

0. INTRODUCTION

Following on from my first instalment of observations about current trends and philosophies in Christianity, I have been encouraged to write again on some other subjects. May God direct me as I attempt to discuss more "hot potatoes".

I have selected the following topics:

1. "Convenient" charity (Matthew 7:19-21 and James 5:1-6)

A pious act of giving to charitable causes, so long as doing so causes no personal material disadvantage or sacrifice - giving from surplus. The act gives one a good feeling of "contributing to society".

2. "Climbing the Church Corporate Ladder" (John 10:11-13)

Being pastor of a church is just like any other job these days. And the path to "employment" is also the same as any other job in the world: one goes to study, then climbs the ladder through life. What does the Bible say about pastoral "career paths"?

3. "Emotional Salvation"

At youth rallies, "Christian" concerts and megachurches around the world, altar calls claim to bring hundreds and thousands of new converts to Christianity. Are all these people really going to Heaven? What's the Bible got to say about conversion?

4. "One Truth, Many Angles"

Maybe my presentation doesn't resonate with you, but truth remains constant and a different angle may switch the light bulb inside your head.

Matthew 7:19-21

19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

James 5:1-6

1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten.

3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of the sabaoth.

5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and have been wonton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

6 Ye have condemned *and* killed the just, *and* he doth not resist you.

II Peter 3:1-2

1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

2 That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.

I Corinthians 1:25-29

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in His presence.

1. CONVENIENT CHARITY

This is an expansion of the effects of "affluenza" on Christians living in the First World. Materialism and consumerism are constantly invading us, and their influences affect our behaviour. No one is immune from the allure of overflowing wealth in industrialised economies. Even those on welfare have a much higher standard of living compared to most people in the Third World. Life in the Western World is very comfortable indeed, and it is this illusion of comfort which lulls Christians into a sense of "entitlement". We are born into a society which expects luxury as the norm.

Contrast our modern society with how Jesus Christ lived. The Bible does not mention anywhere that Jesus Christ owned any material possessions during his time on earth. He certainly did not own a house.

It is not a sin to be wealthy. But the Bible mentions "the deceitfulness of riches" as a warning against placing one's trust in wealth rather than God. Rich people may be able to get themselves out of more problems and deeper holes than those with little or no money, but the poverty of the rich is that they deprive God of opportunities to show His providence, mercy and love to them. Wealthy people often fall into the trap of regarding God as a "safety-net". Those with little or no material possessions rely on God as their first help. Which one do you think will receive the greater blessing?

I bring this topic up because of some past experiences with wealthy Christians. In the eyes of most, I would probably be considered to have lived on the so-called "poverty line" for most of my life; notwithstanding that the "poverty line" in Western economies would fund a high standard of living in most other countries. Nevertheless, the basic cost of survival in an economy like Australia is such that \$15,000 per year is barely enough. In recent years there has been much discussion in Australia about the affordability of housing, and that many welfare recipients and other people on low-paying jobs simply cannot afford to find a place to live. To illustrate this, consider that the maximum unemployment benefit in Australia today is \$13,500p.a. A subsidy of up to \$3,338.40p.a. may be available to those paying private rent. The problem is that there are very few private rental properties priced under \$16,000p.a. And that leaves no consideration for a person's other needs, such as food and transport, which could easily devour \$5,000p.a. between them.

I do not write this specifically to draw attention to myself, nor to offer explanations for my situation or possible remedies for it. I am sure that there are many other people in a similar situation to mine. Nevertheless, some

words are necessary in order to prepare the ground for the statements to follow.

Some who know me may be surprised to learn that I am not afraid to work, nor am I averse to productive labour. Indeed, I have been very productive throughout most of my life, although most of it has not brought me financial reward to date. I ask, though, is that the only goal of productive labour? What will put me at odds with many people is my aversion to working **for somebody else**. Such arrangements usually create a "master and slave" relationship, and although those terms are never used today, that's essentially what it is. Working hours and payment for those hours are dictated to you by an outside entity over which you have no control. And yet, most people happily submit to this "bondage", and consider it normal. I definitely do not think it is normal.

I'm on the rant now, so let's keep it going. The stereotypical image of unemployed people is the "dole-bludger", the person who sits at home all day playing computer games, surfing the internet and hanging around in "gangs" with other unemployed people. While I'm sure there are some who may fit this description, I definitely do not. There are many similarities, in that I spend a lot of time using my computer, but most of this is spent writing documents such as this, or preparing and compiling spreadsheets and other data for the many projects I have on the go at any one time. Ditto for my internet usage, involving research to a deep level on many different subjects. I rarely use social media, or play games on my computer, but should I do so, this does not make me a "dole-bludger".

