

Postmodernism and the Emerging Church

In today's society, it's not uncommon to hear the words *Modernism* and *Postmodernism* in everyday conversations.

A lot of us come from a culture that thinks along the lines of *modernism* and good or bad, that's how we were raised since our parents grew up in the *modern* society or culture.

But today, we are constantly being peppered with conversations and ideas that are considered *Postmodern* and go against very important truths and concepts that we and our parents were taught.

People with extremely different philosophical views and ideas who distrust authority figures, prefer personal experience over objective truth, question the authority and the inerrancy of Scripture and call language and how we relate to each other into question are filling the pulpits of our churches.

This postmodernist movement, known as *The Emerging* or *Emergent Church* has found its way into the church at large.

In a nutshell, the Emerging Church movement seeks to reach the lost with the Christian gospel by adapting it to present day culture. In other words, letting the culture come in and change the church and the gospel message instead of letting the church drive and propagate out into the culture changing the secular worldview.

I want to stress that not all Emerging churches are off Biblically and doctrinally. I want to be careful not to broad brush the whole movement, but some in the movement, often called *Emergent Liberals* or *Revisionists* are theologically liberal and willing to become Biblically illiterate in order to become culturally relevant.

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary asserts that the "Emergent movement represents a significant challenge to biblical Christianity."¹

Dr. John MacArthur recently commented on the Emerging Church:

- "If you haven't heard of the Emerging Church, you will. The Emerging Church movement is wildly popular with people who are dissatisfied with orthodox doctrine, dogmatic preaching, and traditional worship. People who are drawn to the Emerging Church generally place high value on ambiguity and mystery. They reject the notion that God's Word is clear, and that anyone can really understand its meaning. That means every doctrine you and I find precious is subject to new interpretation, doubt, and even wholesale rejection. Everything is being questioned and deconstructed. Unlike the noble Bereans who used Scripture to test what they were taught and refine their understanding of the truth, people associated with the Emerging Church regard God's Word as too full of mystery to warrant handling any truth in a definitive way. The result is a movement that thrives on disorganization, lends itself to mysticism, distrusts authority and dislikes preaching, feeds intellectual pride, and recognizes few (if any) doctrinal or moral boundaries."²

The Emerging Church movement is made up of a widely diverse group of individuals who feel that Modernism and Evangelicalism has pretty much run its course and that in order to reach the new generation, roughly 18-35 year olds, we need to approach "church" differently.

They believe this requires that we radically reform and reshape the church's beliefs to come along side with and conform to postmodern thought and practices.

Unfortunately, this also requires that we set aside certain core Christian beliefs and doctrine, embrace aspects of relativism and to put it bluntly, discard Christian orthodoxy in favor of a humanistic postmodern concept.

I've listed below some of the most erroneous Emerging Church teachings that should cause red flags and sirens to go off in our heads.

1. The belief that the Bible is no longer considered the ultimate and final authority as to the basis of the Christian faith.

This leads to denial of absolute truth and the denial that we can know what the original authors of the Bible were intending to convey.

This leads to denial that we can be dogmatic about doctrine.

This leads to denial that we can be dogmatic about moral standards.

2. Teaching that Jesus is not the only way in which a person might be saved.
3. Validity of other world religions.
4. Allowing the culture to drive Christianity and the gospel message in order to reach a postmodern generation.
5. Condoning of the homosexual lifestyle.
6. Questioning the existence of an eternal/literal hell (Universalism).

So tonight, we'll be looking at:

- 1. Postmodernism and the Emerging Church**
- 2. Objective Truth versus Relativism**
- 3. Scriptural Authority, Inerrancy, Infallibility and Sufficiency**
- 4. Teachings of the Emerging Church Refuted**

1. Postmodernism and the Emerging Church

In order to understand the *postmodern* worldview, we need to understand its predecessor, the *modern* worldview, so let's start there keeping in mind that historically, philosophical dates are different shades of grey and don't always have sharp, well defined edges.

Modernism or the *Enlightenment Period*, as it's sometimes referred to, is the time roughly between 1550 and 1945 and consists of the Scientific Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, Galileo and Newton, the change from kingdom, feudal alliances to democratic states, the decline of the Roman Catholic Church in politics, capitalism, socialism and democracy. It is the worldview that humans could understand and fix any problem that we run into.

Dr. Heath White explains the Modern worldview this way:

- "The heart of the modern worldview was confidence in human powers of reasoning. With proper use of reason, any problem – social, political, personal, or ethical – could be overcome."³

R. Scott Smith, assistant professor of ethics and Christian apologetics at Biola University says:

- "The modern era emphasized the confidence that human reason, apart from divine revelation, could know universal truths in all subject matters."⁴

The bottom line is that Modernism was that time when we thought that we could solve any problem, when we thought the world was getting better and we thought we could know and understand the universal truths and morality on everything, and that humankind, in general, was advancing, making progress and ultimately getting better.

