



Counter Culture Warfare and Christianity

Today we are facing a great war with regard to Christianity. Many times we become desensitized to it or simply ignore it because it is easier to sit in a bubble and put our blinders on choosing to ignore the reality of the world around us. Nonetheless, there is a war that must be recognized by modern day Christians and it is not simply a war of words, philosophies, or theologies. It is a spiritual warfare that is being waged on many fronts. The Apostle Paul summed up the warfare in simple terms as he observed,

Ephesians 6:10-13 – ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

The warfare that we observe within these verses is one that is methodical as we observe an enemy seeking to destroy others. It is not simply a war on morals, integrity, honesty, or character rather it is a war waged on the soul of mankind. Sadly, many Christians are losing this war by surrounding themselves with teachers that will tell them what they want to hear.

The statistics tell us differently as we look at the world with our spiritual eyes wide open. We observe that there is a growing number of people leaving or avoiding the church, which leads to a rejection of the Word of God. Imagine for a moment...

a continuum of cultural responsiveness to Christianity (see the following illustration). At the far left end of the continuum is antagonism toward Christianity and churches; at the far right is advocacy. The various points in between – rejection, resistance, and doubt to the left; indifference in the middle; and curiosity, interest, and engagement to the right – convey the positions people in our culture take toward Christianity and communities of Christian faith.¹



¹ George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014).

QUESTIONS

Describe three excuses people use to leave "church."

What is the danger facing individuals that lack regular attendance in church?

Barna decided to measure the spiritual state of the average American by developing a standard of measurement of 15 different variables related to people's identity, beliefs, and behaviors, including belief in God, church attendance, beliefs about the Bible's accuracy, and likelihood of volunteering at or donating to a church. Out of this standard Barna classified individuals as "Post-Christian" if the individual satisfied 60% or more of the factors (9 or more out of 15). As of January 2013,

Nearly 38% of the nation's adult population qualifies as post-Christian.

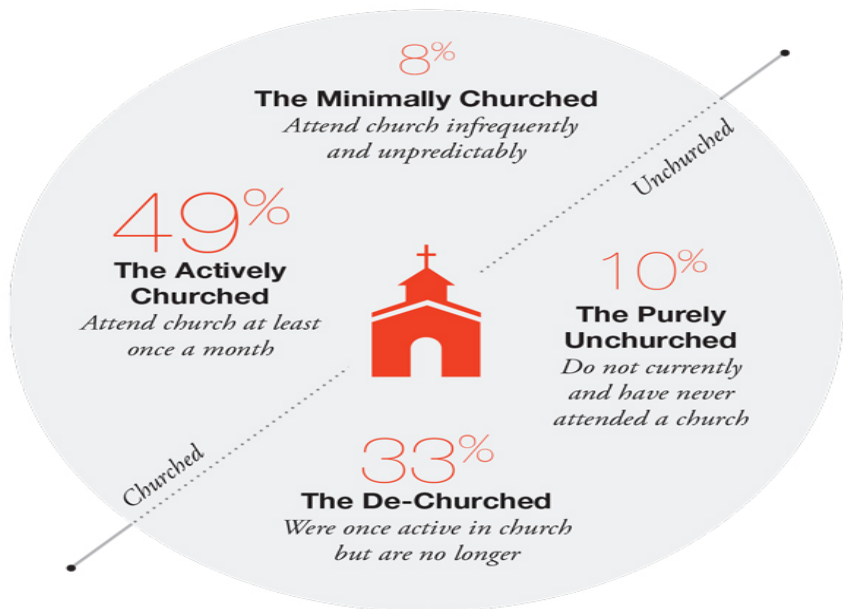
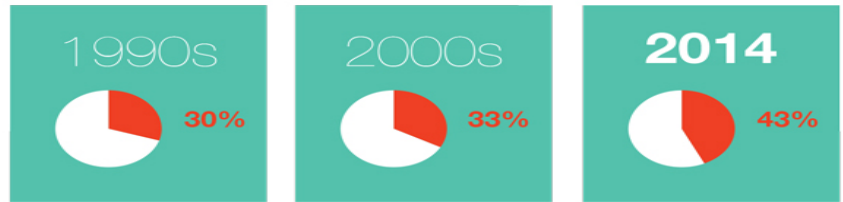
That includes 10% of Americans who are highly post-Christian—that is, lacking engagement in twelve or more of the measures of belief, practice, or commitment.

Another 28% was moderately post-Christian, landing on the resistance-doubt-indifference area of the continuum. In other words, in spite of our "Christian" self-descriptions, more than one-third of America's adults are essentially secular in belief and practice.

