualize and re-define.

When we take the Christian message, the pure gospel, and we put it in the cultural context of another people group, we are re-contextualizing it. However, when we give it a different definition, we change the

meaning of the gospel or come up with a different gospel, which Paul says not to do and get away from those who do it in Galatians, that is re-defining or re-definition. For instance, here in Africa, in Central Africa, there was a group of missionaries, Bible translators, who went to a culture that had no Bible.

And they translated Isaiah chapter 1, verse 18, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. They put it into the tribal language, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as coconut. Simply because the people in this particular tribe were in the tropics and had no concept of snow.

They didn't see what it was. They didn't know what it was. So, therefore, he used the term coconut.

But it didn't change the meaning. It had the exact same meaning. They simply re-contextualized it.

When we re-define, however, we change the meaning of the gospel or the Christian message to meet another culture. At various times in church history, there has been a need to re-contextualize. Sometimes people did it well.

Other times they got it wrong and they re-defined. St. Paul was one of the first, perhaps the first, to re-contextualize the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 9, he says, He became as all things to all men, to the Greeks as a Greek.

When he spoke to the Romans, of course, he presented himself as the Roman citizen he was. When he debated with the Epicurean and Sella philosophers in Athens, he spoke as an academic. When he witnessed in the synagogue to his fellow Jews, he was one of them.

The gospel in its original form was a Jewish message. But Paul, as an apostle to the Gentiles, had to take a Jewish message of a Jewish Messiah and make it palatable to non-Jews. He had to put it in a different cultural context.

Paul did this quite well. This problem or this situation or this need continued into the early church, into the patristic age with the early church fathers. Some of the church fathers rejected it, saying what does Jerusalem have to do with Babylon? But others, like Justin Martyr, believed that what was best and what was truest in Greek philosophy and Greek monotheism, particularly what they got from Socrates, the Socratic idea that there was one God, they believed that that kind of thing helped prepare the Greek world for the coming of Jesus and the gospel the same way as the Torah helped prepare the Jews.

In fact, if you were to look at Plato, for instance, Plato described man as a group of people in a dark, dingy cave chained to the wall, and they couldn't see. One of them managed to break through and ran out of the cave and he saw the sun. He saw a blue sky.

He saw a book of fish swimming in it. He saw butterflies and birds and animals running freely. He saw beautiful flowers and plants and trees and he ran back into the cave trying to tell people that there's a whole new creation out there, that they're blind.

They need to see and come to the light. And the people in the cave thought he was crazy. Well, that's very much like the fallen human condition that parallels the gospel.

We have to be very careful. There is a need to recontextualize, to take the unchanging truth of God's Word and His salvation in Jesus and present it to people of different cultures in a way that they can understand and accept it. But we can never change the meaning and be in God's will.

Sometimes people have changed the meaning and it's brought all kinds of heresy and disaster. One of the ways to understand it is the way things tend to evolve historically. When you have a change in science, you have a change in technology that results.

And with the change in technology, you begin having changes in the economy. And when the economy changes, that causes political changes, social changes and cultural changes. And the Christian message must be recontextualized.

This is one of the ways we understand what happened in the Protestant Reformation. In the aftermath of the Renaissance, Greco-Roman learning was rediscovered and the Crusades came back from the East bringing all these seminal influences from the Byzantine and Islamic empires that lifted Western Europe out of the Dark Ages that it went under in the Medieval Church. What basically happened was there were some changes in science.

The old astronomy of Ptolemy declined and the new astronomy of Galileo and Copernicus emerged. This led to new ways of thinking and new discoveries. The astrolabe was in time discovered and people like Magellan were able to circumnavigate the world.

Columbus was able to reach the New World as New Worlds began to be discovered. This caused tremendous changes from the technology in the economy. Eventually this led to the Industrial Revolution.

Gutenberg invented a printing press. Now Bibles were no longer Latin Vulgates and hand-copied manuscripts available only to monks. But Luther puts the Bible into German.

Wycliffe into English and they could be mass-produced. Literacy increases. A change in economy.

The nation-state was born. The Holy Roman Empire of the Dark Ages declined and then there was the nation-state. People began saying, I'm German, I'm English, I'm Scottish.