Modernism has its obvious problems such as "mankind can fix their own problems" and "human beings were getting better" and "there is nothing supernatural and that there are scientific explanations and rationalistic reasons for everything."

We know these statements to be false but at least Modernism retained the belief that there was truth and that knowledge of truth was possible.

Now, we have done a complete 180 and the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction.

And as a result, we are now in what is commonly referred to as the *Postmodernism* era.

Postmodernism, roughly 1945 to present, can be defined as “a response to modernism” and started coming about around the turn of the twentieth century after “two world wars, the concentration and extermination camps, genocides, and the nuclear bomb...Watergate, CIA cover-ups, the Jim Bakker scandal, and the sex scandals that have rocked the Roman Catholic Church.”⁵

These things and others only helped confirm to postmodernists that human beings were not getting better, but worse.

Americans started to question our involvement in other countries both economically and militarily and a mind-set started to set in that “we needed to be more tolerant of different cultures, ways of living, and morals, for there is no universal standard we can know that is true for all people.”⁶

As these mindsets started to entwine and root themselves into the American culture, they started to enter the church in the form of:

- Doubting that we could know for certain that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God.
- Doubting that there is only one way to God.
- Doubting that homosexuality is not for us to judge.
- Doubting that there is objective or absolute truth.
- Doubting that there are any moral absolutes.
- Doubting why Jesus died on the cross.

The bottom line is that “Postmoderns have rejected [a universal ethic] entirely by denying any moral absolutes – any claims about how we ought to live that apply universally to all times and places and cultures and people.”⁷

Now that we’ve had a little background on postmodernism and its transition from modernism, let’s look at how the postmodern worldview has started entering the church in the form of a movement called the Emerging Church.

For example, here are some quotes from various leaders and proponents of the Emerging Church movement:⁸

- “The problem with the Christian community was that we had ethics, we had rules and laws and principles to judge each other against.”
- “It’s my honest feeling that anyone trying to share their faith in America today has to realize that the Religious Right [conservative Christianity] has polluted the air. The name “Jesus” and the word ‘Christianity’ are associated with something judgmental, hostile, hypocritical, angry, negative, defensive, anti-homosexual, etc. Many of our churches, even though they feel they represent the truth, actually are upholding something that’s distorted and false.”
- “Want to earn a place on the Colorado Springs...er, I mean, Hollywood black list? Admit your uncertainty about homosexuality as a biblically condemned sin....Given a less than stellar track record, is it really so heretical to think that the evangelical church may be wrong about homosexuality as well?”

Many people will find it difficult to nail down exactly what postmodernism teaches as well as what the Emerging Church teaches. I would agree and it seems to be an intentional decision.

Brian McLaren, a main proponent and leader in the Emerging Church movement, says as much in his book A Generous Orthodoxy:⁹

- “I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and *unclear*, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated, and that shock, *obscurity*, playfulness, and intrigue...often stimulate more thought than clarity.” (emphasis added)
- “...you should know that I am horribly unfair in this book, lacking all scholarly objectivity and evenhandedness...” and then says, “...I cannot even pretend to be objective or fair.”

Mr. McLaren also states that his book is “scandalous” that in identifying orthodoxy we should “admit that our past and current formulations may

have been limited or distorted” and that doctrinal distinctives belong in their “marginal” place.¹⁰

D.A Carson, research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School says that “Brian is so careful to dance around the edges that he’s shrewd enough not to come into the position where he simply says, ‘I know that’s what the Bible says, and I disbelieve it.’”¹¹

To the Emerging Church and postmodern movement, certainty is something that we are unsure of and assurance in Scripture is considered the height of arrogance.

Since culture is in a constant state of movement and flux then, according to the Emerging Church, the churches theology will be in a perpetual state of transition and flux as well.

In Brian McLaren’s book, A New Kind of Christian, he says:

- “I drive my car and listen to the Christian radio station...There I hear preacher after preacher be so absolutely sure of his bombproof answers and his foolproof *biblical* interpretations...and the more sure he seems, the less I find myself wanting to be a Christian, because on this side of the microphone, antennas, and speaker, life isn’t that simple, answers aren’t always that clear, and nothing is that sure.”¹²

This is a sad commentary on a leader, a so-called shepherd of God’s children and a main proponent in the Emerging Church movement.

While Brian McLaren might have gone out of his way to be “unclear” because of his belief that doctrinal distinctives belong in their “marginal” place and that “answers aren’t always that clear, and nothing is that sure”, the Bible tells us a different story.

Jesus held the religious rulers of His day, the Pharisees, and by extension, the Christians of every age from then until now and beyond, responsible to read, understand, interpret, teach and obey what God spoke in His word.

