

HAS TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY LOST ITS WAY?

What happened to that strong vibrant church that turned the world upside down in Paul's day?

Are we the same church that came into being the day of Pentecost many years ago?

If we wanted to get back to the faith once delivered, where should we start? Perhaps we should do an analysis of the church of today and compare it with the beliefs and practices of the church of the first century?

A study by the Barna research organization might be a good starting point.

"Forty one percent of the adults who attend Christian church services in a typical week have not embraced Jesus Christ as their savior." I wonder if they think they are saved?

"Only three types of churches - Pentecostal, Assembly of God, and non-denominational churches - had a majority of adherents who had shared their faith in Christ with a non-Christian in the past year."

"In a survey of November 2001 only 22% of Americans believed that absolute moral truth exists, dropping from 38% in January 2000. With that kind of a drop in just 23 months, what would it be today?"

"Among adults who have been married, born again Christians and non-Christians have essentially the same probability of divorce." Are they really Christian then?

"Mormons are more likely to read the Bible during the week than are Protestants or Catholics."

"Adults who attend charismatic or Pentecostal churches were more likely to possess biblical beliefs than were those attending other Protestant and Catholic churches."

"Although one-third of all born again adults claim to tithe their income, only 12% actually do so." Isn't that what Ananias and Sapphira did and therefore, was convicted of lying to the Holy Spirit?

"The percentage of US Hispanics affiliated with the Catholic Church has declined from 68% in 1991 to just 53% today."

"Less than 1% of Hispanics attend a mainline Protestant church, and less than 1% attend a Baptist church."

"At least three out of ten born again adults say that cohabitation, gay sex, sexual fantasies, breaking the speed limit or watching sexually explicit movies are morally acceptable behaviors."

"Since 1993, the number of pastors who say they have the spiritual gifts of preaching/teaching, pastor/shepherd, discernment, and leadership has risen significantly." Then why the disparity among them, their flock, and God's word?

That last statement is very interesting in light of what this next survey tells us.

A survey of ten thousand Protestant ministers by the sociologist Jeffery Hadden revealed that more than 50% did not agree that Jesus was born of a virgin. Over 80% would not agree that Jesus was the Son of God, or that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Perhaps that explains the disparity.

Considering these findings, is it at all surprising that churches are losing their influence on society and declining in membership? Many have been reduced to the status of a social club rather than a house of worship. They build bigger and better buildings, with more forms of entertainment, and less emphases on the truth of God's word.

Jeremiah made some revealing comments on a similar problem in his day. Since we as Christians are worshiping the same God, and since God does not change, could we not assume that his statements could apply to us also?

“I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah” (Jer. 23:14).

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD. They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every

one that walks after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you” (Jer. 23:16-17).

The modern version of that might be, “Don’t worry about the coming tribulation; you will be raptured before that happens.”

Jeremiah 2:19 gives us two major faults that caused Israel to backslide.

“ ... thou hast forsaken (abandoned) the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.” They had abandoned the Lord and had lost all fear of His judgment for sin. But then, why should we fear God’s judgment, after all we have grace; aren’t we told grace covers all our sins, regardless?

Christ warned of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders in his day and referred to it as leavening (Matt. 16:6). Paul berated the Corinthians for being physically unleavened but spiritually leavened (I Cor. 4:18-19).

About Leavening

Leaven is a type of yeast. It reproduces from within its own body (viviparous) and does not need light to reproduce; therefore it can go about its work in complete darkness undetected. It is a microscopic one-celled fungus that makes up such things as molds, mildews, and mushrooms. It modifies what ever it invades, puffs it up and produces fermentation (rot). Is there a better example of what sin does to a person, a

church, or a world? No wonder Christ used leavening as a description of sin.

The Leavening of The Church

Has the leavening of the world contaminated the pure unleavened word of God's truth? But of course, didn't Peter and Jude warn of damnable heresies from false prophets that will creep in unawares?

We are admonished to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good (I Thes. 5:21). How then, should we prove all things, by the word of God or by the word of man? Perhaps we should ask ourselves, how many times has man been wrong, always? Nearly always? Most of the time? Take your pick? How many times has God been wrong - ever?

What did Jesus think of the word of man as opposed to the word of God?

"Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men? For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, ..." (Mark 7:7-8). Jesus considered the commandments of men a worthless and rejected way of worship and an abomination to Him.

Let's remember what we are told in Proverbs 30:5-6. "Every word of God is pure, ..." Also, we are warned, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32).

Let's compare some instances of God's doctrines and commandments that have been replaced by doctrines and

commandments of men? I'm telling you nothing new, and I'm sure you could add to this list, these are just a few points to illustrate why the church has lost its influence on the world.