So that the Gospel was able to prosper and spread. It was no longer able to be suppressed in its evangelical presentation the way it had been under the Dark Ages when the medieval prophecy persecuted groups like the Waldensians and the All-Beginners and so on. Now the Gospel had a political base in which it could flourish because there was no longer a central power.

So the change in science brings about changes in technology. This changes the economy and this brings about changes in society and in politics and in culture. From this comes the Reformation.

They take the Gospel and give it to the new people with a new worldview. A new way of looking at things. The same kind of thing began to happen later on with the Industrial Revolution in England with John Wesley.

Most people no longer made their living in the agricultural economy anymore. Now it became manufacturing. People worked in factories and in coal mines.

And people like John Wesley and George Whitfield came along and found ways to communicate the Gospel recontextualizing it in a way that the working classes of early industrial Britain could relate to it, understand it and accept it. Paul, the Reformers to some degree and certainly Wesley were people who, with varying degrees of success managed to recontextualize the Gospel. Others, however, redefined it and changed its meaning.

After Constantine Christianized the Roman Empire someone named Augustine of Hippo came along and influenced by his own mentors like Ambrose and Cyprian of Carthage basically rewrote Christianity as a platonic religion based on Plato's philosophy. And while Augustine said and believed a lot of things that were true a lot of other things he introduced simply were not. He had the influence of Nacheanism a kind of Gnostic dualistic Greek sect from where he came and he introduced these things into the church which resulted in things like celibacy.

More than that, it evolved into something that was platonic and Hellenized and the church lost sight of its original Jewish roots. It began to be rewritten as a Western Hellenistic religion. In the Renaissance, Thomas Aquinas came along and he rewrote it or redefined Christianity as an Aristotelian religion.

He basically repackaged its doctrines not in a different context but gave them different interpretations based on the philosophies of Aristotle. Something similar happened in Judaism when a rabbi in Spain named Moses Maimonides known as the Rambam rewrote Judaism as an Aristotelian religion. Well, today we're at the same scenario.

Things are changing. We're into a high-tech revolution that is just as radical as the Renaissance or as the Industrial Revolution. People no longer make their livings in factory cultures.

They make their living in high-tech industries and service trades. The same as the agricultural economy had declined by Wesley's day so the manufacturing economy is declining now. We are going into a high-tech, technocratic society and economy.

And this is bringing about rapid political, social, and cultural changes. Once again, there is a need to recontextualize the gospel without changing its meaning. That's the challenge.

The question is are we indeed recontextualizing it putting the same truth into a new context for the new economy and the new worldview or are we redefining it giving it a different meaning altogether? Are we following the example of people like Paul and Wesley or rather going the way of people like Aquinas? A good question. But let's begin looking at the new society and the new worldview. Is it people's opinions redefining the gospel or is the gospel being explained in a way that people with certain opinions can understand and accept it? If there is one characteristic about the new worldview, the new economy, the new society that we need to find a way to communicate the gospel in it is that it is very much a consumerist society.

It's not oriented towards production but towards consumption. In the United States and increasingly in other countries in Europe, South Africa, or Australia we are beginning to see television marketing. There's no programming for television shows just one commercial after another where you have an account that you can access through your computer or by telephone and you can call them up, give them your credit card number and this can be yours, that can be yours they're selling rings, they're selling fur coats they're selling vacation packages.

Name it and claim it. Blab it and grab it. This can be yours.

Just claim it. This is consumerism. So what do we have in the church? How do we evangelize people with a consumerist mentality? Well, instead of recontextualizing the gospel we are redefining it.

We are turning Christianity into a consumerist religion. Covetousness, the sin of covetousness as Paul calls it in 1 Corinthians becomes faith. Name it and claim it.

Blab it and grab it. You can have this. God wants you to have that.

You deserve it. You're a king's kid. This is absolutely wrong.

This is not giving the gospel to a consumer society and a new cultural packaging. It is rather redefining the gospel as a consumerist religion. The worship of mammon.

It is basically the sin of covetousness calling itself faith. In fact, in the epistles of Timothy Paul tells us in verse 6 that those wanting to get rich in this world will lose their faith. Yet we have churches teaching a consumerist gospel saying if you're not rich you don't have faith in 1 Timothy 6.10. Again, they are redefining the Christian message as a consumerist religion.