Jesus laid out a rebuke to those who did not understand the Scriptures, as they should have:

- Matthew 12:3 says, "But He said to them, *'Have you not read what David did...'*"
- Matthew 12:5 says, "Or *have you not read* in the law that on the Sabbath the priests..."
- Matthew 19:4 says, "And He answered and said to them, *'Have you not read...'*"
- Matthew 22:31 says, "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, *have you not read* what was spoken to you by God..."

Jesus also spoke to His disciples after His resurrection on the road to Emmaus about their ignorance of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah:

- Luke 24:25 says, "Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!'"

Paul expected the Ephesians to understand what he was writing to them in the Epistle with the same name:

- Ephesians 3:3, 4 says, "how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery...by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."

As well, he expected Timothy to understand the Scriptures:

- 2 Timothy 3:15 says, "and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation..."

Jesus also pointed out that we should not only hear but also listen to what He was saying:

- Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 16 and Mark 4:9 say, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The apostle John teaches the exact same thing in the Book of Revelation:

- Revelation 1:3 says, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written in it..."

Then Jesus says in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13 and 22:

- "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Finally, Jesus Himself settled the issue on whether His truth, which is recorded for us in Scripture, is sufficiently clear to us:

- John 10:27, 28 says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

It's been said that *the main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things*. I'd say that Jesus couldn't have been more plain than that.

True, there are certain Scriptures that are not always self-evident, Peter even acknowledged that some of the apostle Paul's teachings were "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16), that's why God gives teachers to His church (Ephesians 4:11) and the reason why He gave the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

The bottom line is that God has given us enough information to *know* Him on a personal level (John 17:3), and He has given us enough information to realize that Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for sinners (Isaiah 53:4-10), taking the full brunt of our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21), and that His death was an atoning sacrifice on behalf of believers (Hebrews 2:17).

2.Objective Truth and Relativism

According to John 18:38, two thousand years ago Pilate summed up the mantra of relativism when he asked "What is truth?"

I'm sure we've all heard people say, or maybe we've even said these statements ourselves at times, "what's true for you isn't necessarily true for me" or "that's your view or perspective."

These statements embody the postmodern movement's worldview that objective truth and matters of certainty are relative in the respect that "what is true for you isn't necessarily true for me."

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines *truth* as:¹³

- "that which is true; a fact; a reality; that which conforms to fact or reality; the real or true state of things."
- "a verified fact; a true statement or proposition; an established principle; a fixed law, or the like."

Here's what Dr. John MacArthur says about truth:

- "Here is a simple definition drawn from what the bible teaches: *truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God.* Even more to the point: *truth is the self-expression of God.*"¹⁴

Truth is reality as it corresponds to the way things really are. Absolute truth is absolute no matter where you are, no matter what time you live.

When Jesus said "I am the truth" (John 14:6) and then said "When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9), He was saying that God is truth.

The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, is called "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13) "because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6).

That which is truth, is indeed true. The Father is known as the “only true God” (John 17:3) and John wrote that “we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God...” (1 John 5:20).

The bottom line is that to deny that there is absolute and moral truth is to deny God. To deny that we can *know* absolute and moral truth is to deny that we can *know* God.

Yet, Jesus prayed in John 17:3 that “[we] may *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Why would Jesus pray that Christians would *know* “the only true God” if He knew it was impossible for us to do so?

Jesus said in John 4:24 that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and *truth*.” (emphasis added)

Would Jesus give direction to the early church and by extension to us, on how to worship God knowing that it was impossible and that we would be unable to?

Postmodernism and Emerging Church Truth

One of the key hallmarks of the Emerging Church movement is that there is no absolute truth, at least that we can understand or be privy too.

- “The new school [i.e., the Emerging Church] attitude towards absolute truth is that it exists, but no living human being has direct access to it.”¹⁵

According to Emerging Church thought, we cannot know what is true because we are on the “inside” and we cannot get to the “outside” to experience reality as it really is.

In other words, we can only know what we believe is true because of the "language", "culture", and "story" in which we live. The people who share my same "language", "culture", and "story" all share the same truth but people who live in different "languages", etc...can have different truths.

This is another form or flavor of Relativism.

Although, they would deny that this is another form of relativism because according to proponents of the Emerging Church, we cannot get on the "outside" to see the "truth" so we cannot then know if it's "relative truth" or not.

"...relativists think that there are no objective moral truths, things that are in fact true for all people across all cultures. Some postmodernists might hold that view, but most hold to something similar yet different: *even if* objective truths exist, say the postmodernists, we cannot *know* them as such."¹⁶

The following are quotes from some of the *Emerging Church* leaders and main proponents regarding their view of truth.¹⁷

- "The problem with the critics [conservative Evangelicals] here is that they think they have a superior, timeless gospel that floats above any culture..."
- "I can't see church history in any other way except this...continually being led and taught and guided by the Spirit into new truth."
- "Can Christian theology make any claim to speak 'objective truth' in a context in which various communities offer diverse paradigms each of which is ultimately theological?"
- "Modern foundationalism, with its emphasis on the objectivity, universality, and absolute certainty of knowledge, is an impossible dream for finite human beings whose outlooks are always limited and shaped by the particular circumstances in which they emerge"
- "We are half finished, half-baked, and not driven by the need to find final and definitive answers."
- "When we talk about the word 'faith' and the word 'certainty,' we've got a whole lot of problems there. What do we mean by 'certainty'?..."