Often heard comments from degreed professors and self-proclaimed experts on the word of God.

On the subjects of :

The Old Testament as compared to the New

Man says:

The Old Testament is just a bunch of fables passed down from generation to generation and enhanced with each telling, or at best only good for a study of the history of the Jews. It certainly has little bearing on the Christian Church today. One must be very careful not to try to keep those Old Testament laws, precepts and testimonies as you will fall back into a works religion and be in danger of losing your salvation.

But God's word says:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (II Tim. 3:16). Also, “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God”, Jesus' own words as recorded in Luke 4:4.

Christ defeated Satan by quoting scriptures from the Old Testament; He also verified much of the writings of the Old Testament by His comments on them. Paul described the scriptures as the very oracles of God. A wise man once said, “The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New

revealed.” One helps to explain and establish the other, thus, we have the two witnesses necessary to establish a thing (I Tim. 5:19; Deut. 19:15).

Man is wrong again!

On Creation

Man says:

No God could create this earth in just six days. Perhaps God created it through evolution over billions of years, perhaps starting with a puddle of slime that suddenly begot life, and we all developed from there. (But then, if that’s how it happened, is God really necessary?)

But God’s word says:

Ex. 20:11 “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.” (Some argue that God says He recreated the earth in six days, and they may have a point, but that’s a discussion for another time). Remember that God is the author and creator of time, also, that time is not necessarily a constant.

God’s creative abilities do not depend on mere man’s knowing how it is accomplished. Man is on a need to know basis, trusting God should not depend on us understanding how He did it, but that He did it. Since we do live in an ever expanding universe, reversing the process would of necessity lead us back to a sudden beginning, a point of creation. There are so many, if ands and buts that are unknowable about creation that it's foolish for man to dispute God's word. about it. Man is wrong again!

On the Ten Commandments

Man says:

They are a burden no man could bear, therefore they were nailed to the cross. Besides, Christ fulfilled them for us so we don't have to. (By the way, Colossians 2:14 does not say God's commandments were nailed to the cross, rather, it was our sins that were recorded against us that were nailed to the cross). One major denomination even claims the right and the power to eliminate the one about idols and split the tenth into two so that there are still ten. Others claim nine were reinstated in the New Testament, but not God's Sabbath. (Which is not true, but, if it were, why do they think it necessary to restate a commandment for it to be still in effect, consider what happened to the man God sent to Jeroboam when he listened to the false prophet in I Kings 13)?

But God's word says:

"...all his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Ps. 111:7-8).

Excerpts from Psalms 119:

98 "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts."

104 "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

165 "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life..." (Rev. 22:14).

John said, "He that saith, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I Jn. 2:1-4).

They are given to man as a guide and instructions for a good long life and were later magnified, clarified and fulfilled (filled full) by Christ (Ex. 20; Isa. 42:21; John 5:17).

And finally in John 14:15 Jesus tells us, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Man is wrong again!

On God's Sabbath

Man says:

"Did the church change the seventh day to Sunday? I answer yes! Did Christ change the day? I answer No!" So stated by J. Cardinal Gibbons; (A blatant blasphemous attempt to change God's perfect law). "The Bible says, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it Holy.' The Catholic Church says: 'No. By my divine power I abolish the Sabbath day and command you to keep holy the first day of the week.'"

So stated by T Enright, C.S.S.R in a lecture at Hartford, Kansas, Feb. 18, 1884: (Is this not a commandment of man directly opposing the commandment of God?)

Jesus said, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" [Mark 7:9] It isn't over yet, Mr. Enright).

But God's word says:

“On the seventh day God ended his work, rested and sanctified the seventh day to a Holy purpose.” (Gen. 1:1-3). He gave it to His people (Ex. 16:29) and told them to keep it as a perpetual covenant for a sign between him and His people (Ex. 31:16). He then cautioned them to, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it Holy” (Ex. 20:8). If we, as Christians, claim to be God's people, shouldn't we keep His Sabbath instead of man's? Christ did, the apostles did, and the early New Testament church did until Constantine's edict of 321 A.D. There has always been and there always will be those who keep God's Sabbath (Isa. 66:23).

Man is wrong again!

On God's Annual Feasts and Holy days.

Man says:

These were for the Jews, and only had meaning for them, forgetting the duality of God's prophecies. Christ's followers (Christians) should keep those ancient pagan days that the church “Christianized,” days such as, Saturnalia (Christmas), Ashtoreth (Easter), all saints day (Halloween), etc. Even though this is in direct defiance of Deuteronomy 12:30-32. It is interesting to note that Saturnalia is a period of orgiastic unrestrained revelry, and Ashtoreth, also known as Ishtar, Eostre, as well as Easter, is called the queen of heaven and mentioned in I Kings 11:5; & 11, 33; II Kings 23:13. Worshipping Ashtoreth caused Israel to be split into two nations. Also, consider Jeremiah 7:17-20; (causing God's anger) and 10:1-5, (learn not the way of the heathen). Remember too, Ezekiel 8:8-18, particularly verse 18.