Another example of this is people go shopping for churches. In the Bible church is a commitment to a local congregation of other believers. It's a committed relationship.

Biblically, a God they love true love puts God first others beginning with our family second and ourselves last. But consumerism puts self first. What product will meet my need? What church will meet my need? Instead of asking the question where does the Lord want me to go to church to meet the needs of others to be used by him to meet the needs of others it's what church will meet my need.

Have you tried this church? Have you tried that church? And people go shopping for a church. In fact, there's something called Willow Creek in America which basically did that. It did marketing research.

Asked people what kind of a church they want. And they'll provide anything from entertainment to food halls just to bring people in. This is simply consumerism gone mad within the body of Christ.

These people are not taking the Christian message and repackaging it or recontextualizing it for a consumer society. They are fundamentally rewriting Christianity as a consumer religion. They're getting it dead wrong.

It is people's opinion. But we also live in a tough psychology driven society. This goes back even to the 50s and 60s with the Dale Carnegie courses, How to Win Friends and Influence People.

How to Feel Better About Yourself. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale who was said to be a Freemason began preaching a kind of Christian sermon based on this kind of pop psychology. He called it the power of positive thinking.

Now this has no rooting in Biblical faith. What has happened now is it's begun to become combined with Eastern ideas of mysticism and shamanism. Visualization techniques.

A major preacher from Korea has said in a book he wrote about the 5th dimension or 4th dimension that Buddhists and Hindus have known this for centuries. Now Jesus has shown it to him. You begin visualizing and picturing things and speaking it into being.

A mixture of pop psychology and Eastern shamanism. What is this? This is simply pop psychology. Convince yourself something is right.

Convince yourself something is true. Talk it up. Believe it.

Claim it. Have faith in it. Confess it.

Again, this doesn't follow any Biblical model of faith confession. It is simply pop psychology. There is a faith in the Bible and we can confess things specifically in Scripture that these people are going around confessing and believing all kinds of things that have no Biblical premise whatsoever.

It's positive thinking. It is pop psychology. This becomes extended into other fields and other avenues.

In the secular world in the early 1970's within pop psychology there arose a kind of therapy known as Primal associated with something called Dr. Arthur Janow. And it became popularized when one of the Beatles, the late John Lennon did a record album based on his own Primal therapy experience. Primal therapy says you have to go back and relive past painful experiences to become liberated from them.

Now the Bible is very very different. The Bible says the way we deal with past hurts is two ways. The first way is God is perfect and we are not.

If we want Him to forgive us for our sins we have to ask Him for the grace to forgive others. Christianity is very much based on forgiveness. God forgiving us on the condition that we ask Him for the grace to forgive others.

But the second is of course even more centrally the cross of Jesus. The Bible says the way a Christian is to deal with past hurts is to reckon yourself dead. That abused child, that sexually abused child, that scorned wife that bereaved person is dead.

Now you are in new creation. Reckon yourself dead. Primal therapy was a way to get people to relive their past hurts.

But today in the church instead of recontextualizing the gospel for people with this top psychological idea of primal, they are trying to Christianize it. Only they call Christian primal therapy inner healing. Something the apostles or Jesus never taught even one time.

And all the instructions the apostles gave to churches or to Christians and the epistles telling them how to apply the teachings of Jesus, they never taught such ideas of dealing with past hurts by anything other than reckon yourself dead. The scorned person, the hurt person is dead. Satan is always trying to take our minds off the cross and deny its sufficiency.

And that's the only thing inner healing is. It is this particular kind of primal therapy in Christian masquerade. They are not recontextualizing the gospel or the Christian message for people influenced by primal.

They are redefining the Christian message as primal. It's totally, totally wrong. We also live in a society that is enzymatic.

People want instant results. Not only instant coffee now but you can go down to a video shop or access a video program over a computer and get anything you want when you want it. Watch any film you want when you want it.

And the technology is getting better all the time. Microwave oven. Fast food.

Everything is instant, instant, instant, instant. Super computers are getting faster and faster. Jet travel is making distances shorter, shorter, and shorter.

