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Contact Information:

Jerry Bannon

Publisher

Wonder Springs

36 Merkel Road

Kettle Falls, Washington 99141

phone: 509.496.5855

blog: www.wondersprings.org email:

jerryb@wondersprings.org

chronicle@wondersprings.org

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The American Church, *striving for failure*

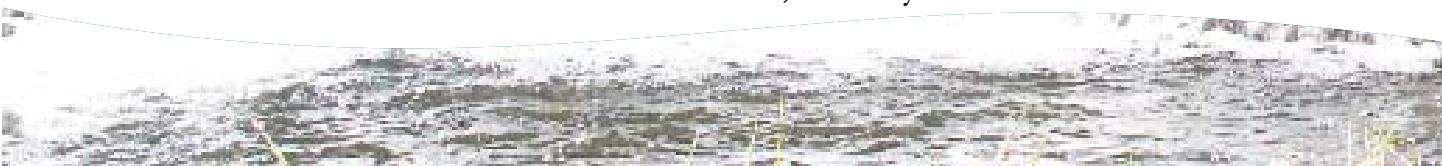
One of the fundamental operational precepts of human activity early in this century is power in sincerity. As long as you are sincere in your beliefs and actions everything is going to work out just fine, not only in the near term, but in the long run as well. This sincerity however, never acknowledges the possibility of being sincerely wrong. It is thought by truly sincere advocates that the truth of being sincerely wrong is not a possibility.

Two books we have reviewed earlier this week seem to provide pretty damning proof that there is something sincerely wrong with the American church. So far everyone is so busy striving with the bailouts, meltdowns, the freezing global warming winter, and a whole host of other aspects of stupendous change, to look seriously at those failures and work toward constructive solutions, that may

not accommodate our sincerity, but still are verified by absolute truths.

The first book was “Quitting Church, Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About It,” by Julia Duin, the Religious Editor for the Washington Times. The second book is “Christless Christianity, The Alternative Gospel of the American Church” written by Michael Horton, Professor at Westminster Seminary California and host of the “White Horse Inn” radio broadcast.

One of my least favorite Bible verses is found in Psalm 46:10; *Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth* NIV. The NKJV has it as “be still.” In the larger context the whole of this Psalm pretty much describes what is now happening as our world evolves into this new world order of unforeseen chaos.



As we discussed last week there is increasing anxiety sincere striving noise about what is happening to all our toys. We are too early into this to have it really affect our present toys, but the future of ever increasing toys, at least for the short term is beginning to look rather bleak. Since the whole world economy functions greatly on toy manufacturing, distribution, and sales this recession/depression could produce some very yet unknown consequences.

It is my hope, and that also perhaps of Duin and Horton, that some of these consequences will create opportunities for the Christian church to again become a beacon of temporal and eternal truth in a very dark world. In Christianity alone, does anyone find the truth that answers life's truly important questions. Those indicatives, at least in Christianity, are the basis of Absolute Truth, no other religion, philosophy, or worldview can provide answers anywhere close to the consistency of these principles.

These principles are not being taught properly in the church today, as fallout, many people are increasingly bailing out. When they go, while not as dramatic as banking and mortgage problems, the long term effects may change the world much more than credits scores to buy commodities that one really does not need, but only desires. After all, striving to get more and more stuff is really the energy that drives much of the world's economy.

Leadership in virtually any arena, relates to accomplishing a mission. In warfare, that objective may be some physical goal such as Baghdad in the Iraq War. Or it may be the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, or providing a foothold for democracy in the Middle East. It took way too long in Iraq to achieve any mission, and at least in the current perspective it was more costly than the reward, but throughout history that has been the result of many wars, few justify the human trauma they invoke.

If the mission is not being achieved, in the reality of war, a game you are not winning, or achieving your objectives in life, you make drastic changes and many times get new leadership to

run the show. Those changes should have been done earlier rather than later in Iraq.

We used the Bible passage from Matthew 16:18 in our book reviews to point the reader to a more relevant truth than what we currently perceive in the state of the church. That passage states the truth of Peter's confession that Jesus was Messiah. The verse in the red words of Jesus states: "*on this rock of Peter's confession I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.*"

Now if we sincerely believe that Jesus is a good life coach, or moral teacher, that signifies really not a whole lot. However if Jesus truly is the one and only Messiah of all humanity and creator of the universe, being sincerely wrong in not accepting that truth will have some drastic eternal consequences. Furthermore, if you are not part of the solution, you may be shuffled off to someplace much more unpleasant than Buffalo or Detroit in winter. This is especially true if you were called to be a Christian leader, and interpreted your calling based solely upon the precepts of what you believed to be sincerely right.

Life presents every human being with four significant questions. The answers to each have both temporal and eternal consequences. To answer I was too busy with my created noise and toys to sincerely look at these questions, is truly an argument from ignorance, as is the excuse that God doesn't give everyone enough evidence of His existence. This sincerely is the pretext of many of the enlightened of the present world. At the point of death that flawed personal sincerity will allow the opportunity for the enlightened to contemplate that personal hell for eternity.

Those four questions are:

Origins: *Where did I come from?*

Morality: *How am I to live?*

Meaning: *What am I to do?*

Destiny: *What will happen when I die?*

To be a workable worldview, which is based upon truth beyond sincerity, the answers must be based upon at least three constructs. The first is a logical consistency within the questions and as the questions relate to each other. Second, there is sufficient empirical evidence to support these

hypotheses, again within the question and in harmony with each other. Finally, these answers must relate to the true reality of life, not just sincere wishful thinking.