But God's word says:

“These are the feasts of the LORD, (not the Jews), which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations” (Lev. 23): The LORD'S Passover - the feast of unleavened bread - the sheaf of the firstfruits - Pentecost - the Feast of Trumpets - the Day of Atonement - the feast of tabernacles - and the Last Great Day. An understanding of these feasts will give one great insight into God's overall plan for the redemption of all things.

By the way, if you are a sincere Christian, it's easy to prove Jesus was not born on Christmas, neither was He resurrected on Easter Sunday.

Man is wrong again!

On Immortality

Man says:

Man has an immortal soul that lives forever in either heaven, hell, or maybe purgatory, (and therefore, still believes Satan's first Lie, “ye shall not surely die”).

But God's word says:

“...the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality...” (I Tim. 6:15-16).

Paul agrees, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, (when?) at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption,

and this mortal must put on immortality" (I Cor. 15:53). We simply don't have it yet. Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6). Jesus was describing two entirely different beings. Man is wrong again!

On Death

Man says:

The dead are fully conscious and are in heaven, hell or purgatory and are aware of happenings on earth. Even in certain rare cases influencing or making actual contacting With the living. (Again, still believing Satan's lie about death).

But God's word says:

Death is like a deep sleep. Dan. 12:2; Jn. 11:12-14; Acts 13:36; Ps. 13:3; II Sam. 7:12, etc. Shouldn't sleep have the same meaning in the Bible as it does in the dictionary?

The patriarch David is both dead and buried and still in his grave (Acts 2:29), and he is not ascended into heaven (Acts 2:34). "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing" (Eccl. 9:5).

"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13).

Man is wrong again!

On Hell

Man says:

Hell is a place of fire and brimstone where the wicked and those who refused, or even never had an opportunity to accept

Christ, will live forever in eternal suffering and punishment. However, some say there may be a special place reserved for those too young to understand, they just don't quite make it to heaven.

But God's word says:

The three hells as described in the original Hebrew and Greek Bible are:

1) The hell of Gehenna: the Valley of Hinnom, the city dump where fires were kept burning continually. But, they are not still burning and the worms that never die became flies and flew away. Jesus frequently used Gehenna to symbolize the lake of fire of the final judgment, from which there is no resurrection.

2) The hell of Sheol or Hades: the state of the dead, the grave or pit where the dead sleep as in a coma-like state until their resurrection. Sheol or Hades never refers to the lake of fire. (See Ps.6:5; Ps. 146:4; Ps. 115:17; Ecc. 9:5-6).

3) The hell of Tartarus, which has nothing to do with man. "... God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (tartarus), and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (II Pet. 2:4).

Man is wrong again!

On Baptism

Man says:

It can be done by sprinkling of holy water or by dunking. Some believe it can be done by or for others without a freewill decision on their part, such as baptizing for the dead or babies, as if to get them ready for, or nearer to, salvation. But how can

that be if they have no knowledge of what's going on? There would be no commitment or repentance or belief from the person being baptized.

But God's word says:

It is to be a purposeful, freewill decision, after repentance and belief in Christ (Heb. 6:1-3; Luke 3:2-3). It is to be done by total immersion signifying death burial and resurrection as illustrated in John 3:23, "...because there was much water there, and they came, and were baptized."

Man is wrong again!

On the Physical Appearance of Jesus

Man says:

He is typically pictured with very long blond hair, long effeminate hands, a rather sickly expression and a halo over His head. (Very atypical of a common Jew in appearance).

But God's word says:

"For [the Servant of God] grew up before Him like a tender plant, and like a root out of dry ground; He has no form or comeliness [royal, kingly pomp], that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isa. 53:2 AMP). Jesus' appearance was like any ordinary Jew and certainly there was no halo over his head. Consider also I Corinthians 11:14, "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?"

Man is wrong again!

On the Crucifixion

Man says:

Christ was crucified on “good” Friday afternoon and resurrected Easter Sunday at sunrise (the day of the pagan god, Ashtoreth), but should never be confused with or observed on the same day as the Jewish Passover (ignoring that Christ is our Passover). (Therefore, being in the heart of the earth only a part of Friday, all of Saturday, and a part of Sunday, but only two nights, thus, proving to the world that the Easter Sunrise service is honoring the ancient god Ashtoreth, not Christ. Are they not preaching another Jesus (II Cor. 11:4)? Consequently, confusing the most important event in the history of man, the Passover.

