

THE CURSE OF CHRISTIAN PRAGMATISM



I would like to briefly address the tendency of "pragmatism" among professing Christians. Unfortunately, this worldly philosophy is so ingrained in today's collective church psyche that few seem to recognize its presence or understand its spiritual ramifications.

How might we define '*pragmatism*'?

According to Oxford's Dictionary, '*pragmatism*' means: "*An approach that evaluates theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application*". In other words, '*the end justifies the means*'. Thus, we can unofficially define *Christian pragmatism* as...

If it's big, popular, appears to garner results, and if its experience is one of uninterrupted peace and bliss, it must be God, if not, the questions begin.

Those who are swayed by this philosophy, to a large degree, are unaware of its influence. Rather, there has been a slow, subtle, and unconscious shift in motives, spiritual priorities, and methodology resulting in a humanistic approach to ministry.

The Christian pragmatist tends to question or doubt when the spiritual winds of opposition, testing, or confrontation begin to blow. If the present end fails to reflect the desired results, the means then come under intense scrutiny ("if the church isn't growing we must be

doing something wrong"). Hence, pragmatism, though often unconscious, drives men to constantly monitor the end (always tend to be moved/worried by the results). And if the end fails to meet their preconceived expectations they naturally tweak and adjust the means. Needless to say, this is a formula for spiritual disaster. We must realize, it's the flesh, not the Spirit, that quivers, quakes, balks, stalls, and presents a thousand "what ifs" when faced with the cost of following Jesus.

Philip. 4:11-12 ...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound

Now, I believe the root cause, the cornerstone if you will, to this unscriptural mind-set is a false concept of Jesus. We know, that the foundation of all liberty is truth, so likewise, at the heart of bondage there is always error. Our notions about Jesus are the spiritual hands that mold and shape our everyday Christianity. The "Christ" the pulpit preaches today will become the Church of tomorrow. Sadly, today's gospel actually conditions men to reject the purest manifestations of the Biblical Jesus.

Ironically, this article was inspired while speaking to several professing Christians while evangelizing on the LSU campus in Baton Rouge. Each had a good spirit, and by all accounts, each seemed sincere. Nevertheless, each was driven by pragmatic reasoning (often unconsciously) as they questioned our evangelistic methods (they were alarmed at the crowd's reaction).

My response?

I simply asked them to consider what reaction Jesus would receive should He visit their campus today. As I reasoned with them, I was alarmed at their hesitancy to agree with the Bible's account of the Lord Jesus Christ. I learned that basically, this is what they believe...

IF JESUS CAME TODAY, HE WOULD BE POPULAR

Somehow, they assume Jesus, for the most part, would be accepted. Of course, they would deny this in theory. Meaning, they know Jesus is hated by someone, but they give no place for the practical application of this truth in their everyday lives.

“He wouldn't be accepted by the masses,” they reason, “but surely He would move these here today.”

“Sure, there is a darkened, extreme pocket of hatred, somewhere across the ocean. Perhaps he would be hated by the Democrats?”

You see, pragmatic men, when faced with opposition, hatred, or disapproval, tend to immediately question the validity of their position. They are often uncomfortable finding themselves in the minority. Why? Because they inwardly and unconsciously doubt Jesus would face such criticisms or disapproval. They refuse to believe Jesus would place Himself in such an extreme position, authoritatively establishing ultimatums, and forcing men to choose. However, the Bible says...

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Instead of interpreting the opposition in a Biblical context: that fallen humanity possesses a universal hatred of God, they tend to attribute the hatred, persecution, and misunderstanding to the means, or our evangelistic methods, apologetics, etc...

“You are causing them to act this way...” they conclude.

They forget that the Bible says of Jesus...

John 1:10-11 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

Now, if we believe Scripture, it stands to reason, that the popular and accepted Jesus is a Biblical impossibility.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

2 Tim. 3:13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

The Bible is clear: Jesus hasn't changed and men are waxing worse. Therefore, it stands to reason, if Jesus came today He would be treated worse than when He came 2000 years ago.

True, just because we're hated doesn't necessarily mean we are right. We can be hated and be wrong. However, Jesus said...

Luke 6:26 Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

John 15:19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

Hence, if we are accepted, applauded, or loved by this world we cannot claim to be followers of Jesus.

I found they also believe...

IF JESUS CAME TODAY, HE WOULD BRING SWEEPING REVIVAL

John 11:25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live...

Indeed, Jesus embodies revival. Hence, if Jesus came today he would certainly bring revival because He is revival. But the important question to ask is this, "would he bring more revival than He did the first time when they nailed 'Revival' to a tree?" You see saints, the confusion lies in how we define revival. Today's church, defines revival as thousands joining the church, the world acknowledging the church, etc. I cannot deny that this has occasionally happened in times past, nor should we limit God. Nevertheless, according to the

Bible, Jesus or revival can come, while no one is converted, but rather hardened.

Many deny they are susceptible to pragmatism even while they are moved by what they feel, hear, see, and sense. "Where's your fruit?" they ask. Meaning: our spiritual eyes are on the end, and we don't like what we see, perhaps we need to change the means.

Moreover, they suppose...