I do not receive any financial benefit for this work at the moment. Perhaps in the future some of it may have potential for earnings of some kind.

End of rant. Time to get off this tangent and back on to the main point.

My experiences with Christians so far can be summed up with the phrase "convenient charity". People are very happy to give out of their surplus, so long as such giving does not affect their own quality of life. Sacrificial giving, or lowering of one's quality of life in order to raise that of another is foreign to most Westerners, and, sadly, also most Christians.

Let us now consider the following scenario, not directed at anyone in particular. Although the situation presented will be hypothetical, I am sure these circumstances exist.

You own a home, and there is no encumbrance on it; that is, no mortgage or any other money owing. You happen to have a self-contained spare room in this house which you are not using. How much would you charge to live in that room?

- Would you charge the full market price because that's what you are "entitled" to by the economy we live in?
- Would you charge a lower amount of rent, because you want to feel "charitable"?
- Would you charge no rent at all, but ask the tenant to pay expenses at cost?
- Would you charge nothing at all, not even for expenses, in exchange for assistance with regular maintenance and cleaning of the property?
- Would your answer be dependent on the tenant's personal income?

My experiences with most Christians is that they expect the first option, that is, the full amount of their "entitlement" afforded to them by the market. Most of the rest go for the second option. Almost nobody would ever consider the third or fourth options, despite neither of these being detrimental to personal wealth, while being the most beneficial to me.

Where does the Bible stand on this? I appeal to the passages quoted above in Matthew 7, I Corinthians 6 and James 5. These Scriptures warn against "chasing the dollar", and being prepared to "suffer fraud". This latter point is further backed up by none other than Jesus Christ Himself, when He said, in Luke 6:30:

"Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again.

I also call to mind the practise of the early church, as recorded in Acts 2:44-45:

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

There was no "rich" or "poor" in the early church; all were equal, and those who had freely gave to those who had not. I submit that this attitude is diametrically opposite to that prevalent in most Christians today.

I do not make this point in order to get "a free ride" for myself. I believe in paying a reasonable amount for things, but such a "reasonable amount" must be relative to a person's available resources. The current climate in Australia is such that what I consider a "reasonable amount" in my circumstances is far short of the market price of even the most basic accommodation. I refuse to pay \$300 a week just to sleep in somebody else's building. I'd rather sleep in my car, in a soft, warm sleeping bag, for free.

Epilogue: Some may argue that they have "earned a right" to enjoy the full rewards of the market because of a lifetime of service and productive work. My question to these people is: who are you working for - yourself or God? By the way, God doesn't care about your "rights", because, in His eyes, you are wrong!

2. CLIMBING THE CHURCH CORPORATE LADDER

Step 1: Attend Bible College

Pastoring a church in the Western World is a lucrative career path. You get a high salary with generous tax breaks, not to mention the personal pleasure of "leading" a large group of people. And you don't even have to believe (or read) the Bible. You only have to know what it says. Hiring pastors are infecting churches worldwide with the "doctrines of devils" taught at the colleges they study at. Lazy sheep in the pews lap up this "vomit", never bothering to read the Scriptures for themselves to see what God has to say about it.

Well, I hope I got your attention after that scathing introduction! I believe the Bible is just as hard on this subject, so let's get in to it and see what we find.

There is absolutely nowhere in Scripture that one can find evidence of prophets or apostles going to a place of education before beginning their ministry. Let's take a look at how some of these men gained their knowledge:

- Adam was the first man created by God. He was obviously intelligent, for he gave names to all the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). Where did Adam get his knowledge from? There were no other humans on the earth. Adam's intelligence must have come from God.
- Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, commonly called the Law. His earthly learning came through his Egyptian childhood in the house of Pharaoh. No doubt Moses was a very learned scholar by the time God called him, but Pharaoh would not have taught anything about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This knowledge would have been passed on to Moses through oral histories of the Hebrew people. But God also revealed Himself directly to Moses at Mt. Sinai, when the Ten Commandments were written. And Peter bears witness to Moses' source for writing the Pentateuch: the Holy Spirit prompted Moses (I Peter 1:21). I believe the Holy Spirit prompted Moses, not in a general, abstract sense, but in a minute, specific way, right down to the exact words Moses wrote. No mention of a school or college here.
- The 12 apostles are probably the greatest witness against Bible colleges, for they are described in Acts 3:13 as "unlearned men". None of the apostles studied Greek philosophy, nor did they study the teachings of the religious leaders of their day. But once Jesus called them, He taught them everything they needed to know.