In the early church, if you wanted to send a letter from South Africa or somewhere like this, even a hundred years ago, if you were writing from South Africa to someone back in England, or writing someone in Australia from America, the letter would take several weeks to arrive by ship. They were basically transported the same way Paul transported the epistles in the early church. By courier and by ship.

Now with a fax machine you can send a letter to a relative or a friend in Australia or New Zealand or Britain or Africa with a fax machine in a matter of moments and with email in a matter of seconds. We live in an enzymatic society. The challenge becomes, how do we recontextualize the Christian message for an enzymatic society? Well, they are not recontextualizing it.

They are redefining it. How? Let's look at the subject of deliverance. Not one time, not one place is the word deliverance used in the way it's used today in popular Christian circles.

While I myself am a Pentecostal, I see no biblical basis for deliverance ministries the way they're taught now. The Greek word *ekballo*, cast out, is never used in connection with a Christian. Never.

The word *therapeuo*, the field is used in connection with demonic oppression, but never casting demons out of believers. It simply was not done in the Bible. You have people coming back with deliverance, deliverance, deliverance.

Who's getting delivered this week? The same one who got delivered last week. Who's going down in the spirit this time? The same one who fell down the last time. But do these people's lives change? Generally they do not.

What you mostly see is hypnotic induction and people looking for an enzymatic solution to a problem. Instead of picking up their cross and following Jesus, living a crucified life, putting on the armor of God as it says in Ephesians, following the biblical pattern and the biblical formula to see change and victory in their lives, they want something instant. So they go to somebody to get a demon cast out or to fall down.

Again, you don't see this in the Bible. In fact, most of what you see people going down in the spirit doesn't resemble what happened to John in chapter 1 of Revelation at all. It resembles more stage hypnotism.

An enzymatic society. So people are trying to rewrite Christianity as an enzymatic religion with doctrines of deliverance and so on. But it's not scriptural.

We also live in a society where gender identity is being eroded as it was in the culture of the first century church and as it was in Sodom. Bisexuality and homosexuality are being propagated as socially normative. And even in England now you have supposedly evangelical Christians accepting and compromising with homosexuality and bisexuality.

There was a meeting of lesbians and homosexuals in a famous cathedral in England and not a single evangelical bishop really did anything to protest it and in fact the sermon at that service was preached by the former secretary of the Evangelical Council of the Church of England. More than that, we live in a feminist society where we have the feminism of the secular world. There is no problem of course biblically with women in high-demanding or high-pressured professions, but there are still a difference between men and women.

The Bible teaches directly that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. Women are more sensitive than men and they are therefore more vulnerable for spiritual seduction. The

same as men are dependent on female sensitivity, women are dependent on male protection.

That is why leadership is male. But because we have women doing everything from putting out fires and climbing telephone poles to serving in positions of executives and companies, we take what is happening in the world and bring it into the church. The question is how do we recontextualize the gospel for a society where gender identity is being eroded? Instead of recontextualizing it, we are redefining the Christian message as something feminist.

Women pastors, women preachers, of the twelve apostles not one was a woman. The role of women is to be honored and exalted, but it is not the same as the role of men. Does it mean that men are higher or greater? But it does mean that the responsibility for leadership in the body of Christ and in the Christian family is to be, in God's ideal, male.

What's happening? Christianity is being rewritten, redefined as a feminist religion. In Britain we even have Redactionist Bibles, which are known as Bibles that have been basically put into a feminist format. They are called inclusive versions, which do no justice to the original Greek and Hebrew text just to accommodate feminist prejudices.

And Christians who disagree with this because it doesn't fit the original Greek and Hebrew text are told that they only want a Bible to suit their own prejudices. This is absolutely ridiculous. The only thing they're doing is rewriting Christianity as a feministic religion.

In the New World view we have a programmatic society and a programmatic economy. If you get the right software program for your hardware, your computer will give you the results you want. Just get the right program, get the right formula, and you'll get the right results.

But we have to find a way to communicate the gospel of Jesus to people who think programmatically. That is clear. We need to put it into a context that these people, whose worldview is being increasingly molded by the internet, can accept it.

The problem is, instead of re-contextualizing the gospel for a programmatic society, we are redefining the gospel, or the Christian message, programmatically. There are things that have come out of America, particularly Fuller Seminary, known as the church growth movement. Get the right program and your church will grow.

