

# ***A Mighty Fortress***

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**IS OUR GOD**

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Orthodox in Confession, Charismatic in Expression



## **The Marginalization of Christianity**

By Joe Graber

Something struck me several weeks ago as a dangerous and tragic trend in modern Christendom. I am talking about the pervasive trend of progressively marginalizing the Faith. There were two particular events that occurred within minutes of each other which got me thinking about how Christianity is being marginalized. First, I was driving up to a stoplight and I saw a sign which asked the drivers to pray for unity of the church, their pastor, and one other thing which I have forgotten as they are stopped at the traffic light. I surprise myself sometimes when I'm surprised at theological infantilism like this. I thought about what an incredible tool for dominion. During those gap times when we have nothing else to do and nothing to think about, perhaps we could mouth a few words to God... Oops the light changed. As I was thinking about whether this was the type of dominion tool that a church being built by Christ and which the gates of hell will not prevail against would advocate, I came upon event number two.

I passed a church on my way to Grand Ledge and the sign out front nearly did me in. The sign read "free ticket to heaven....details inside!" I was shocked! Is this really the gospel message...free ticket to heaven? I found myself wondering if a gospel which doesn't totally reorient lives is any gospel at all. Is this what the church's purpose on this earth has come to... free ticket to heaven... stop by and pick up yours on the way the football game. Is Christianity really that meaningless?

### **USA: Statistically a Christian Nation**

We live in a time when more people than ever in history call themselves Christians. 70 percent of Americans belong to a church of synagogue. 90 percent believe in heaven. 95 percent believe in Jehovah God. Incredibly, even 52 percent of those claiming to be non-Christian believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! Giving to religious institutions is at an all time high. The sales of religious (particularly Christian) books makes up about a half of all new books published each year, and the Christian book industry is growing by about 15 percent per year. As Richard John Neuhaus put it, "Statistically at least, America is as much a Christian nation as it ever was, and perhaps more so." \*

So then, we step back and look around us to see the impact of Christianity on society and our culture. We have pornography running amok. We have a civil government which has both instituted and encouraged gambling. We have a divorce rate in society of approximately 50 percent, and the divorce rate within the Church of Jesus Christ is actually higher (about 52 percent). We have an ever increasing violent youth. We have the largest prison population in our history, and one of the highest per capita incarceration rates. In 1994 we passed the 1,000,000-man mark... over 1,000,000 people in prison.

We legally kill 1.5 million unborn children a year in abortion, and continue to contribute to a massive problem. Peter Drucker recently published an article in the Futurist magazine outlining the underpopulation problem in the world. Contrary to the myth of overpopulation, the facts clearly show that it is underpopulation that will destroy us. The Economist magazine recently published an article detailing how indicators point to a worsening underpopulation problem. How is this legalized killing possible in America? A 1995 CBS News poll told the horrid tale. In this poll, 46 percent of the respondents said that they believed that abortion is murder. However, half of those who said abortion is murder said that it can still be justified.

I received a letter a while back from a man who insisted that capital punishment should be staunchly opposed by the church. He had no scriptural basis, but rather showed me a list of religious organizations which supported his position. Amazingly, these same people believe that the unborn have no right to life whatsoever. Protect the killers, and kill the innocent...the mantra of the modern liberal religious establishment.

### A Defective Gospel

So, Christianity is marginalized in society as the church shirks it's responsibility to be the redemptive institution in society. The church preaches a Gospel that

speaks of a savior which fills the void in our lives, who fills us with joy unspeakable, who gives us a peace. The church preaches a Gospel which has people come as they are and stay as they are for year after year after year. The Gospel is now preached to get a number of conversions as if signing your name on a card, raising your hand as people pray, or coming forward to confess Christ makes one a Christian. This is a defective Gospel.

The Gospel that we preach must be that we stand condemned by God's law word. We, every one of us, have violated God's law word and deserve damnation for such an affront to our holy and righteous God. Our God has graciously sent his son to fulfill the penalty and accept the guilt for our sin upon himself.

Christ didn't come simply to save people from hell. Christ came to save people from hell **and** to reorder their lives. Christ's claims of dominion and sovereignty are universal. All answer before the almighty. The church has a responsibility to preach a Gospel which shows men and women that they are sinners who are totally hopeless and helpless without Christ. Christ's elect are those who throw themselves upon him in

total despair knowing that without Him we are nothing. As the scripture says, "*Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we do all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*" (Isaiah 64:6).

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We understand then that we don't belong to ourselves to do with as we see fit. We are not the controllers of our own destiny. As the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, "Ye are bought with a price." What a high price indeed. Jesus Christ bore the guilt and punishment for our casual flaunting of God. Paul says in this same passage that since we have been bought with a price that Christ owns us as a servant. We are servants of Jesus Christ. We have a duty to obey Him and to serve him in every area of our lives.