Certainty can be dangerous. What we need is a proper confidence that's always seeking the truth and that's seeking to live in the way God wants us to live, but that also has the proper degree of self-critical and self-questioning passion."

These men even question Christian orthodoxy and Biblical doctrine as seen in the following quotes:

- "I don't think we've got the gospel right yet...I don't think the liberals have it right. But I don't think we have it right either. None of us has arrived at orthodoxy."¹⁸
- "We must be continually aware that the 'old, old story' may not be the 'true, true story'"¹⁹

Orthodoxy is defined as "right belief, practice and worship."

Orthodox belief is characterized by what we believe as taught by the Bible with a strong emphasis on the life, teachings, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Orthodox practice includes what is taught in the Scriptures regarding living for Christ, becoming "Christ like" and serving others.

Orthodox worship has to do with what Jesus taught in John 4:24, that we must worship God "in spirit and truth."

The Bible tells us in first Timothy 6:5 that there will be those who are obsessed with "useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth..."

- Romans 16:17 says, "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them."
- Galatians 1:6-9 says, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel..."

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

- 2 Timothy 4:3 says, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."
- 2 John 9-11 says, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."

When it comes to truth, we can rest assured that the Bible, which is God's Word to us, is truth because God Himself is Truth.

- Psalm 33:4 says, "For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth."
- Psalm 119:160 says, "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever."
- John 8:45-46 says, "But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me...And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?"
- John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."
- Romans 2:8 says, "But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath."

The bottom line is that orthodox authentic Christianity has always recognized and accepted that truth is unchanging based on the Biblical truth that:

- God is unchanging – Malachi 3:6 says, "For I am the LORD, I do not change."
- Jesus Christ is unchanging - Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

- God's word is unchanging - Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven."

If God *is truth* and unchanging (Malachi 3:6) "how could we ever view truth as transient, pliable, or adaptable?"²⁰

Finally, Romans 3:4 says, "Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar."

3. Scriptural Authority, Inerrancy, Infallibility and Sufficiency

While the last topic answered the question of "could we know truth", in this section, I would like to discuss the authority, inerrancy, infallibility and the sufficiency of Scripture:

According to Tony Jones, the U.S. National Coordinator for the Emerging Church:²¹

- "[We should] stop looking for some objective Truth that is available when we delve into the text of the Bible."
- "The reformation doctrine of sola scriptura, joined to the invention of the printing press and underwritten by the democratic trust in the intelligence of the 'common person,' has created the situation that now makes people believe that they can read the Bible 'on their own.' That presumption must be challenged, and that is why the Scripture should be taken away from Christians in North America."

According to the Emerging Church movement, even if the Bible held truth that we could recognize and understand, we should be focusing on other things:²²

- "...sermons are not primarily about extracting truth from the Bible to apply to people's lives."

- "...the Bible is not about truth and doctrine but about hopes and ideas and participation."

The Emerging Church movement even goes so far as to doubt that we can have a personal relationship with the God of the universe.

- "How could you possibly desire a relationship with an invisible, all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, supernatural entity where the end game is to make that entity happy? How would you know if you are actually succeeding or failing?"²³

In *A New Kind of Christian*, Neo, Brian McLaren's fictional altar ego, says that Scripture doesn't claim to be authoritative in the "modern" sense of the word, that we should "let go of the Bible as a modern answer book", and that it's not a foundation for faith.²⁴

All these quotes come from one place – doubt and distrust that the Bible is authoritative, inerrant, infallible and sufficient.

Authority

The *authority* of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.²⁵

As Dr. James R. White explains in his book *Scripture Alone*:

- "Scripture's authority is inherent in its nature as the very speech of God...the Scriptures can boast of no higher authority attesting to their truth than that which they give themselves."²⁶

Around 2,000 times in the Old Testament we read of the men of God stating, "God said..." or "Thus says the LORD..."

Jesus claimed Scripture as His authority for...

- cleansing the temple (Mark 11:17)
- rebuking the tradition of the Pharisees (Matthew 15:3, 4)
- settling doctrinal disputes (Matthew 22:29)
- and in Matthew 4:4, 7, 10 Jesus rebuked the devil 3 times by responding, "It is *written*...It is *written*...It is *written*"
- See also Luke 16:17; 24:44; John 10:35

Jesus often spoke on the authority of the Old Testament as inspired and that it gives final authority on all matters.

Even in the New Testament, Jesus' own words are authoritative.