There is no emphasis on the sovereignty of God. It all becomes a matter of a right program where they engage in everything from market research to one idea or concept after another. Saying, well, this church is growing and it's doing this, so therefore our church will grow if we do that.

That is not necessarily the case at all. In fact, the church growth movement, from its onset, founded by Dr. Donald McAlvin at Fuller Seminary, said we have to quantify church growth statistically. And the very statistics and the statistical means by which we quantify the church growth, testifies to the fact that the church growth movement basically does not work.

They come up with all kinds of ideas from the homogeneous unit, to marketing research, thinking that a church will grow as a result. Friends, that is simply not the case at all. I've seen in Great Britain one program after another, things called Minus to Plus, something else called the Jim Challenge.

They go from program to program to try to turn the country around spiritually and morally. But it doesn't work. Yes, we do need a way to contextualize the gospel of Jesus for a programmatic society.

But instead, we are rewriting the gospel, redefining it as something which is a mere program. It just doesn't work. Go to a Christian bookshop and you'll see all the program literature.

At one time, you would have found good Christian books relating God's principles. The Bible is big on principles, but short on formulas. Apart from believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be saved, you don't find many formulas in the Bible, only principles.

And the traditional Christian literature that showed us how to live these principles, things like the Pilgrim's Progress or the Screwtape Letters, those are not Christian books that are popular anymore. Today it's Seven Steps to Prosperity, Five Steps to Victory, Twelve Keys to Success. This is just programatics gone wild in the church.

We're not bringing the gospel into the world, we're bringing the world into the gospel. We also live in a media-driven society of the electronic age. More and more satellite TV, more and more radio bands on different frequencies.

More and more possibilities with computer technology. There was a top artist in New York City popular in the 60s and 70s named Andy Warhol, and he once predicted that in the future everyone would be famous for 15 minutes, simply because he saw the impact culturally that the explosion of media would have. Well, he was, in a sense, right.

We live in a media-driven society. But let's look at what's happened. How do we bring the gospel of Jesus into people whose worldview is molded by television, by the computer, by radio? Are we getting it right, or are we getting it wrong? Well, the fact is, we are turning Christianity into an electronic religion.

We are redefining it as a media faith. Just look at the televangelists, mainly from America, and those who imitate them in countries like South Africa. It looks just like the world.

It looks just like Hollywood. It looks just like the Whoop-Dee-Doo show. Here it is! With all the grits, the fanfare, even the same kinds of music and styles designed to appeal to the lowest common denominator.

Instead of lifting God's people up to higher things, it sinks down and basically keeps them down with all kinds of erroneous cliches, hype, even manipulation to satisfy the financial demands of keeping such things on the air. What we have here is an electronic church. You know, any media that is that powerful as television or radio is something that the devil has to corrupt because it could be used for God's work.

As it's become now, I would rather see no Christian television than see what we have today by and large. When unsafe people see these money preachers on television, they think being saved is simply a financial con job. They're teaching consumerism, they're teaching the worship of mammon and covetousness and calling it Christianity.

And unsafe people see right through it. It's good for little other than discrediting the gospel. It could have been used for good, but most of it is not being used for good.

Now, I thank God for those faithful ministries which do use it for good, but basically we have a problem. The problem is we have an electronic church. The Bible says forsake not the fellowshiping together one

with another especially as you see the day approaching.

Instead of meeting together, people are turning on the knob. They're turning on the television. That becomes their church.

They're paying their offerings and their tithes to an idiot box and sometimes to an idiot who's speaking on it. This is not right. This is not Jesus.

This is not recontextualizing the gospel for a media driven society. This is redefining Christianity as an electronic face. We also live in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society.

The Word of God gives us a plain formula how to bring social harmony to people of diverse races, backgrounds, and cultures. It is that Jesus, although a Jew, is the Savior of all men. And we need to respect all cultures and let people worship within their culture except when some aspect of their culture comes into conflict with the Bible.

We read this in Acts 15. He's the Savior of all men, unity in Jesus. But today, instead of having a church which is recontextualizing the gospel along multi-ethnic lines, we are redefining Christianity as an interfaith ecumenical religion.