In contrast to this what do we have today? We have a society in which it is fashionable to call yourself a Christian and to give a slight nod to Christianity occasionally, but remember we've got education, welfare, taxation, healthcare, national defense ...etc.. we have these all figured out. And, the Bible has no place here. Not only is the state not subject to the church today (correctly so)... but the state claims that it is not subject to God Himself. We have a society which prints "In God we trust" then proceeds to worship at the alter of city hall, the state capital and Washington D.C.

What do we have today? We have a church that claims that faith is a powerful force...especially when mixed with federal funding (as one news magazine article recent claimed). We have churches that give unto Caesar that which is God's and unto God that which is left over. Our churches advocate for all kinds of government coerced theft for programs which should not exist...from welfare programs which should be family and church oriented to public schools which teach our kids to hate Jehovah God. And that is what they are teaching our kids! The church has been less and less of a driving force in our communities. The new synagogue as the NEA calls our public schools has taken the role. We have churches that scoff at the idea that Christians could start hospitals, schools and universities. But Christians were the ones who started all these.

What do we have today? We have Christians who mouth their allegiance to Christ even as they tread on His wonderful name in their daily lives. Christians who perform the shoddiest work. Christians who commit adultery with impunity... even being left in pulpits or leadership positions. Christians who don't keep the laws of the land. Christians who speak in sexual innuendos constantly. Christians who are so perverse that even the heathen are taken aback. Christians who don't raise their children in the way that they should go... rather they don't raise them at all... and then are surprised when their children's lives are a wreck. Christians who dump their parents at a retirement home. Christians who can't afford to send their kids to a Christian school or homeschool but who can afford a new SUV. Christians who are in debt that seems endless. The list goes on and on and on.

### **The Roots of the Problem**

How can this happen? It's easy to see the effects of the marginalization, but what is the root of the problem? I contend that the root is two fold. First, the root is basic humanism, skepticism, and outright atheism which has invaded the church. Second the root is the destruction of Christian dogma which has occurred over the last 150 to 200 years. Let us address these two issues.

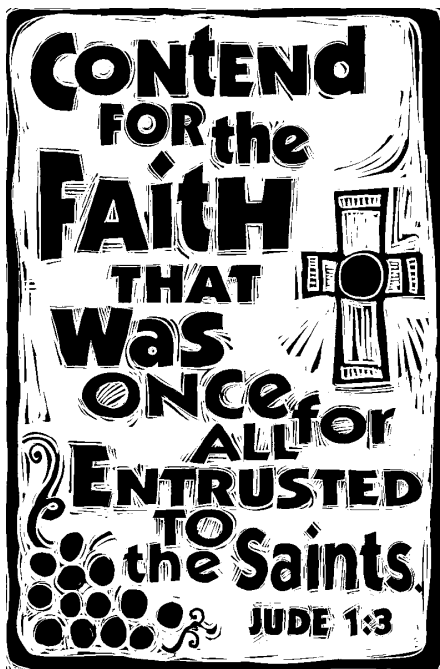
Romans 1:17 says that the just or the righteous shall live by faith. We are saved by the faith which God gifts unilaterally to us and by which we believe on Him. We are saved by God's grace through faith. It is only through this faith gifted by God that we live in his sight. God justifies us and makes us righteous in His sight in order for us to be loved by God. God's standard is nothing short of perfection and He hates both the unrighteousness and the worker of unrighteousness (Psalm 5:5). So it is by the gifted faith from God that we are able to stand in His presence and we are redeemed from the curse of damnation and hell. This verse has much broader implications though. Yes, it is speaking about justification of the sinner, but it has much to say about how we view the world after that conversion.

At conversion we have faith in God. We believe in God. We don't simply believe that God exists. The demons believe that. This faith is a life changing, life reorienting faith. We recognize God as the source of all things. We recognize Jehovah God as the upholder of all things. We view every single event, every institution, every thing, every person through the eyes shaded by the scripture. If we really have faith that Jehovah God exists, that He has created all things, that He upholds all things, that He speaks to us through His inerrant, inspired Word, then we will live lives which are guided by His Word in every area.

### Atheist Christians?

I run into Christians all the time who proceed to tell me which parts of the scriptures are not true or that they don't believe to be true. Everything from the creation to the flood of Noah, to Jonah, to Job, to the Red Sea crossing, to the walking on the Sea of Galilee to the resurrection have been touted to me by Christians as not true. I have to wonder whether this type of faith is faith at all. When a person wants to claim the redemptive work of Christ without the rest of the story, what is the point?

