

Christianity in Crisis

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[0 : 00] I'm talking about a topic that's contemporary, called pragmatism.

! It means whatever it takes, whatever it takes. That's the philosophy of ministry in many places around the world today. Last week I attended a church service, an opening of a brand new building. I was invited in a civic role. A brand new building in the locality of a church that started just down the road from here, in this very suburb. A church that started on good foundations, had a good solid foundation.

They showed the history of where this church came from. They had a multimedia presentation that showed the history of the church and some historic shots. And it started with much outreach and faithful people at its beginning.

But what I saw that day dismayed me and troubled me when I saw what they had become. What they had become. The auditorium was blackened. Centre stage were the drums, along with the rock band with electric guitars, playing hard and loud at times.

[1 : 16] Playing along to the flashing brightly coloured lights. Looking more like a disco club than a house of God. I was dismayed at that, brothers and sisters.

The main entertainer who sang had an earring and the women jived along with the beat. Certainly different from where it began. Different from the foundations.

It was a strange mix that day. A strange mix. You had Wesley's hymns and then intermixed with those with some ear-piercing rock from the Hillsong camp. A strange mixture.

A strange mixture. It didn't gel with me. It seemed like a flash there for me. I don't know. Others, maybe it doesn't seem to affect them that way. But it troubled me, brothers and sisters, that day to think of where the church is going.

What's happening? What's going on? And for some this might sound, this is quite an odd thing to say. For some it might seem, well that's just how it is. And it was interesting after this presentation, there was one of the people in the audience that was a grey-haired lady and she was featured in the multimedia presentations.

[2 : 26] She didn't look so grey-haired back then when there were some earlier shots of the church. After the entertaining speaker stepped down and the performance was all finished, I chatted with this lady and some of the others there about the history of the church and the historic slideshow of the church's beginnings.

And she said to me something, and it was unprompted, said to me something along the lines of the church. It's not the same church. It's not the same church that had started differently.

It's a different church now. And she intimated to me that they were not keen on the new style music, but that they had to change. They had to change to go with the times to suit the modern generation. They had to. It's not that they wanted to. They had to is what she was saying to me. They were saying, we've got to give them what they want. But that's seen to be the dominating force and reasoning behind the change, the massive change, the massive shift that undertook in that church. And friends, if you turn to Acts 2, we see the church of God, Acts chapter 2. And the context there is Peter's preached the gospel. And he said to the people, he said, repent.

[3 : 41] He said, repent. And those folk getting saved there. This is Acts chapter 2. And we see the context there in verse 38.

He says, repent. That was the message to the crowd. It wasn't some feel good message. It was saying, feel bad. It's hard to feel bad about your sin and get it right with God. It's time to repent. That was the message from Peter. And in Acts 2.40, he goes on this different kind of message to the generation, as it were. You know, the story is told.

We've got to go with the times. We've got to change to suit the modern generation. Peter says in Acts 2.40, and with many words, other words, did he testify and exhort, saying, save yourselves from this untoward generation, this wicked, this corrupted, this twisted generation.

And verse 41, it says, then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day were added 3,000 souls. And verse 42, and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers, and fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

[4 : 58] Would it be good to go back to the book of Acts, to the church of Acts? Christendom today is at a crisis point, it seems to me. A crisis point where we've moved so far from our moorings, everything is being redefined.

It's being redefined. The gospel is being redefined. Christianity is being redefined on many fronts. We're moving away. We're moving away in three things. I'll put it to you today. Moving away in three ways.

Firstly, from the foundations. We're moving away from the foundations. We look back at that church, its historic beginnings, an evangelistic, soul-lending church, committed to the word of God. The foundations have shifted, it seems to me.

Psalms 11, 3 we're told, if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

It's been a redefining in Christendom today of the core values, of what really counts, of what really matters. It strikes at the heart of foundational teachings.

[6 : 02] In the book of Acts, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. There was a steadfastness there in the doctrine, in the teaching, in the foundational training and teaching of God's word.

What we are founded upon matters. It does matter. It does matter. We're witnessing today a shift in doctrine. Doctrine has shifted from what was foundational, from what was time-honoured teaching, has been jettisoned, it seems, sadly, in many quarters.

And that's not to say that we've got it all together in this church and everyone else is wrong. I'm not putting that message across. There's many lovely, wonderful, truth-teaching ministries out there, even in this locality.

I'm not denying that. But we're seeing a shift. Nevertheless, there's a shift going on. Even in that church I'm speaking of, I'm not bagging them to say they don't have the truth.

But there's certainly been a shift there. A massive shift. A mind shift. A shift in doctrine. There's a compromising of the word of God. It's not the plumb line by which we set everything anymore.