Where the premises of biblical truth and even the gospel itself, salvation by grace through faith, justification, opponents, is being bent to accommodate all kinds of ideas of the gospel which are simply not scriptural. We live in an interfaith, multi-ethnic society so we're having an interfaith, multi-ethnic gospel. In fact, the gospel is for all races and all people.

But it's the same gospel. We need to bring the gospel into people of all faiths and cultures, of all religious backgrounds. We do not bring these other religious ideas into the gospel.

But that is what is happening. What we are seeing now is for the third time in church history Eastern religion is invading Western Christendom. The first time this happened was in the pre-Nicene church.

But it became worse in the post-Nicene church around the 4th and 5th centuries. It began with someone called Philo who actually influenced Judaism but then it became more of a problem with someone called Oregon and later two other people named Basilides and Valentinus. These people were situated in the city of Alexandria in North Africa.

And that became the epicenter of Gnosticism coming into Christianity. It is where Eastern religion began to invade Judaism and Christianity. That was the first time it happened.

And people like Basilides and Valentinus under the influence of Philo began turning Christianity into a Gnostic religion based on some kind of subjective mystical revelation. The second time it happened was when the Crusades came back from India and the East with the spice trade which was revolutionizing the economy of Europe. And they bought Eastern religious influences from the world of Islam and Hinduism into medieval Christendom.

Everything from the bowing down to the statues to the flagellation rituals that took place in medieval convents and monasteries. These things were copied from Islam and also from Hinduism. The Vishnu counting prayer on beads and so on.

This was the second time that Eastern religion influenced Christianity. But now it's the third time. We are seeing a great great invasion of Eastern religion into Western Protestant culture particularly.

This is the New Age movement. In the early church, the forms of Gnosticism that were pagan began to influence Christianity. Basically what Gnosticism did was take a subjective mystical insight into a scripture and take the scripture out of context.

Instead of using symbolism or typology or allegory to illustrate a doctrine or to illuminate a doctrine which is perfectly valid. The way Jesus used the symbolism of the Jewish Passover to explain his atonement. These people would rather claim a subjective insight into the symbol and then redefine the basic meaning of the gospel or the Christian message in light of this subjective insight known as a Gnostic.

And from this Gnosticism comes. There are many forms of Gnosticism in the world today and they're all coming back. Among Hasidic Jews they claim that their Rabbi is known as the Rebbe or the Tzadik and he would have the reincarnated spirit of someone called Baal Shem Tov.

So it's not important what the Torah actually says, it's only important what the Rebbe or the Tzadik says about it. In Roman Catholicism there are many strains of thinking, but going back some centuries, something developed called the *census plenius*, the fuller sense. And this became an issue of contention.

There were two main Roman Catholic saints in their canon who denied the Immaculate Conception. Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas both denied it. Yet it was proclaimed later by a Pope.

Mary said, my soul rejoices in God my Saviour. That's what she said. She said she needs to be saved because the angel Gabriel told her she'd be the mother of the Messiah who saves his people from their sin.

Now, what basically began to happen was this. No, Mary doesn't need a Saviour. Mary is a *Theotokos*, a Greek word not found in the Bible.

She has no sin, even though she said she needs to be saved from it. It doesn't matter what the text says, it only matters what the person claiming a *naso* or a *census plenius* says about it. In Tibetan Buddhism it is the Dalai Lama.

He has a *naso*. In Shia Islam it is the Imam. In Sufi Islam it is the Suf.

In Hinduism it is the Brahmin priest or the guru. He goes to Vishnu and the gods directly. You go through him.

Hasidic Jews have a Rebbe or a Tzadik who goes to God through Torah. You go through him. In Mormonism it's their priesthood.

In Catholicism it is also, obviously, the prophecy in their priesthood. All these ideas evolved from monotheism. But it's made a big comeback today, even in evangelical Christianity.

Particularly among my fellow Pentecostals and Charismatics. There was a leader of a church in America called the Vineyard Movement who took the book of Joel totally out of context in chapter 2. A prophecy about Nebuchadnezzar's army. An army which God judged and destroyed in verse 20.

And somehow typifying or foreshadowing something that will happen in the last days. The leader of the Vineyard Movement, who has now died, said that the Joel's army is the manifest sons of God. The conquering church, the latter-day reign, the man-child.