Jesus didn't speak like the Old Testament prophets "Thus says the LORD" but said "I say to you":

- Matthew 5:21-22 says, "You have heard it said...But I say to you"
- See also Matthew 5:18, 26, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44
- Matthew 7:28-29 says that "the people were astonished at His teaching, *for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*" (emphasis added)
- John 14:15 says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

Inerrancy

The *inerrancy* of Scripture means that Scripture in the original autographs do not affirm anything that is contrary to the fact.²⁷

Whenever we talk about the *inerrancy* of Scripture, we can point to two directly explicit truths that the Bible teaches:

First, the Bible is the Word of God (Matthew 22:31; 2 Tim 3:16-17) And second, God cannot commit an error (Heb 6:18; Titus 1:2; Rom 3:4).

Therefore, logically, the Bible, in its original autographical form, as dictated from God to men (2 Peter 1:20, 21) is inerrant.

- "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

With that said, it will inevitably be brought up that we no longer have the original autographs so talking about inerrancy in today's Bible is misleading. It can be stated with a confidence level above anything else that for over 99 percent of the Bible, we can *know* what the original autographs said.

The Old Testament has been faithfully passed down from generation to generation, copied by groups of men known as the *Massorettes* ("tradition") and the *Sopherim* ("counters") in such a way that we can be assured that their copy techniques were par excellence.

The Dead Sea scrolls only attest to the accuracy that these men applied to their trade.

Charlie Campbell, Director of *Always Be Ready Apologetics* Ministry says that "there are enough quotations from the early church fathers that even if we did not have a single manuscript copy of the Bible, scholars could still reconstruct 99.86% of the New Testament that we have today. There were only 11 verses in the New Testament that were never quoted by the Church Fathers."

Indeed, even the Bible itself argues against the possibility of its corruption:

- In Isaiah 40:8 we read, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."

- Jesus says in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

Infallibility

Infallibility simply means that the Bible cannot or will not lead us astray and give us wrong advice in matters of faith and practice.

Old Testament infallibility can be seen in what Jesus Christ taught in regards to:

- The Bible's authority by quoting Old Testament passages (Matthew 22:23).
- The Bible's reliability and sufficiency by referring to Old Testament prophecy (Matthew 26:54; Luke 16:31).
- The Bible's finality when referring to Old Testament authority (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).
- The Bible's indestructibility when referring to Old Testament writings (Matthew 5:16, 17).
- The Bible's unity and clarity when referring to Old Testament Scriptures concerning Himself (Luke 24:27).
- The Bible's historical accuracy when referring to Old Testament history (Matthew 12:40).
- The Bible's inerrancy and infallibility when referring to the Scriptures themselves (Matthew 22:29; John 10:35; 17:17).

New Testament infallibility is seen as Jesus promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach them additional truths and give them remembrance of all He had taught (John 14:25-26; 16:13). This prepared them – as agents to the complete and final revelation of Jesus Christ – to write the NT and establish the church, which began on the Day of Pentecost.²⁸

Indeed, the *infallibility or the unfaillingness* of the Scriptures is attested to over and over again by Jesus and the truth of Gods word both in the Old and New Testaments.

Sufficiency

Sufficiency simply means that the Bible is sufficient in and of itself and we need no other writings to supplement it.

Sola Scriptura is Latin and literally means "Scripture alone." It means that Scripture alone is the sole infallible *rule of faith* for the church.

The Bible itself claims to be the sole, sufficient, infallible and timeless *rule of faith* for the church, not needing any supplementation and its authority is not dependent on any council, man, or church.

If Scripture is not our source for absolute truth, our *final authority and final court of appeal* and personal experiences are allowed to define and interpret what truth actually is, then anything goes, up to and including a saving faith in Jesus Christ which would be rendered meaningless.

The Bible stands alone as the self-consistent, self-interpreting, and self-authenticating God-breathed Word of God as seen in the following verses:

- Matthew 22:31 says, "...have you not read [the Scriptures] what was spoken to you by God..."

Notice something very interesting here. Jesus asked them if they had *read* what God had *said* to them through the Scriptures. In other words, *Scripture* is God *speaking* to us.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- 2 Peter 1:20, 21 says, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by

the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The word *moved* [Greek: *enegko*] literally means "to be driven; carried along" and is used in Acts 27:15 and 17 in relation to the winds driving a ship along.

J. Vernon McGee says, "The Greek actually portrays the idea of a sailing vessel. The wind gets into those great sails, bellies them out, and moves the ship along. That is the way the Holy Spirit moved these men."²⁹

- Luke 1:3, 4 says, "...it seems good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account...that you may know the *certainty* of those things in which you were instructed." (emphasis added)

The NASB renders verse 4 as, "so that you may know the *exact truth* about the things you have been taught." (emphasis added)

The word *certainty* or *exact truth* (Greek: *asphaleia*) means "steadfastness, stability, security against error, and undoubted truth."