IF JESUS CAME TODAY, HE WOULD RARELY, IF EVER, PREACH

Many today fail to believe that "preaching" is God's ordained method of communicating the gospel.

1 Cor. 1:21 ...it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

On one hand, they attack Biblical preaching as archaic, primitive, outdated and offensive. This is clearly revealed by their disdain for preaching.

"Don't preach to them, you will turn them off", they cry.

I can't count the times I've been admonished, "You will catch more flies with honey than vinegar!" A worldly idiom, I might add.

On the other hand, they may agree with preaching in theory, but rarely practice Biblical evangelism themselves. Amazingly, as they neglect to preach to hardly anyone outside the church, they have all the answers on how it's to be done. Why? Often, because they unconsciously believe Jesus would do otherwise today (preaching/authority stirs up opposition, exposes rebellion). They somehow reason that there are new and improved methods for today's generation. They propose that today's culture needs the gospel communicated to them through rock music, theater, or some other form of art. They foolishly reason that Jesus would have done likewise if such artistic means were available (rock/rap/movies, etc.).

In their unbelief, they fail to realize that the boundaries of human technological advancement have never limited an all-knowing, all-powerful God. The simple truth is: if God wanted Jesus to act, mime, rap, or rock-and-roll He would have. He didn't because God didn't want Him to.

“There is no greater fallacy than to think that you need a gospel for special types of people.” -D. Martyn Lloyd Jones

The Bible says in...

Rev. 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people...

Make no mistake, if Jesus came today, He would do what He did the first time.

Mark 1:38 And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.

So intertwined is the person of Jesus and the practice of preaching that the Bible refers to them as one...

Acts 5:42 ...they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

In fact, the Bible declares that...

Rev. 19:10 ...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Yet amazingly, many professing Christians are actually ashamed of the Bible, and the God of the Bible. They apparently feel obligated to apologize for His ways, His words, and His methods.

Luke 9:26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.

The false church subconsciously supposes that God is a bit outdated, His methods are obsolete, and are unfit for the 21st century. Hence, they believe that they're merely doing their duty to adjust His ideas, methods, and character to appeal to a broader base of interest. Accordingly, modern day evangelistic methods tend to work off these four progressive false premises:

1. Men are seen as victims of sin, instead of wholly responsible for sin.
2. It is then presumed that God is misunderstood by fallen man, rather than hated by fallen man.
3. Therefore, the problem is considered one of communication, rather than reconciliation.
4. Consequently, instead of calling men to repentance, we urge them to give God a chance.

Thus, they reason, the Biblical God is a bit too Victorian for our contemporary tastes. So they strip the high and holy God of the Bible of all His majesty and glory and transformed Him into a heavenly pauper begging for an opportunity to manage the little sinner's life.

Judges 2:17 ...they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so.

They also believe...

IF JESUS CAME TODAY, HE WOULD SURELY PASTOR A BIG CHURCH

Again, so many associate the blessings of God with carnal success: Namely, numbers = God's approval. Today's church has somehow been led to believe that the anointing of the Holy Ghost will always win folks over. The Bible teaches otherwise (in fact, many times it got men killed). Think about it, could there be a more anointed moment

in the history of God's economy with man than Calvary? Not many good feelings and goose-bumps on the cross, amen? Likewise, consider that Jesus really only pastored a handful of fully committed disciples in his earthly ministry. Only 120 fully received his initial ministry. I realize thousands eventually came, but fruit, or the end cannot be judged at a mere glance. I am not denying that it is possible that if Jesus came today, He could pastor a large church. I am opposing the idea that, as a matter of consequence, just because He is Jesus, surely he would pastor a large church.

Another pragmatic belief...

IF JESUS CAME TODAY, HE WOULD BE THE GREAT UNIFIER

They believe He would effectively erase the division among professing Christians. Yet, think about it, one of the first things Jesus did in His earthly ministry was to cleanse the temple. That represents God's method of unity (purification, remove the dross/mixture). Somehow today, they believe Jesus, with a wink and a smile, would win over the rebels by establishing a relationship with them. They assume, apart from any church discipline and a very hands-off ministry, "they will eventually come around." Like Israel of old, who misinterpreted what the Bible said about the coming Messiah. The Jews mistakenly assumed Jesus would wield sweeping political influence, which, in fact, conditioned them to reject Christ. Ironically, Jesus violated the Jew's false perception of the Messiah by being: born in a stable, raised in a carpenter's home, was not educated in the halls of their religious schools, was numbered among the transgressors, etc...

Today, the church expects a Jesus who exhibits incredible religious influence (which again, actually conditions them to receive the anti-christ). My Bible reveals a different Jesus...

Matthew 10:34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

In the gospel of John, we read that Jesus always draws lines and creates spiritual ultimatums.

John 7:43 So there was a division among the people because of him.

In conclusion, in today's professing church, false teachers are presenting a false gospel, which exalts a false Christ which, when followed/embraced, produces false Christianity. This is the spiritual pattern of deception exhibited almost everywhere. What safe guard do we have in the spirit?

Psalm 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

If we will put our trust in Him and truly believe His Word, we will not be deceived.

–B.W.

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