A lot of Christians I know believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, but they don't believe that God created the world as the scriptures relate. So, since the creation account is given by God as fact, these people are looking to their Savior for salvation whilst calling Him a liar. Charles Hodge a Princeton theologian wrote a book entitled What is Darwinism in which he said Darwinism is nothing more or less than flat-out atheism. Darwinism holds three tenants: evolution, natural selection, and an absence of design.



This rejection of major tenants of scripture is nothing other than skepticism. It is us operating from a humanistic approach. We say that we are the purveyors of truth and Jehovah God will have to convince our puny little minds of truth before it can be. We stand as judge of all. We decide what in scripture is really for us and what is just a story. We may use all kinds of tools to this end, but in the end they are all skepticism rooted in atheism and humanism. We don't really believe in the God that we claim to believe in.

We might say that this passage was for that time. Or we might say that this portion of scripture is a metaphor. Or we might say that we live in a new dispensation. We might say that those writers of scripture didn't have the revelation that we now have. I know of one nationally known teacher, whose name you would all recognize, who said the writer of Job didn't have the revelation of Satan that we now have. You see we have all kinds of ways of allowing our skepticism in a God who is really God show forth. The question is: Are we living by faith or by humanism?

### Errant Doctrine

The second way in which marginalization creeps into the society, the church and Christian lives is by way of mutated and incorrect doctrine. Augustine wrote in his A Treatise On Faith And The Creed that Romans 1:17 was sort of charged with meaning. He said that this living by faith mandated that we strive to maintain pure and true doctrine:

*"And it must be our aim, by pious and careful watchfulness, to provide against the possibility of the said faith sustaining any injury in us on any side, through the fraudulent artifices of the heretics."*

Let me give you an example of what I mean. The any-second-now dispensational pre-millennial view of the rapture has done more to harm the church in that last 50 years than probably any other doctrinal error. Why invest in building Christian schools? Why build Christian colleges? Why build Christian hospitals? Christ will be here any second. This kind of doctrine leads to eunuch church leaders who go about asking forgiveness for wacky things and seeking to live at peace with all reprobates. Did you hear the other day that a group of Christians finally apologized for the crusades? The response from the middle east was, "Better late than never".

We go around mending fences with every horrifically sinful group that exalts itself against God because what's the difference? Jesus will be here any second. Might as well just relax. I know personally of Christians who have pulled their kids out of good private Christian school and sent them back to public schools. Their justification? There is no doubt that Christ will return within the next 5 years, so why not live a little more comfortably in the mean time. I am not making this up.

Doctrine is important! Paul thought doctrine was important. Compare the following scriptures: Galatians 1:6-9 and Philippians 1:15-18. These passages set a great contrast. In the Galatians text Paul is talking about a group of men who are preaching an errant gospel. It is a small, but devious error in the Gospel. Paul preached that the order of salvation was: believe, justified, then good works. These men preached: believe, good works, then justified. He called these men accursed for preaching a false and errant gospel.

In the Philippians text Paul is talking about a group of men who are preaching the true gospel, but they are doing it specifically to harm Paul and to exalt themselves. What does Paul say? "Whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice."

Christians and the church are in retreat across this country. Not all of them, just those who are not living by faith. Some of us have lost the truth behind Hebrews 11:1. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. We didn't see creation, but we know the Biblical account is true. Why? Is God a man that He should lie?

### **Our God Reigns!**

When we begin to apply God's word to our lives with a child like faithfulness, the tide of marginalism will turn. We will have boldness because we know that God is in control and works all things according to the counsel of His will. We will strive to put away sin because we believe the truly evil nature of sin described in scripture. We will rebuild Christian institutions. Christians will reorder their lives, their families, and the church, and Jehovah will reorder society.

My friends, your Christianity must be about more than salvation. It isn't fire insurance, as Andrew Sandlin is fond of saying. It must reorder our lives. It must be actively applied to every area. Christ is even now reigning here on this earth. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Let us act like it!

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\* Note: The information in this entire paragraph and other statistics within the article came from [The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity](#) by Thomas C. Reeves. This book was republished as a paperback as [The Empty Church: Does Organized Religion Matter Anymore?](#).

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## ***RECOMMENDED READING***

### **In The Face of God:**

**The Dangers & Delights of Spiritual Intimacy**

**By: Michael Horton**

***"But in every era in which the light of the gospel has been obscured and Christians have turned from the words of Scripture to feelings or images, superstition has crept in until eventually one begins hearing more about Satan than God, more about demonic forces than Christ and the gospel, more about spiritual warfare by using our own incantations (white magic, you could call it) in order to name and claim our way to happiness. As Georgia Harkness observed, 'There is a difference between belief in God, which is religion, and using God, which is magic.' Harkness is right; by that definition, many evangelical Christians today are practicing their own brand of witchcraft."*** Page 2 and 3