Evangelicals believe that *Sola Scriptura* is the one foundation that the authority for faith and practice rests upon.

We believe that Scripture alone is the *final court of appeal* or the *final court of arbitration* for determining the validity of any and all theology, doctrinal and moral issues.

We have already talked about and shown that God is true and truth, it's also well established that God does not change and cannot lie simply because it goes against His nature:

- Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should change His mind."
- 1 Samuel 15:29 says, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change his mind."

- Malachi 3:6 says, "I the LORD do not change."
- Matthew 24:35 says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away."
- John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth."

So when the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

- "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Regarding Belief:

- Profitable for doctrine – This means that *all Scripture* is profitable for knowing what is right.
- Profitable for correction – This means that *all Scripture* is profitable in how to get right.

Regarding Behavior:

- Profitable for instruction – This means that *all Scripture* is profitable in how to stay right.
- Profitable for reproof – This means that *all Scripture* is profitable for knowing what is wrong.

Purpose of Scripture:

- The word *complete* [Greek: *artios*] means "fit, complete, sufficient; able to meet all demands." Notice that this is the *first and primary goal of the Scriptures*. In other words, your character or who you are is complete in the sense of being Christ like.

- The word *thoroughly equipped* [Greek: *exartizo*] means “completely outfitted, furnished, supplied and equipped.” This is the *secondary goal of the Scriptures* and relates to appropriate conduct in things relating to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- So, we see that first the Bible should be used for *transformation of character* for the believer and second for the *transformation of conduct* for the believer.

4. Teachings of the Emerging Church Refuted

At the beginning of our discussion, I listed a few teachings that the Emerging Church movement teaches that should concern and trouble us as Christians.

These are just a few of the more serious teachings that need to be refuted from a Biblical standpoint, so let’s take each one separately and see if they hold up to what the Scriptures teach us:

1. The Bible is no longer considered the ultimate and final authority as to the basis of the Christian faith.

This leads to denial of absolute truth and the denial that we can know what the original authors of the Bible were intending to convey.

This leads to denial that we can be dogmatic about doctrine.

This leads to denial that we can be dogmatic about moral standards.

Below are some quotes from proponents of the Emerging Church movement regarding where they stand on the truth of the Bible.³⁰

- “The truth of the Bible, like any truth, is not best seen ‘objectively’...Where, then can I find authority that I can be sure of? Since God is (by and large) invisible, we are left with ordinary people holding a book. As we had said before, we cannot simply ‘go to the book.’ Truth cannot properly reside as a mere proposition on a paper. Truth lives in persons and relationships.”

- "I grew up thinking that we've figured out the Bible, that we knew what it means. Now I have no idea what most of it means. And yet I feel like life is big again — like life used to be black and white, and now it's in color."

Biblical Teaching

The Bible itself teaches that it is absolute truth (John 17:17) and Jesus, just by virtue of quoting Scripture, demonstrates that it has final authority (Matthew 22:43, 44).

If the Bible is not absolute truth, or only part of it contains absolute truth, who decides what truth is and which parts are true and which are not?

- Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven."
- Matthew 22:29 says, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.'"
- John 6:68 says, "But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'"
- John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."
- 2 Timothy 3:15-17 says, "and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Jesus closed the issue once and for all and the teachers of the Emerging Church would do well to remember this:

- John 8:31, 32 says, "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

The epistle of 2 Timothy warns us that we should “rightly divide the word of truth” (2:14), and that we “should not stray concerning the truth” (2:18), that we “may know the truth” and “come to knowledge of the truth” (3:7) and to not turn “away from the truth” (4:4) as many disapproved workers did.

2. Teaching that Jesus is not the only way in which a person might be saved.

The following quotes are from leaders and proponents of the Emerging Church movement:³¹

- “It is possible for someone who does not know Jesus to be saved.”
- “I was relaxing in my parents’ swimming pool with my brother...I asked him how the engineering business was going, and he reciprocated: ‘How’s the ministry world going?’ ‘Okay,’ I said, ‘except that a couple of weeks ago I realized that I don’t know why Jesus had to die.’ Then Peter, without skipping a beat, without even a moment’s hesitation, said, ‘Well, neither did Jesus.’”
- “What I think I can say is, and this is where I get into trouble, I’m not so sure that when this life is over that all possibilities for salvation are over.”

Biblical Teaching

This has to be the most troubling teaching of the Emerging Church movement. If the above statements are true and Jesus is not the only way that a person can be saved, what’s the point of being a Christian?

If all paths lead to God for salvation, as these quotes imply, can a Buddhist remain a Buddhist or a Mormon remain a Mormon and still be saved?

Jesus Himself taught in John 14:6 that He “[is] the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Him].”

Jesus also said in John 10:9 that “[He] is the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture...I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.”