[7 : 12] It's what the popular vote is. But God's word is the plumb line. That is what we measure things by. They say, get rid of your King James Bible. You know, it's not trendy anymore.

I was watching an interesting YouTube video about the Bible verse in 1 Timothy 3.16. God was manifest in the flesh. And the preacher was explaining how one little inflection on the word theos changes it to who.

And that little, what would have been called in Hebrew, a tittle, like a little mark, a little line has been removed. So theos, which has a little squiggly line in the middle of the th, or the theos word.

I'm not a Greek scholar, but the little squiggly line, whatever the technical name is, is gone. In the modern Bibles they've followed that text. So they don't say God was manifest in the flesh in many Bibles today in 1 Timothy 3.16.

I think that matters, don't you? I think it matters. God says, not one jot or tittle shall pass away. Not one little incy stroke or line will pass away, the Lord Jesus says.

[8 : 25] My words are forever. And if your Bible in 1 Timothy 3.16 doesn't say God was manifest in the flesh, then you haven't got the real thing. Brothers and sisters, it doesn't matter where it's trendy or got nice bright colours on the cover or nice helpful notes inside it.

It's not the word of God if it doesn't have God in 1 Timothy 3.16. So there's a compromising of the word of God today. And there's a trend towards a false unity. A false unity.

It's like you can tie two cats together by their tail and hang them over a clothesline and then together they join. But it's a false kind of unity. And there's a clash there. We can't join hands with the Roman Catholic system because they don't have the gospel.

Friends, they don't have it. And we're seeing that march progressively down the road to Rome.

That's what we're seeing. And well-meaning, godly people are joining with these folk thinking that's all lovey-dovey.

We're all brothers and sisters. No, sir. If they're bowing down to idols, if they're worshipping that false system, then I'm not in unity with that.

[9 : 32] And I never can be. And no god-fearing man would ever be. It's choice today. It's a choice today. It's a hard line. Now this is a tough call.

It's a choice today between two things. Pragmatism or principle. Pragmatism, do what the crowd wants, give them what they want. Or principle, standing on truth.

It's a choice between these two. Where do we turn? Do we choose principle or pragmatism? One or the other. What path do we tread? We can wonder today, will there be anyone left that will tell me the truth?

In Christendom today, there's such a shift going on in many camps. It's not just in one camp. It's not just in one flavour of Christianity.

It's infecting the whole. Where can I turn? Where anyone will be left who will tell me the truth? And I've been saddened as folk left this church, they don't like me preaching some of the things that I say.

[10 : 34] Well, if God says it, I'll say it. I don't care. I don't have to be popular with anybody here. And God forbid. If I'm so watered down that I'm not willing to tell you the truth, then woe to me.

Woe to me. And we must choose. It's like when you choose where to go and eat. When you choose what food place to eat at, what fundamentally matters is, am I going to get good food or not?

Am I going to get good food or not? It's not about the colour scheme, or the music, or the ambience, the atmosphere, or how much people smile at you and wear nice bow ties or whatever they wear and sell the service.

If they're feeding you rubbish, you're not going to eat there. And yet, sadly, the sun, they move to where the razzmatazz is, moving away from the truth.

And that's not to say we might be able to have a bit of razzmatazz ourselves. But we need the truth. That's the point. And we need to not shift away from the truth. And it matters about getting good food. That's what counts.

[11 : 42] Good food. Deciding on what is right. And we all got to discern that. You've got to judge me as the word instructs you to search the scriptures, to see if these things are so.

Decide what's right, whether it's biblical or not. And yet today, there's a shifting going on, as I say, in the Bible training, in the schooling of preachers.

It's about methodology rather than doctrine. It's about getting a method. It's about the church growth techniques, the marketing styling. Whether we feed the carnal appetites and desires of people enough that they want to come back and get their ears tickled again.

That they want to come and get scratched where they itch again, as it were. The emphasis is all on results and numbers. It's audience driven.

It's user friendly, amusing the me generation. People's felt needs are the driver. But that's not how it is in here, is it? The people's felt needs, they got pretty hurt when Peter was saying, Repent.

[12 : 47] You've crucified the Prince of Glory. Repent of your sins. Get right with God. That wasn't user friendly or seeker friendly. Does the truth really matter anymore?

That's what matters. That's what we've got to ask ourselves. Does it matter about keeping the false out of doctrine anymore? It does matter. It matters what you eat.

It matters what you eat spiritually. What you eat spiritually. We've all got to be discerning of that. Or is it rather we please ourselves than what a church actually teaches?

Is it pleasing ourselves that that counts more our own comfort and wants than what is taught?

Shouldn't it rather be that we give the people what they need rather than what they think they want?

And it could be that we need to get a job. We need a bolt of lightning to strike us as it were and to shock us and shake us. That the word can shake us and that we tremble at it, that we take it seriously.