Among the churchless, the proportions skew even more heavily to the left of the continuum. Overall, more than three-quarters of unchurched adults fall in the heavy-to-moderate range on the secularization scale. That compares to about one out of eight among the churched. Skeptics lead the secularization march: 74 percent are heavily secularized and 98 percent are in the moderate or higher category.²

This helps us understand why we have an increased trend of more individuals leaving or avoiding the church in our current times.

The rise of churchlessness in America



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Today's R.A.C.E. We Face

The picture is simple, we are in a war as Christians and this war is being waged on many different fronts from the pulpits of every church to the programs carried out by the church to the marriages of Christians in our culture. This study seeks to sum up this warfare into four basic categories and label it as the "R.A.C.E. We FACE!" The categories are as follows,

- **Removing** the Word of God
- **Attacking** the Word of God
- **Corrupting** the Word of God
- **Enthralling** Christians With Alternatives to the Word of God

² Ibid.

REMOVING THE WORD OF GOD

The modern day version of the protestant church in America is drastically different than the New Testament model that was implemented upon the completion of Peter's evangelistic message on the "Day of Pentecost." We are witnessing a rise in the number of churches that are becoming more pragmatic in nature rather than being Christ-centered in programs and methodology.

The face of Christianity is changing in our country because of the modern movement to become more "Seeker Sensitive" and "Politically Correct." We see that churches are more concerned today about growing in numbers than they are about sending out missionaries from their midst. The modern day version of the church is in desperate need of a revival and it begins with recognizing the steady creeping in of the world into the heart of the church.

James 4:4 – You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Colossians 2:8 – See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

As we begin looking at the warfare waged against Christianity today, we observe that the Word of God is being removed from the heart of the church and being replaced with a pragmatic pursuit of political correctness.

Pragmatism versus Biblical Theology

Definition of Pragmatism – Pragmatism is when the value or worth of something is determined by practical value not based on its actual value.

Examples: (1) A church desires to grow in numbers and so they begin approving of homosexuality and abortion versus taking a stand against it. (2) A church wants to reach the younger generation so they begin using profanity and explicit illustrations through the service and sermons. (3) A church wants to reach a wider demographic and so it changes its name to "Everyone Is Valuable Community Church" and begins taking a loose stance on Biblical truth, welcoming and accepting a variety of interpretations on all core beliefs.

Formerly, a doctrinal statement represented the reason for a denomination's existence. Today, methodology is the glue that holds churches together. A statement of ministry defines them and their denominational existence.³

Pragmatism in the church is dangerous because it ultimately leads to the annihilation of the truth of the Gospel as individuals begin pursuing a man-made Gospel. When a church subscribes to pragmatism as the rule of authority then they are giving way to worldliness which will allow Satan to have a foothold in the church and ultimately it will lead to a false gospel being presented. The ultimate danger of pragmatism is destruction of the believer and the church.

Romans 2:8 – But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

QUESTIONS

What does mean for a church to become "pragmatic" in nature?

How do you guard against becoming a "pragmatic" church or a "pragmatic" Christian?

³ Elmer L. Towns, *An Inside Look at 10 of today's Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 249.

2 Thessalonians 2:10 – And with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

The impact of pragmatism as it seeks to replace the Word of God is found in the example of a minister in a church in Canada that is convinced that pragmatics draw more people to truth than Christ as seen in the article, “‘I Don’t Believe In God’: Atheist Minister Resists Effort To Boot Her From United Church Of Canada” as the author observes,

An ordained minister with the United Church of Canada is resisting efforts to oust her from the pulpit because she is an atheist.

“I don’t believe in ... the god called God,” Gretta Vosper told the Globe and Mail. “Using the word gets in the way of sharing what I want to share.” She said that she believes the Bible is “mythology,” and denies that Jesus is the Son of God.

“We build a faith tradition upon it which shifted to find belief more important than how we lived,” Vosper said.

Vosper, 57, and who was ordained in 1993, first came out as an atheist in 2001. Earlier this year, Vosper wrote an open letter asserting that a belief in God can compel people to commit evil, referencing the Charlie Hebdo massacre in France.⁴

QUESTIONS

What does the impact of “pragmatism” look like in the local community?

What is the danger of “pragmatic” Christianity?

Please observe that this minister has made faith about pragmatism and tradition leading to an acceptance of the things of man and rejection of God and His Word. Ultimately she has sinned against the Lord in many areas but with her rejection of the Lord and lack of Biblical faith then she faces eternal judgment.

Hebrews 11:6 – And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

ATTACKING THE WORD OF GOD

The next stage in the warfare facing Christianity is found in the area of “Attacking the Word of God.” We observe that this is being accomplished in the life of the church by alternative gospels presented by false teachers. The Apostle Paul warned Christians to be on their guard against false gospels as he states,

Galatians 1:6 – I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel...