However, verse 20 says it's an army God will judge and destroy. This is monotheism. You ignore what the text means and claim some subjective, hyper-spiritual insight into it, and break in disregard for its obvious meaning.

The Bible didn't do that. The Antiochian school of the early church didn't do that. It came from Alexandrian Gnosticism and it's come back today.

In the early church, again, you had two forms of Gnosticism. The pagan forms with the demiurges and the eons and the kind that got into the church. Well, today it's the same.

The pagan form of Gnosticism is the New Age Movement. The cosmic illumination of the inner self. The form of Gnosticism getting into the church is the Restoration Movement.

The latter-day reign, the man-child, the manifest sons of God. Instead of recontextualizing the gospel for a society increasingly influenced by Gnosticism and Eastern religion and New Age, we are redefining the Christian message as a Gnostic, Eastern, New Age religion. Even evangelicals.

We live in a power-driven society. More computer power, more megabits, more megabytes, more this, more that, a bigger engine for your car, more CCs. Power, power, and more power.

The Greek word for power is dunamon. But the power was always given for some service. Today, people are just craving power.

Some kind of an experience. And they want more power. They're lifting up power.

They actually sing hymns. More power, more love, more power. Well, dear friends, the Lord will empower us to what we need.

But when people only want to experience power, they have a problem. We live in an experiential society. When I was a teenager, or when I was in university, people were looking for things like love, peace, and truth in the hippie movement, in the hippie era.

Afterwards, it became experiential. People were no longer looking for meaning. They were looking for experience.

The experience itself determined what was true, what is right. The term in philosophy and theology for this is Judaism. The experience vindicates whether something is right or wrong.

Biblically, however, it is the Word of God that tells us if something is right or wrong, and we are commanded to discern it on that basis in 1 Corinthians. However, today, we'll see people going to Pensacola or to Toronto. And they'll behave in a manner which is described even by themselves as drunken, or drinking at Joel's place and getting drunk.

Now, the Scriptures continually tell us in Matthew 24 and 2 Timothy in the last days, we ought to be sober. But these people are saying to get drunk. Now, the Bible says the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

Etrete in Greek. These people are out of control. When you say this is not scriptural, they say, but I was blessed.

I had a good experience. The experience becomes a vindication of whether something is right or wrong. This is gross, gross deception.

We live in an experiential society where people are going through everything and everything for a new experience. Trying this, trying that, try the other thing. But now this has come into the church.

We are rewriting, redefining Christianity as an experiential religion where everything is subjective. That is the problem. The Bible is objective truth, but the objective truth of the Bible is being equipped by subjective experience.

Experience is good to the extent it agrees with the Word of God. In the world we have now, we've gone beyond the theories of relativity in the world of physics. We live in a hyper-relativistic society with a hyper-relativistic worldview.

This leads to something known as post-modernism where there are no absolutes. Thus we see a society where there are no moral absolutes, there are no doctrinal absolutes even in society anymore. It's all disintegrating in this new worldview.

Instead of the church of Jesus restoring a sense of objective truth and absolutism, we are instead redefining Christianity as a relativistic post-modern religion. We ourselves have compromised the absolute truths of God's Word. Instead of recontextualizing, we are redefining.

Let's look even further. The new worldview, if you would notice, is becoming increasingly anti-Zionist and even anti-Semitic. There's a gross rebirth of anti-Semitism even in Germany.

At a recent election in Germany, 12% of the people voted for the neo-Nazi party. Media bias against the nation Israel is excruciating. Now I myself do not suggest every Christian must agree with all of the policies of the Israeli government.

I simply say that this century has seen more anti-Semitism than any century before, and more persecution of the Christian church than any century before. The Bible makes it clear that this anti-Semitism will increase. The Jews will go back to Israel in fulfillment of biblical prophecy according to Luke 21-24, Zechariah 12, etc.

But anti-Semitism will increase. How do we take the Gospel to a world that is becoming increasingly anti-Semitic, hating the people of Christ after the flesh? Well the answer is not found in becoming anti-Semitic ourselves. In the Restoration Movement, the New Kingdom Dominion theology, people are teaching replacementism or supersessionism, the erroneous idea that God is finished with Israel and the Jews, and that the church is a new Israel.