Since Jesus is the Son of God, His teaching is not that of a man, but of God. So again, we see that God gave the knowledge directly.

- Paul, whose letters account for half the books in the New Testament, had a lot of worldly knowledge (he was a lawyer). After Jesus apprehended him on the road to Damascus, Paul wrote according to the Holy Spirit's inspiration.
- Acts also mentions the Berean church, whose members "searched the Scriptures daily" (Acts 12:11). The Bereans didn't ask their scholars for confirmation; they went directly to God's Word instead to find out for themselves.

OK, so we've established that Bible college is not necessary for a fruitful ministry. Let's look at the other side of the coin now. Is there anything wrong with Bible College?

To answer this question, we must first heed the warnings given in Scripture. Here are some:

- I John 4:1 - Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.
- II Peter 2:1-2 - But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.
- II Timothy 3:7 - Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- I Corinthians 2:5 - That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

I will comment a little on these. The I John reference about "trying spirits" is not in opposition to the Scripture which says, "do not tempt God". In fact, God welcomes you to test Him, because His Word is always true, and the true Spirit of God will always testify to the Word. Other spirits will not agree with the Scripture.

II Peter 2 is a major text on this issue. There are at least three important points to note in this passage

- The false teachers came in **privily** (Jude uses the phrase "crept in unawares"). They did not openly announce their doctrines, for to do so would have exposed the difference immediately. Instead, they teach it slowly, a little at a time, and it's much less noticeable

that way. And no wonder, for these "doctrines of devils" (I Timothy 4:1) are authored by Satan, whose trademark is subtlety (Genesis 3:1).

- Verse 2 goes on to say that "**many** shall follow their pernicious ways", indicating the popularity of the message. Compare this with the broad way and narrow way Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7.
- The crunch comes at the end of verse 2, "the way of truth shall be **evil spoken** of." The "way of truth" is Jesus, for He said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6). The very first verse of John tells us that the "Word was God". Therefore, we have this collaboration that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Word, and that the Word is the "way of truth". In other words, the "way of truth" is the Word of God. How is the Word of God evil spoken of? By the constant, relentless hatred of most Bible college professors towards the King James Bible. Very, very few colleges endorse usage of the KJV for their courses, in fact, most despise it and actively discourage their students from using it. They tell their students that the KJV contains "errors", that King James was a homosexual, that the translators added the italic words which were not in the original text, and many other fables, all of which have been disproven so many times, it's a shame to have to mention them again.

I Corinthians 2:5 admonishes us not to trust the words of men. You read my words and you believe them, and agree with them. Good for you. Why do you agree? Is it merely because I presented my case in a way that appeals to your human logical reasoning? Don't be lazy! Prove me right or wrong by the Scripture! Everything that any man says should be supported by a minimum of two Scriptures for credibility. To authenticate that statement, I offer up Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 18:16 and II Corinthians 13:1

We have seen that the Bible does not say anything about Bible college being a prerequisite for ministry. But neither does it say anything specifically against further learning. Indeed, Paul admonished Timothy to "study to shew thyself approved unto God" (II Timothy 2:15). So the concept of formal Bible training is not prohibited by Scripture. The problem is that most Bible colleges are not teaching pure Scripture alone. They add in the "wisdom of men", placing it on an equal, or sometimes, higher level than the Bible itself. Commentators, textual critics and theologians all add their worldviews to the curriculum, denying God's promise to keep His Word pure and preserved forever. The students of these colleges, who know no better, do not bother to verify the truth of what they are taught, and in any case, they are forced to regurgitate this rubbish and serve it up in their assessment in order to pass

their course. They then go out into the churches promoting these lies and diluting the pure Word of God with their own, scholarly observations.

We live in an age of intellectualism, where human logical reasoning and scholarly research trumps the wisdom of the past. The Bible is not immune to this flood of scholarly upheaval. The latest archaeological "discoveries" are revered and pored over by scholars from all over the world to see what "new" information we could learn from them. The assumption, of course, is that we still don't have all the pieces of the Bible jigsaw puzzle (indeed, according to this view, we never will), but now, here at last is one more missing piece, so we can get closer to what the "original manuscripts" really said. There's no faith at all in God's promise to preserve His Word forever.