This kind of attack has been observed for centuries and it has not ceased in recent years. A few years ago ministers became popular for false gospel presentations due to the appealing nature to the self-gratification ego of modern man. Some ministers would preach messages of this nature,

“Every Christian is a god...You don’t have a god in you; you are one.” “It is in your power to release the ability of God.”⁵

And I say this with all respect so that it don’t upset you too bad, but I say it anyway. When I read in the Bible where He says I AM, I just smile and say, ‘Yes, I AM too.’⁶

⁴ <http://www.prophecynewswatch.com/2015/August11/115.html#YEmrvKc73orOoJMb.99>

⁵ Kenneth Copeland, The Force of Love (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987), audiotape #02-0028, side 1.

⁶ Kenneth Copeland, Believer’s Voice of Victory Broadcast, 7/9/1987.

"I just want to encourage every one of us to realize when we obey God, we're not doing it for God—I mean, that's one way to look at it—we're doing it for ourselves, because God takes pleasure when we are happy. . . . That's the thing that gives Him the greatest joy. . . . "So, I want you to know this morning – Just do good for your own self. Do good because God wants you to be happy. . . . When you come to church, when you worship him, you're not doing it for God really. You're doing it for yourself, because that's what makes God happy. Amen?"⁷

The Word of God has been attacked and redefined so that man is more comfortable with their sin stained nature. It really comes down to a "Market-driven" ministry approach. Unfortunately, this ministry philosophy appeals to the very worst mood of our age. It caters to people whose first love is themselves and who care not for God – unless they can have Him without disrupting their selfish lifestyles. Promise such people a religion that will allow them to be comfortable in their materialism and self-love, and they will respond in droves.

Paul foresaw such a time. Near the end of his second epistle to Timothy, after outlining the principles we have listed above, Paul abridged his advice to Timothy in this well-known verse: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). Then the apostle added this prophetic warning: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" (4:3, 4). The King James Version translates the passage like this: "After their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth."

QUESTIONS

How is the Word of God being attacked within our country?

How does a "Market-driven" ministry impact the local community?

CORRUPTING THE WORD OF GOD

The next stage of warfare that we must observe is found in the "Corruption of the Word of God." Many churches today are suffering due to false gospels that are being presented from the pulpit. These churches focus on softening the Word of God versus presenting the full truth of God's Word. Consider some of these advertisements for different churches,

"There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible-thumping. Just practical, witty messages."

"Services at [the church featured in the article] have an informal feeling. You won't hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners. The goal is to make them feel welcome, not drive them away."

"As with all clergymen [this pastor's] answer is God—but he slips Him in at the end, and even then doesn't get heavy. No ranting, no raving. No fire, no brimstone. He doesn't even use the H-word. Call it Light Gospel. It has the same salvation as the Old Time Religion, but with a third less guilt."

"The sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short. You won't hear a lot of preaching about sin and damnation and hell fire. Preaching here doesn't sound like *preaching*. It is sophisticated, urbane, and friendly talk. It breaks all the stereotypes."

"[The pastor] is preaching a very upbeat message.... It's a salvationist message, but the idea is not so much being saved from the fires of hell. Rather, it's being saved from meaninglessness and aimlessness in this life. It's more of a soft-sell."

"The idea, [the pastor] says, is to get people through the front doors, then disprove the stereotype of the sweating, loosened necktied, Bible-thumping preacher who yells and screams about burning in hell for eternity."⁸

⁷ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/09/03/the-osteen-predicament-mere-happiness-cannot-bear-the-weight-of-the-gospel/>

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 47.

The modern church has conformed to the world and is presenting a “Seeker Sensitive Gospel” or the “Itching Ears Gospel.” Today, the minister is given the counsel to disregard man’s authentic need and replace it with his felt need.

No longer are pastors trained to declare to people what God demands of them. Instead, they are counseled to find out what the people’s demands are, then do whatever is necessary to meet them. The audience is regarded as “sovereign,” and the wise preacher will “shape his communications according to their needs in order to receive the response he [seeks].”⁹

The felt need approach is popular but misplaced and man made. It is a weak, worldly, & man-centered approach to presenting the Word of God that ultimately leads to destruction.

QUESTIONS

What are the elements of an “Itching Ear Gospel”?

How can you train others to recognize this type of a Gospel?