John said in 1:29, “Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

And in John 3:16, He says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

As for the “other possibilities for salvation after this life is over,” all we have to do is look at Hebrews 9:27 which says:

- “And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

Just the fact that the Emerging Church proponents deny and question these *basic truth claims* of Scripture, reflects just how far off theologically and doctrinally some of these men have slipped and “crept in unnoticed” (Jude 4).

3. Validity of other world religions.

The following quotes are from Brian McLaren, an outspoken proponent of the Emerging Church movement.

- “I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus *and* remain within their Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish contexts...”³²

- “The church must present the Christian faith not as one religious army at war with all other religious armies but as one of many religious armies fighting against evil, falsehood, destruction, darkness, and injustice.”³³

The following world religions are diametrically opposed to Christianity on virtually every essential doctrine and yet we’re told they should “remain within their [religious] contexts” and follow Jesus.

Islam teaches monotheism but denies the trinity (Sura 4:171; 5:73), denies that Jesus was the son of God (Sura 6:101; 25:2), and denies that Jesus is God incarnate (Sura 5:116).

Hinduism teaches that there are literally thousands of gods and goddesses and when one sins, it is against oneself and not against God.

Buddhism teaches that there is no god and that reincarnation and karma is allotted to man until he reaches nirvana or “nothingness.”

Biblical Teaching

Christianity is an exclusive religion just by the nature of the first commandment:

- Exodus 20:3 says, “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Having a personal relationship with Christ is a narrow road as Jesus said:

- Matthew 7:13 says, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction...”

So yes, “the gate is narrow” because Jesus said that there is only one way to the Father (John 14:6).

But remember, being narrow does not give us a pass for being unloving. Being narrow means we must be loving (1 Corinthians 13:1-8) since we have the truth, as given by the Bible, and we can guide people off the wide path of destruction and onto the narrow path of Jesus Christ and eternal life.

The Bible tells us that light and darkness cannot live together "because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4) and God "sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." (1 Corinthians 1:22)

Jesus said in John 8:12 that He is "the light of the world" and that whoever follows Him "shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

How can a person come to the saving knowledge of Jesus and remain in their Muslim or Buddhist faith?

Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Again, Jesus said in John 10:7-9, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

Let's face it, only a false teacher would try to sell you a saving Christian faith and tell you that you can "remain within [your] Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts."

Once you "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8), you will realize that any religion, other than a personal relationship with the creator God of the universe through His Son Jesus Christ, just doesn't measure up.

4. Allowing the culture to drive Christianity and the gospel message in order to reach a postmodern generation.

Another hallmark of the postmodernism influence on the Emerging Church movement is that of reaching the lost with the Christian Gospel by adapting it to the present day culture.

In other words, they believe that the world is radically changing and the church must change in order to keep pace with the world.³⁴

- "As we move beyond modernity, we lose our infatuation with analysis, knowledge, information, 'facts,' and belief systems — and those who traffic in them..."
- "Good evangelism is the process of being friendly without discrimination and influencing all of one's friends toward better living, through good deeds and good conversations..."
- "In a post-Christian postmodern world aren't sermons an absolute waste of time?"

Biblical Teaching

First, according to the Bible, the world lives in darkness:

- In Acts 26:15-20 during Paul's conversion, Jesus says that He is sending Paul back into the world to "open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God..."

Second, as Christians, God called us out of darkness and into His light:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:4, 5 says, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness...You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness."

And finally, the church is the light that shines into the world – not the other way around:

- Matthew 5:14-16 says, “You are the light of the world...Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”
- Romans 13:12, 13 says, “...let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”

Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984), Christian theologian & apologist said:

- “The culture is to be constantly judged by the Bible, rather than the Bible being bent to conform to the surrounding culture.”³⁵

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), one of the greatest theologians of our time said:

- “We should not adjust the Bible to the age, but before we have done with it, by God’s grace, we shall adjust the age to the Bible.”³⁶

5. Condoning of the homosexual lifestyle.

The following are quotes from the Emerging Church movement:³⁷

- “Frankly, many of us don’t know what we should think about homosexuality. We’ve heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say ‘it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us.’ That alienates us from both the liberals and conservatives who seem to know exactly what we should think... Perhaps we need a five-year moratorium on making pronouncements...Then in five years, if we have clarity, we'll speak; if not, we'll set another five years for ongoing reflection.”
- “And although the debate has been agonizing, liberals have blazed the trail in seeking to treat homosexuals and transgender people with compassion.”

When asked by *Time* magazine what his position was on homosexuality, Mr. McLaren stated “You know what, the thing that

breaks my heart is that there's no way I can answer it without hurting someone on either side."³⁸

Biblical Teaching

These are leaders of the Emerging Church movement who want to have a "five-year moratorium" to determine if homosexuality is a sin or not!

And as for answering the *Time* magazine question, it will be true that someone's not going to like the answer but how about answering the question Biblically.