Many claim that the only "pure" copy of the Scriptures was contained on the "original manuscripts", that is, the original papyrus or parchment scrolls written by Moses, Isaiah, Paul, etc. God refutes this doctrine in Jeremiah 37. Here, God tells Jeremiah to take a new scroll and write what He tells him. Jeremiah dictates the words of God to his scribe, Baruch, who writes the scroll. The scroll is read to the king, who cuts it up and burns it in the fire. The original manuscript is destroyed. "Oh no!", cry the modern scholars "we've lost the only copy of God's Word! Now how do we know what He said?!" God told Jeremiah to take another new scroll and make a copy of the first scroll, and Jeremiah records that this second scroll added "many like words". Therefore, God's Word wasn't lost, it just had to be copied again. And that's exactly how God has preserved His Word through the centuries. The Jews were extremely meticulous about accuracy when copying the Scriptures. We can be sure that absolutely no errors have been introduced to the copies of manuscript we have today. Testimony of this is the fact that more than 99% of the manuscripts we have (all in the Byzantine family) agree with each other more than 99% of the time. This large "cloud of witnesses" declares loud and clear the EXACT text of the Scripture.

It is the scholars, using their faulty human logic, who overlook this obvious witness and gravitate to the Alexandrian family of unreliable witnesses, branding them as the "oldest and best" manuscripts. Consequently, this stand is taught as fact in Bible colleges, and most students never see through it, being not inclined to do their own research. It does not take much digging to uncover the truth; it's just that people are lazy and can't be bothered.

Step 2. Get on the church gravy train

All aboard for 50% tax-free income!

Pastors in most denominational churches are considered "employees" of that church, and, as such, are paid a salary or wage. (There are exceptions to this, which is why I said "most" and not "all". Independent Baptist churches, for example, do not have employees.)

The amount of that remuneration is usually dictated by the governing board of the denomination, irrespective of the financial health of any particular church.

Under arrangements with the Australian Taxation Office, most churches are exempt from paying taxes, as they are "religious organisations". These same tax concessions provide for up to 50% of a pastor's remuneration to be exempt from income tax as well.

There are two major problems with this model:

1. It is not in line with the Scriptural procedure for supporting the pastor.
2. It breeds "hireling" pastors, whose allegiance is to their employer and not to God.

What is God's way for providing the needs of His chosen leaders?

We can look at the Old Testament Levites, the priestly tribe of Israel, to see how God provided for them. The Levites did not own any land, nor did they own any sheep. They had no income of their own, and so no way of providing for themselves. But, as God's chosen tribe to administer priestly duties for the nation of Israel, they were given cities to live in, and the temple sacrifices for food. And God demonstrated His blessing here, for the Temple sacrifices were the best animals in Israel. The Levites dined out on the best meat in the land, as a reward for their faithfulness in carrying out their duties. They had to trust God for all their needs, having nothing of their own. God not only met their needs, He provided abundantly.

We turn to the New Testament, and learn from the book of Acts that the early church commenced a collection to support the work of Paul and the other apostles.

Acts 2:44 mentions that the believers "had all things common".

Step 3. Climb the church ladder

This step is not possible in all churches, because their denominational structure may limit the extent of the pastor's personal remuneration.

Churches are increasingly being run as businesses, with the primary aim to generate as much money as possible for those in leadership. This is rarely, if ever, articulated by those who benefit most from it, but nevertheless,

the evidence is obvious. The procedure for "growth" is usually a building expansion. The leaders know that increased finances only comes from increased numbers people. The old adage "bums on seats", used in the corporate world, is now in vogue in the church. How many people can we get into our services every Sunday?

I bring Saddleback Church in California into focus as a case in point here. The beginning of this church was not a prayer meeting, asking God to bless the planting of a new church. Rather, Rick Warren canvassed the neighbourhood, asking people what they wanted in a church service. "What would we have to do to get you in the door?" Saddleback constructed a service tailor-made for what they were told to do. Nobody asked God what He wanted. This was all about pleasing the community. And of course, from a business perspective, it was a raging success. The cash registers at Saddleback haven't stopped ringing since. Rick Warren became a household name overnight. And then he wrote the "40 Days of Purpose" book, telling others how to run their churches like businesses as he did and cash in. Nevermind that he used 15 different versions of the Bible in his book (God is not the author of confusion).

Saddleback is not a model of how to plant and build a church, in fact, it's the antithesis of what Scripture teaches. "...Be not conformed to this world..." (Romans 12:2)

Through church expansion, pastors ride the crest of the wave and draw large salaries as a "reward" for their "work".

Some denominations are structured such that the above scenario cannot develop, because they set the pastor's income at a fixed amount. This does not prevent such churches adding more "employees" to milk the pot.