2 Timothy 4:3-4 – ³For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

CONCLUSION: ENTHRALLING CHRISTIANS WITH ALTERNATIVES TO THE WORD OF GOD

Finally, the last stage of the warfare that we examine is found in the area of replacing sound Biblical teaching with entertainment. The first step of successful merchandising is to give consumers what they want. If they want bigger burgers, make their burgers bigger. Designer bottled water in six fruit flavors? Done. Minivans with ten cup holders? Give them twenty. You’ve got to keep the customer satisfied. You’ve got to modify your product and your message to meet their needs if you want to build a market and get ahead of the competition.

Sadly, today this same consumer mind-set has invaded Christianity. The church service is too long, you say? We’ll shorten it (one pastor guarantees his sermons will never last more than seven minutes!). Too formal? Wear your sweat suit. Too boring? Wait’ll you hear our band!

And if the message is too confrontational, or too judgmental, or too exclusive, scary, unbelievable, hard to understand, or too much anything else for your taste, churches everywhere are eager to adjust that message to make you more comfortable. This new version of Christianity makes you a partner on the team, a design consultant on church life, and does away with old-fashioned authority, guilt trips, accountability, and moral absolutes.

It’s Christianity for consumers: Christianity Lite, the redirection, watering down, and misinterpretation of the biblical gospel in an attempt to make it more palatable and popular. It tastes great going down and settles light. It seems to salve your feelings and scratch your itch; it’s custom-tailored to your preferences. But that lightness will never fill you up with the true, saving gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is designed by man and not God, and it is hollow and worthless. In fact, it’s worse than worthless, because people who hear the message of Christianity Lite think they’re hearing the gospel—think they’re being rescued from eternal judgment—when, in fact, they’re being tragically misled.

The False Gospel of Self-Esteem

The true gospel is a call to self-denial. It is not a call to self-fulfillment. And that puts it in opposition to the contemporary evangelical gospel, where ministers view Jesus as a utilitarian genie. You rub the lamp, and He jumps out and says you have whatever you want; you give Him your list and He delivers.

⁹ George Barna, *Marketing the Church* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1988), 33.

- Some within the framework of evangelicalism will tell you Jesus just wants you well, and if you're not well, it's because you haven't turned in your spiritual lottery ticket. If you're not rich, it's because you haven't claimed it. Jesus wants you free from debt, and if you send the televangelists enough money, that act of faith will free you from the demon of debt. Your salvation through Christ is a guarantee of health, wealth, prosperity, and happiness.
- The psychologically man-centered evangelicals tell you that Jesus gives you peace, Jesus gives you joy, Jesus makes you a better salesman, and Jesus helps you hit more home runs. Jesus really wants to make you feel better about yourself. He wants to elevate your self-image. He wants to put an end to your negative thinking.

Robert Schuller wrote a book number of years ago called *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*. He called for a new approach to sharing the Word of God as he wrote,

"It is precisely at this point that classical theology has erred in its insistence that theology be 'God-centered' and not 'man-centered.'"

To define man-centered theology (an oxymoron), he wrote further, "This master plan of God is designed around the deepest needs of human beings – self-dignity, self-respect, self-worth, self-esteem." For Schuller, the pearl of great price is self-respect and self-esteem. He went on to say, "Success is to be defined as the gift of self-esteem that God gives us as a reward for our sacrificial service in building self-esteem in others. Win or lose: If we follow God's plan as faithfully as we can, we will feel good about ourselves. That is success!"

In this new reformation of self-esteem, the first thing required is to pull God down from His supremely elevated place so you can then lift yourself up, replacing God-exalting theology with man-exalting self-esteem psychology. To pull this off requires altering and misinterpreting the Bible and the gospel for the grand purpose of making people feel better about themselves, so they can fulfill their dreams and realize their visions.

Maybe the most amazing statement in *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* is the following,

"Once a person believes he is an 'unworthy sinner,' it is doubtful if he can really honestly accept the saving grace God offers in Jesus Christ."

So, if you want to be saved, according to this new gospel you cannot believe yourself to be an unworthy sinner. How twisted is that? How contrary to the truth is that? But it is just the sort of man-centered, self-esteem gospel that eventually became the seeker-friendly movement, which has hijacked so many churches. It's a kind of quasi-Christian narcissism, or self-love, that is characteristic of false teachers: according to 2 Timothy 3, which reminds us, "Dangerous times will come, for men will be lovers of themselves"

Christianity, in the hands of some seeker-sensitive church leaders, has become a "get what you want" rather than a "give up everything" movement. These leaders have prostituted the divine intention of the gospel. They have replaced the glory of God with the satisfaction of man. They have traded the concept of abandoning our lives to the honor of Christ for Christ honoring us. As such, our submission to His will is replaced by His submission to our will. Since people usually reject the real gospel, modern evangelicals have simply changed the message. Yet Jesus declares this truth,

Matthew 16:24-25 – ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

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