In Britain there was a magazine published which actually said the church must raise a prophetic voice against Israel published by the Restoration Movement. Thank God that magazine went bankrupt. Here in South Africa, from where I'm speaking at the moment, a preacher from Texas, the American Bible Belt, is repeatedly brought in and promoted on radio and in big stadium rallies.

This preacher from Texas teaches Israel is nothing but a waste of money. The Jews have nothing by way of any right to be in the land of Israel. Again, the anti-Semitism of the world is coming increasingly into the church.

We live in a society where people are driven by self-help programs. These are often called 12-step programs, helping people from different kinds of substance abuse and addictive or compulsive behavior, from alcohol to gambling to drugs. And to a degree, these programs are based on Biblical principles.

Except that they admit while there's a God greater than themselves or a power greater than themselves, it is some kind of a universalist concept of God. It is not the Biblical one. The Bible says Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

While these 12-step programs can help some people to get off of these addictions or get away from these compulsive behaviors, these 12-step programs cannot give people salvation. I know people who never would have become Christians had they not gone through a 12-step program because they were too destroyed by alcohol. But I know other people who never became Christians because of the 12-step program.

A 12-step program can't save you. You see, the Bible is always based on a new creation. The old creation is passed away.

You are crucified. I'm not an alcoholic who's recovering. I'm a new creation in Christ.

The alcoholic is dead. I'm not a former drug addict or a former compulsive gambler. I'm a new creation in Christ.

The drug addict or compulsive gambler is dead. Reckon yourself dead. Similar to inner healing, 12-step programs must get people to live in the old creation.

Now, biblically, we can get our testimony. We can tell people how the Lord saved us from drugs or gambling or alcohol or something like this to help others to come to faith in Jesus. But it is Jesus who saves, not a 12-step program.

No 12-step program can get us into heaven. When you see people meeting, Hello, my name is Fred. Hi, Fred.

And I'm a recovering drug addict or I'm a recovering whatever. That is going back into the old creation all the time. These people's idea of fellowship becomes based on their old sin instead of on a new birth.

It is quite dangerous. It resembles Christianity. It can do some good, but it has no power unto salvation.

Finally, we live in a virtual society. And the virtual reality technology first begun for the American Space Program and then designed to train fighter pilots and airline pilots is getting better and better and better. A time will come when people can construct their own reality or at least an illusion of it.

They will put on a helmet or a visualization device of some kind attached to a computer and they always want it to be Napoleon so they'll create a false world where they are Napoleon or Elvis Presley or Marilyn Monroe where they're astronauts. A virtual world where people construct their own reality. This is going to become more and more of a problem.

It's going to cause tremendous social problems. Not that the technology is wrong, but the way the technology will be used. Anything former man can use for evil, he will.

It may be used for good, but like nuclear energy, it will be used for evil. Virtualism is going to drive these trends of pop psychology and Judeanism and experiential vindication even further and further and further. Already, it's coming into the church.

There's something called conscientiousization. It became popular with liberation theologians in Latin America and here in Africa. Where instead of you using the gospel of Jesus to address a social situation, you begin with a political social situation where there's injustice and you redefine the gospel as a political liberation.

You begin with your problem instead of the word of God. Instead of addressing your problem from the word of God, you address the word of God from your problem. Thus, liberation theologians teach that the main event in the Bible is the exodus because it was a political liberation.

This is conscientiousization. It is basically virtualism coming into the church. You make your own reality, the objective goes.

Friends, Laodicea is the church of people's opinions. We need to find a way to recontextualize the gospel for this new worldview. Of the theme Aquinas, the teller evangelist got it wrong.

Paul, Wesley, to a degree the reformers got it right. Are we getting it right or are we getting it wrong? Jesus says, Laodicea, church of people's opinions, I stand at the door and knock. You're getting it wrong.

It's people's opinions. You're getting it wrong. You're redefining.

You're getting it wrong. You're rewriting the gospel into a gospel that's no gospel at all. Open the door, Laodicea.

Let me in. How do you recontextualize? I showed Paul how to do it. I showed the reformers how to do it.

I showed Wesley how to do it, and if you'd stop running the church by people's opinions and let me in, I'll show you how to do it. I stand at the door and knock, Laodicea. Let he who has ears let in hear.

God bless you.

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