[13 : 48] But the problem is today there's a door being opened. A door has been opened. Someone's just opening it now. The door's being opened and the door is ajar.

And when the door is ajar, if there's a flood tide behind it, it's hard to shut. The trouble is if you let the door ajar just a little bit, before you know it, it's wide open.

And that's what's happened in some of these godly places at one time, these godly gatherings.

They've let the questionable things in and it's open slather now.

So don't open the door. Where's the church? We take it seriously. We take the music ministry seriously. It's a blessing having this family playing here today for the first time. We take the music ministry seriously.

We take the teaching of our church seriously and the practice of our church. And yet today we're seeing today an abandonment of truth. Of Bible preaching, of life-sustaining doctrine, of plainly declaring the word of God.

[14 : 51] The truth of the gospel. And has the gospel changed? No. No sir, it's still the same gospel. It's still the same unchanging message of the gospel. Man is a sinner and Christ is a saviour.

And the saviour. But yet the gospel message has been damaged and twisted, redefined by the marketing mindsets of today. By the mainstreaming of Pentecostalism.

By the dumbing down of the message. The gospel has shifted. It's different today. You've got the health, wealth and prosperity gospel. If you're not rich, then you haven't got God in your life.

That's what they're telling you. What a lie from hell. What a lie. What a damnable heresy. Friends today, it's a lie from the pits of hell.

The changing of the gospel. That's serious stuff. That's serious. That matters. We should take it seriously when these things happen. When you're moving to a man-centred, trendy kind of substitute for the real thing.

[15 : 52] That counts. That matters. So, we want a biblical ministry. God will bless a biblical ministry and nothing less than a biblical ministry. So, we've looked at the foundations. The foundations are biblical doctrine.

The apostles' doctrine of fellowship. Bible doctrine. The foundation. Secondly, the fellowship. Verse 42. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

Fear came upon every soul. Many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. Today, the church has been redesigned. Redesigned, redefined. It's like you have to make the church so alike to the world that people will feel comfortable there.

Comfortable. Where are the carriers of his cross today? Where are those who will be carriers of his cross? The fact is, it's a convenient cross-less Christianity today. A cost-free Christianity.

A Christianity where Christ doesn't say to you, take up your cross daily and follow me. There's no cross there. There's no sacrifice there. It's all very convenient and pandering and pampering.

[17 : 03] Now, sure, we'd like to see many attending in our gatherings too. Yes. But not at the expense of truth. Not at the expense of that. Not using the approach of whatever it takes.

Pragmatism. Whatever it takes. You know, in some ways, the church is adopting all these peripheral things that are becoming the dominating thing.

Now, some of these things we've used. And we do use and we will use. But the problem is an over-emphasis on these things. Things such as drama, comedy, dance, entertainment, worldly music.

It's becoming a circus performance. We're witnessing a slow and gradual shift. As I say, you don't see it at first. It's imperceptible. The door is just ajar a little bit.

But before you know the flood waters, open the door. And you can't shut it. What a waste. What a waste when godly people are going and fellowshiping and giving and supporting such ministry.

[18 : 10] When Christians get swept along by this tide, they support this ever more and more. And then their children grow up in it. Their grandchildren.

You'll never see them again. They're lost. Friends, it's a sad waste. The real spiritual power is lost when the church is diluted and sold out.

Just to entertain, just to draw a crowd. Biblical principles have been abandoned for pragmatism. For what draws the crowd? The worldly fashion, the worldly techniques and methodology.

The sanctuary. The sanctuary used to be the holy place. Now it has become a fleshly place. A fleshly place. If you want to attract the lost on the basis of what might interest them, you've got to bring in what appeals to them.

What appeals to them, what accommodates their flesh. Friends, should the church of God resort to such tactics? Is that what we have to do? Really? We don't need to mimic that.

[19 : 15] We don't need to mimic what's popular in our culture. To play the top of the pops, the performance style upbeat music, theatrical productions, sleek and crafty messages that are designed to make people feel good about themselves.

That's not what it's about. Was Peter's message that? Repent. Repent. Something to redesign fellowship, we've got to make the lost feel more comfortable.

Declares it soundly and loudly. And we'll be those who will stand on the street corners. As some of our number do. They'll stand and declare a message that the world will mock and scorn.

That must be declared. We have to stand for the faith. The gospel being truly preached. Soundly preached. The watchman warning. The faith being declared and defended.

What did Paul say in Acts 20, 27? He says, For I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. All the counsel of God.

He didn't shun from it. He didn't shy away from it. He said, I'm going to declare to you all the counsel of God. The whole counsel. The difference between ultimately having the truth or following a lie.

[25 : 07] Is it a lie? Is the preacher preaching a lie? Is that sister preaching a lie? That is the question we all need to answer.