So let us begin to look at these questions as viewed in American Christianity, evangelical, mainstream denominations, reformational denominations, and non denominations. Under the concept of the Priesthood of all Believers, all Christians are required to answer these questions consistently. True, there are special burdens and requirements placed upon pastors and teachers, but to sit passively under false teaching is ignorance that denies the unique freedom of all Christians, and that true freedom is not possible to non Christians.

Origins: The logical exposition of the Book of Genesis requires a young earth. This is further verified by natural laws, especially of thermodynamics and information, but all creation while having the appearance of age, that age only verifies the eternal nature of the Creator, not the creation itself. Furthermore, Orthodox Jews believe in a world somewhat younger than even the most Bishop Usher Christian enthusiast.

The typical Christian response tends to ignore the question, hoping that it will go away. When an answer is required the prime retort is that we really don't know the age of the earth for sure, so it might have happened over long periods of time like secular religious evolution teaches. This answer is generally spun in the concept of Theistic Evolution or an even more the indefensible position of a Gap of millions of years between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2.

I have been told that these two Gap Theory dispensations allow for the existence of seven total Biblical Dispensations, giving Dispensational Eschatology a further shroud of sincere legitimacy. Personally however, I see no reason to waste any time to check out the accuracy of those sincere flawed precepts. Neither Theistic Evolution nor the Gap Theory possess any of the three logical, empirical, or experiential constructs to be considered a legitimate Origins theory.

Morality: Christians are supposed to operate in a paradigm of a vertical transcendence of God. This means that God intervened in human existence. The vertical transcendence is the power behind the Christian Gospel, which enables Christians to be still, or cease striving when the world around them is in total chaos. Furthermore, in transcendence not only does God bring saving faith through His grace alone in to the life of the individual, only through the word of God and uniquely mysterious common means of grace does the power to live the truly sanctified Christian life exist.

The United States was and probably will always be a "can do" society. Those early Puritan Pilgrims in New England came to set up a model of the Eternal Jerusalem, if not the actual city itself. Much is made of the Christianity of these and other founding fathers. However if you look at the much discussed separation of church and state, that separation was codified not so much because it was some glorious ideal, it was because the Baptists, didn't want to be forced to become Calvinist, which continued across the whole of religious sects and genres.

It has always been part of the American way of life to superimpose the concept of what I can do for God and what I or you need to do to be saved, upon both the church and the culture. In short the American religion is always been heavy on law, and weak on the understanding of unmerited grace and external justification. Horton's "Christless Christianity" gives good consistent insights into many of the more prominent works and law dominance of our American Christian heritage.

Meaning: Confined strictly to Christian life, meaning is perhaps best described in the first article of the Westminster Confession. That meaning is to know God and enjoy Him forever. To know God means to actively participate in that vertical transcendence now, meditating on that vertical transcendence, in which before the dawn of time God had prepared a way to not only reconcile fallen humanity consistent with His Holy Nature, but also in the fullness of time to restore creation eternally to the state before sin and death became the operational paradigm in this world.

No other worldview offers the same degree of logic, evidence, and reality that is present in historic orthodox Christianity. In historic Christianity

human meaning and purpose is supplied by God through grace in the knowledge of Christ crucified and resurrected, as God calls His elect unto Himself.

In American Christianity meaning is supposed to be accomplished by active evangelism, or more bluntly, obtaining decisions for Christ by whatever means works. Sadly this emphasis upon conversions, at the expense of catechesis and other forms of discipleship, sow the seeds of not mature Christians, but Christians who have no understanding of the depth, wonder, complexity and joy of the faith they claim to possess. The constant stress of sincerely witnessing by living the overcoming Christian life, eventually leads to despondency, fear, and even atheism in extreme cases. The concept of striving is part of all human religion, the ability to be still and cease striving comes only through the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ and by no other means.

Destiny: In Biblical Christianity death has been conquered through the resurrection from the dead by Jesus Christ. In the understanding of saving faith through grace alone, comes the reality that death in the natural sense has lost its sting and the validity of its sentence. Hence, eternity begins through saving faith by the grace of God, not by human will or understanding.

Therefore not only can this life become a training ground for the restored eternity, it can become a joyous extension in this fallen world. In other words, Biblical Christianity allows the vertical transcendence mystery of God to shine through common works of benevolence, bringing gratitude and praise not only to the Christian, but also to the recipient, and become a sense of wonder down into created nature itself.

Since most American Christianity focuses upon horizontal relationship with society and others, it cannot fully comprehend the reality of vertical transcendence, hence this type of Christianity is not only limited to the realm of natural means, any lack of consistency in the means is noticed and reported at hypocrisy or something worse. The biggest problem however, is that it requires the Christian to operate entirely with natural means, experience, and reality just like the rest of the world and its religions.

For American Christianity to experience eternity in the present, all sorts of human inducements are fabricated to bring down a Godly experience from above. Sad is as sad does, because that condescending work of God was completed on the cross two thousand years ago, and in order to experience that reality, the imperative of being still or to cease striving in that reality needs to be present, to experience the true reality of God's grace.

We have looked briefly at the differences between most present and historic forms of American Christianity. Those forms have been somewhat naturally contrasted with the paradigm best described as historic, orthodox, reformational, protestant, Christianity. The Reformation, which took place about 500 years ago, still is the dominant reality of all western cultural institutions. If you look at the total Bible, as well as church history you will see approximately every 500 years some type of unique renewal that can be best described as a vertical transcendent mysterious gift of God's grace to humanity. We are due for a new re something. It looks like the stage is set, live expectantly, in the stillness and reality in which sincerity seems like a human failing, compared to the gift of God's grace.