All of the above is not intended to imply that all pastors are raking in large sums of money for very little effort. Far from it - there are many pastors for whom the above does not apply. However, there are many pastors who are lazy, who download sermons from the internet rather than "studying to shew themselves approved" (II Tim 2:15), who allow the "deceitfulness of riches" to cloud their thinking. Such pastors will seldom, if ever, preach on "hard" topics such as sin, hell or dangerous cultural norms/trends, because to do so may offend certain members of their congregation, which in turn could affect their bottom line. So they'll turn a blind eye to the spots on the sheep because they fear men rather than God.

3. EMOTIONAL SALVATION

The conditions under which salvation is granted to a person is clearly spelt out in the Scripture. The process requires faith, which produces belief, and then repentance. Romans 10:17 gives the source of this faith as hearing the word of God. Therefore, it is the Bible itself which ultimately leads to salvation. This is why it is so imperative to ensure that the Bible is indeed the pure Word of God, not corrupted with the interjections and omissions of the heretics of history.

True salvation results in repentance. What does this mean? Repent is used in the Scripture in the sense of a “change of heart”. Genesis records that God repented of having made man on the earth, on account of the wickedness in Noah’s day. When God made man on Day 6, He said it was very good. Now, He was repentant of His creation. Did God make a mistake? No, once again, it was man who corrupted God’s perfect creation. The only solution to man’s corruption was for God to wipe out mankind and start over. We see in Genesis 8 that eight people preserved by God left the Ark to repopulate the earth (8 is the number for new beginnings; the eighth day of the week is the first day of a new week).

In the meaning of salvation, repent means to turn away from one’s previous life. This is not just an emotional feeling, as may be experienced in a crowded concert hall or megachurch, where peer pressure and public perception have strong influence over many people’s actions. I’m not saying that nobody gets truly saved on such occasions. But the authenticity of such “mass conversions” must be questioned.

The parable of the sower comes to mind here. The preaching of the Word is equated to seeds being spread out far and wide. Many people hear the words of the preacher, and they interpret them all in different ways. The Holy Spirit will be ministering to some of these people in different ways also, as it is His job to effect salvation. Not that He is forceful about it; for God always respects a person’s free will to choose, but the gentle conscious nudging of the Spirit produces a tension between the conscience and the heart which must be resolved.

The result of a “mass conversion” following an altar call at a megachurch or “Christian” concert is not a large number of new Christians, but a large number of emotionally-sensitive people purportedly looking for a “relationship with Christ”. The marketing of salvation from the podia of these meetings is often directly in contrast with Scripture. The audience is goaded with numerous emotional pleas from the front, almost begging for a response.

I hold that God does not need to beg people to repent. He’s waiting for you to come to Him when you are ready, not as a hyped-up solution to all your problems, but as a loving Father Who is longing for you to come home.

I’m getting off track here (as usual). The seed is sown, and the recipients of this seed have many varied responses to it. Satan comes and attacks the Word anytime it is preached (unless, of course, it’s from one of his own perverted versions, in which case he usually leaves it alone, because the corrupted word will produce corrupted fruit and cause enough confusion in the new Christian’s life anyway), diluting it, challenging it (his oldest trick – Genesis 3, “Yea, hath God said?”) and even contradicting it with the thoughts he plants in their minds.

As in the parable, other seeds find ground in which a root can take hold, but it is never fed properly, so it quickly fades. This reflects the multitude of “quick-fix” converts, who only went to the front on an emotional whim, and discovered they had bitten off more than they could chew, or those who weren’t really serious, they just wanted to follow the crowd, or support their mates.

Yet other seed nestles in amongst good soil, and these are the true converts, who begin to study the Bible for themselves, and find a solid Bible-believing church. These are the ones who grow and produce fruit.

It’s a contentious allegation, but I truly believe that not every person who responds to an altar call will make it to Heaven. Jesus said that “not everyone who calls Me ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter into the kingdom” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Salvation is not a response to an emotional guilt-trip, nor a case of following the masses to “fit in with your mates”. It is a deeply personal decision which only comes after the Holy Spirit has convicted you of your sinfulness and your need to be saved. After this conviction, the Bible tells you how to take action: “if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10.9)

4. ONE TRUTH, MANY ANGLES

Truth is always truth, but sometimes it needs to be presented from a different angle before some people will accept it and see it for what it really is. Therefore, if I tell you something, you may not accept it because of the angle I presented it to you. But later, someone else may present a different angle of the SAME truth which connects with you and you begin to understand.

Therefore, I appeal to you not to dismiss this, but conduct your own investigations. Start with your King James Bible, and ask God to honour His promise to “guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).