And the man outside of Christ is not going to find truth. It's not going to find theology, preaching, the gospel or Christ himself palatable, relevant or entertaining unless the Spirit gives a prompting.

Unless the Holy Spirit gives a longing for Christ. It's got to be Christ that will draw. It's got to be the Holy Spirit that will move and convict. It's not about creating a conducive environment, having gimmicks and fatty things and mood and manipulation that's man created.

It's got to be the message, that centre stage, not the music. Preaching must be thoroughly biblical and sound and forthright.

And then the genuine seeker of the truth will be drawn because the Holy Spirit will prompt them, will draw them, will move them. And the whole counsel of God.

[26 : 12] And that means through hearing the preaching of the Word of God. Romans 10, 17. Faith cometh by hearing. Hearing the Word of God. Friends today, to close, think of it.

The gospel, it matters. The gospel matters. We don't want to substitute gospel. A gospel that's been twisted and turned. Christ somehow died on the cross so you could be wealthy or even healthy.

It's not so. It's about your sin. It's about salvation for your sin. It's not for you to be a success, for you to have a better life. It's not for you to be more affluent.

It's for you to be saved from your sin. That's what counts. That's the gospel. Yeah, it's been diluted, perverted. There's a woeful ignorance of the faith today because there's so many messages out there that are contradictory to it.

And friends, we must share. As a church, I pray that we will not open that door. That it won't be a jar. It will be firmly closed to the things that we don't want to infect or dilute or damage the gospel.

[27 : 19] The whole gospel. The preaching of sin, of hell, of repentance. That is what our world needs to hear. They may not always want to hear it. Maybe in Peter's day they didn't want to hear that.

But the Holy Spirit convicted them when they were told to repent and they were saved. And friends, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

The power supply for this place is not so much the AGL power company. The power supply for this place is not measured by the meter box on the wall so much as the power of the gospel.

The power of the gospel, the power of prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit. And we see that God moved in wonderful ways in Acts 2. And that's because the truth was there.

The wonder of Calvary. The power is not in the atmosphere, the entertainment, the performance, the techniques. The power is in the Word.

[28 : 19] The power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. The power of God. It's not in the preacher. It's not in the singers. It's not in the musicians. It's not in the multimedia.

It's in the gospel. The power of God unto salvation. Friends, that's what we need. The power is in the Word of God still. It needs to be declared with authority, with consuming passion, with conviction and in totality.

The full truth. God's church once had real spiritual power. Real spiritual power. Not the make-believe so-called revivals of today.

And you wonder with alarm. It's nothing. It's not in here what's being done and said. So, is it God? I think it's an honest question we can ask.

Is it God if it's not in here? We would wonder, and certainly we should wonder. We must rely upon the Holy Spirit nevertheless. But the Holy Spirit will not move in discord with His Word.

[29 : 22] He will move in accordance with His Word. With the declaration of it. And, friends, there's a shift, as I say, from God-censored to man-censored. A foundational shift.

A shift in the foundations, in the theology, in the doctrine. There's a shift today in the fellowship. Where it's just a mish-mash. There's no clear holy people gathering together. It's not a fellowship anymore that's in accordance with the Word of God. Being one accord and of one mind. A people trembling at His Word. And the faith.

The faith has been abandoned now for entertainment. The sufficiency of Christ and His Word has been replaced with a poor substitute. Friends, let's not be moved that way.

But in 20 years' time, when they're showing some multimedia show about this place. About this people. About this church. About this ministry. There won't have been a change.

[30 : 23] There'll still be the unchanging power of the Gospel. There'll still be the unchanging power that saves souls. That's what we need. That's what we must have. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You that we are inadequate. Yet You are more than enough. You are the all in all. You are the all-sufficient. And Your Word is all-sufficient.

And it's truth. Lord, we pray. Help us to heed it. To obey it. To not disregard it. To not treat it carelessly and lightly. But to make it real. To make it personal today.

Lord, that we might be as those in Acts that trembled at Your Word. That repented. There was conviction. There was holiness. There was life. There was revival there. Lord, we thank You that we can be that church.

That biblical church. That biblical church. That biblical fellowship. That biblical faith. Lord, return us to that if we stray. Help us to have that ever closer nearness to You.

[31 : 23] That closeness to You. That You would be honoured, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. To close. To close. To close. To close. at our Bible study. We're going through the Gospel of Matthew.

And I was touched by, as we got to the message of the cross, as we got to the account of the cross, the Spirit moved on the teacher of that message.

And there was a weeping. As we thought about Calvary, as we thought about what Christ did for us, what Christ paid for us, and it was moving to me. And friends, let's be moved about Calvary.

Let's be moved by the truth. And make it count. Make it live. God bless you.