As Christians, we cannot condone the homosexual lifestyle because God, in His word, makes it very clear that it's wrong.

- Romans 1:25-27 says of ungodly and unrighteous men, who worship the creature rather than the Creator, "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another. Men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."

Just a look at the strong language Paul uses in Romans 1:18-32 when talking about "God's wrath on unrighteousness" indicates that this lifestyle is not to be condoned and that Christians are not to "approve of those who practice them."

Shepherds of God's people should know better than this. To be so wishy-washy on a subject and lifestyle that is obviously so abhorred by God that in at least six passages of Scripture God condemns the practice.

- See also Genesis 19:1-11; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-10.

This is not to say that we don't love people. We let Jesus' love shine through us but we need to let them know that homosexuality is a sin and that God loves them but does not condone the lifestyle in which they choose to live.

6. Questions the existence of an eternal/literal hell.

The following are quotes from the Emerging Church movement:

- Spencer Burke says in his book, A Heretic's Guide to Eternity, "When I say I'm a universalist, what I really mean is that I don't believe you have to convert to any particular religion to find God" and a couple of pages later he says, "The God I connect with does not assign humans to hell."³⁹
- Brian McLaren says that he is "trying to find an alternative to both traditional Universalism and the narrow, exclusivist understanding of hell..."and then goes on to say that "we should consider the possibility that many, and perhaps even all of Jesus' hell-fire or end-of-the-universe statements refer not to postmortem judgment but to the very historic consequences of rejecting his kingdom message of reconciliation and peacemaking."⁴⁰
- Rob Bell states in Velvet Elvis, "To make the cross of Jesus just about human salvation is to miss that God is interested in the saving of everything. Every star and rock and bird. All things."⁴¹
- An Emergent Manifesto of Hope states: "In summary, we give the following statement of our understanding about the widening scope of salvation: Not only *soul*, whole body! Not only *whole body*, all the faithful community! Not only *all of the faithful community*, all of humanity! Not only *all of humanity*, all of God's creation!"⁴²

Often times, liberal Emergents, will deny a literal hell or they will lean towards universalism or the belief that not only "all people will eventually be saved" but, all creation including inanimate objects will be saved and this is equated to Jesus' salvation sacrifice.

Biblical Teaching

This is a false teaching that all people will be reconciled and eventually saved whether in this life or the next. The Bible states otherwise:

- Matthew 7:13-14 says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."
- 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says, "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"
- Revelation 20:15 says, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

The Biblical doctrine of hell, as well as heaven, can be seen in Matthew 25:46:

- "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

It's important to note here that the punishment is said to be everlasting or eternal [Greek: *aionios*]. It's the same Greek word used to describe the righteous to eternal [*aionios*] life.

And as for Emergent leaders teaching that the earth and "every rock and star" will be saved, let's see what the Bible says:

- 2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12 says "But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men...in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up...because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat"

Universalists even go as far as teaching that the Satan and demons will one day “bow the knee”, repent and be welcomed back into heaven since after all, they are part of “all of God’s creation” as well. Again, the Bible says otherwise:

- Revelation 20:10 says “The devil, who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. *And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*” (emphasis added)

Dr. Norman Geisler says that “Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) taught that any belief based on a mere wish that something be true is an illusion. No loving person would *want* anyone else to suffer in hell forever; however, strong desire to the contrary seems to be a primary impulse in universalist thinking, setting up an implausible and unbiblical system of belief.”⁴³

Conclusion

“We must not take our cues from people who are perfectly happy to compromise the truth wherever possible ‘for harmony’s sake.’ Friendly dialogue may sound pleasant. But neither Christ nor the apostles ever confronted serious, soul-destroying error by building collegial relationships with false teachers.”⁴⁴

What Dr. John MacArthur is saying here is that the Bible teaches us that there will be false teachers, wolves in sheep’s clothing, who will come from outside the church or worse yet, from inside the church. They will bring division, distort the truth and attempt to lead even God’s elect astray.

Just as the apostles and the early church fathers did, we should not shun away from “convincing, rebuking, exhorting” (2 Timothy 4:2) those who distort and twist truth and if need be “turn away” from them and their false, unbiblical teachings altogether.

- Romans 16:17 says, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the *doctrine which you learned*, and avoid them. (emphasis added)

The word *doctrine* [Greek: *didache*] means “knowing what is right.”

- 2 Timothy 3:1-5 says, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves...having a form of godliness but denying the power. And from such people turn away.”

A form of godliness means that they have an “outward shape and appearance... [and] claim to be servants of God and teachers of His Word, but they are really servants of Satan and purveyors of his lies.”⁴⁵

- Jude tells us in verses 3 and 4, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. *For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (emphasis added)

The bottom line is that the church should not absorb or mimic the current secular culture because “friendship with the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4) and that we should not be “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14) but we should be world changers (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8) being ready “in and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2) to do the work of God.

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