But God’s word says:

Christ was crucified on Passover the 14th of Nisan, which fell on a Wednesday that year. And was resurrected toward the end of the Sabbath, thus, proving to the world that He was the Messiah by His statement in Matthew 12:39-40. “...there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” The Friday crucifixion, Sunday resurrection does not fulfill the only sign that Jesus gave that He was the Messiah.

Calling something by a different name does not change its character; nor does "Christianizing" a pagan deity. Easter is still a pagan goddess and an abomination to God.

Man is wrong again!

On Being Born Again

Man says:

Upon giving your life to Christ you are born again. (But how can that be, you are still flesh and blood and certainly not a spirit being? Do you fit the description that Jesus gave to Nicodemus; can you move about like the wind? Have you left your mortal body and now an immortal spirit being? Are you still capable of sinning, do you slip up once in a while? If so, then your corruptible physical body has not yet put on the incorruptible, immortal, spiritual body that both Jesus and Paul described when you are born again (I Cor. 15).

But God's word says:

Jesus explained to Nicodemus what being born again meant in John 3:3-8. By illustrating the difference between a physical being and a spiritual being, and stressing the fact that a physical being cannot enter, or even see the Kingdom of Heaven. To enter the kingdom of Heaven, you must be born into it as a spirit being. Until that happens you may be begotten of God, but you are born at your resurrection.

In I Corinthians 15:50 Paul repeats Christ's statement that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, then goes on to explain that after we die we will be born into the Kingdom by a spiritual resurrection at His coming (I Thess. 4:14-17). Read Paul's description of a born again individual in I Corinthians 15.

Being begotten (Greek "gennao" is used to define entire gestation process) is not the same as being born any more than

at the time a baby is conceived it is also born. Jesus said, "You must be born again!" Why not believe Him?

Man is wrong again! Gestation

On Grace

Man says:

Once saved always saved. Regardless of how much you continue in sin, once you have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior grace will save you. It is simply impossible for you to sin beyond the reach of grace whether you repent or not. So, don't be overly concerned about those little peccadilloes in your life, you are not under the law. Remember God loves the sinner, and He died on the cross for you. You are redeemed.

But God's word says:

"What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (Rom. 6:15-16)? How can a servant of sin be a citizen of the Kingdom of God?

We read in Hebrews: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6). Also, "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful

looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26-27). Also see Romans 1:21-32.

And So, Man Is Wrong Again!

In view of all these discrepancies (and many more not mentioned) is it any wonder why God warned, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4)?

A warning to the Brethren:

"Beloved, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4).

Titus tells us how those, even while professing God, deny Him. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:16).

Jesus warned of many coming in His name (under the banner of His name), deceiving many, and of False Christs, even performing miracles, that would come in the latter days. Jude warned of the many who would sneak in unawares. Peter warned of false prophets and teachers, and that the way of truth would be evil spoken of. Are we forewarned?

Who do you suppose Jesus was talking to when He said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21-23).

These were claiming to have done great works in His name, and I’m sure they appeared to be very righteous. Just as it was in Jeremiah’s day, the principal cause of the problem is the ministers, the teachers, and those in authority over the brethren. Remember that Satan appears as an angel of light and his ministers as ministers of righteousness.

Brethren let us diligently guard against, remove and forever keep the leaven of this world out of our lives. Never compromise God’s truth; never put tradition over God’s law; and never turn to fables. Always nourish a sincere love of God’s truth.

Consider what God has in store for those who do not have a love for the truth. Read it in II Thessalonians 2:10-12. “... because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ... God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

And the Lord said:

“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none” (Ezek 22:30).

What a shameful thing for God to have to say about His people. Brethren, let's all strive to stand in the gap!

Remember, it takes just a little leaven!

“When a well-packaged web of lies has been sold gradually to the masses over generations, the truth will seem utterly preposterous and its speaker a raving lunatic.” Dresden James

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For a more in depth study of the above refer to these study guides:

Subject:

A STORY OF GRACEGrace and the law
GOD'S INTRIGUING CYCLE OF SEVENSGod's appointed times
LIFE AFTER DEATH PART 1 AND 2Where are the dead
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THE NUMBER SEVEN AND GOD'S SABBATH Sabbath
THE PROTECTING WALLSabbath
BEINGS FROM ANOTHER WORLDBorn again
THE AWARDS CEREMONY AT THE THRONE OF GOD . Born again
THE PASSOVER AND YOUImportance of the Passover to you
UNDERSTANDING HELLThe meaning of the word hell
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THE DAY JESUS DIED The actual day Jesus died