

## *The Extracts*

outside the door. This is absolutely upside down from modern church-growth strategy... But [in the New Testament] there had to become such a deadly dread and fear [so great] that unbelievers [just] wouldn't dare go in to the church...

[From Acts 5:13, we learn the reaction of the people:] 'Don't go there, you might die'. That's a far cry from: 'Let's go there, it's fun'...

Church is not about being a jokester, it's not about funny, clever pop jargon...

It's so interesting to me to watch the flow of church growth. It starts out with sort of meeting people at their social level. They need associations, friends, singles need to meet singles, let's have restaurants for them, let's have recreation. That's the first wave that connects with them socially.

The second wave goes a little deeper and says: 'No, they've got all these felt needs; you've got to have 45 Twelve-Step Programs, so let's connect psychologically'. So the new wave of church growth says: 'Let's connect [with them] psychologically'.<sup>14</sup>

### **Extract 10**

Another great evil is *the want of decision for the truth among truly good men*; those who are our brethren in the faith of our Lord Jesus, but who do not seem to have made up their minds as to separation from error. Good, easy men, they are all for peace! 'Sitting on the fence' seems to be a popular position among professors just now... Several brethren may have made up their minds; but, [waiting], they will sit uneasily upon the fence... There is a position which I never was able to occupy myself, and therefore I have no very profound sympathy with them. One or two learned divines are trying their utmost to get down on both sides of the fence; but it is a perilous experiment. Some are trying to get down on the winning side, and others would prefer to keep their judicious position world without end. Neutrals, in the end, have the respect of neither party; and, assuredly, they are *the difficulty* in every controversy.

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<sup>14</sup> John MacArthur: 'A Biblical Response to the Church-Growth Movement'.

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There will always be trouble in the churches so long as men are afraid to denounce sin and error. A negro preacher, in a certain village, said that among his flock he carefully abstained from preaching against the sin of stealing chickens, because it seemed so much to damp brotherly fellowship!... Is there not a great deal of this suppression of unpalatable truth? Are not many unfaithful as to the sins around them? They are 'all things to all men', but it is not that they may save some. I have heard it whispered that it is in order that they may save *a sum* to the exchequer of the church. Are not important persons too much consulted? Is not position more valued than piety? Is there enough of downright faithfulness to truth and to Christ at all hazards? Brethren, we want grace to say: 'I can be poor; I can be ridiculed; I can be abused; but I cannot be false to my Lord'.

I make no personal reference, but I see the spirit of compromise concerning holiness and sin, truth and error, far too prevalent. The spirit of compromise comes not of the Spirit of God, but of the spirit of the world. It is always wisest and best to exhibit clear decision upon fundamental points; we must draw the line distinctly, and then stand to it firmly. Do not alter your course because of winds and currents. Do not try to make things pleasant all round.

Another great evil of the times is *the insatiable craving for amusements*. That men should have rest from labour, and that they should enjoy such amusements as refresh both body and mind, nobody wishes to deny. Within suitable bounds, recreation is necessary and profitable; but it never was the business of the... church to supply the world with amusements. Did Christ found his church that it might offer to the public *tableaux vivants*,<sup>15</sup> and living waxworks? A Dissenting congregation, to my own knowledge, commenced a series of special services with a social meeting, and the evening was spent in various silly dissipations; and among other things the assembled friends played at 'Musical Chairs'! I do not know whether you understand what that childish game means. Think of ministers of the gospel and officers of a church playing at 'Musical Chairs'! There is a bill extant which states that,

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<sup>15</sup> Groups of silent models in costume posing to portray various scenes.

next week, there is to be a ‘Punch and Judy’ show in the same place of worship (so-called)! This is to go on side by side with the preaching of your bleeding sacrifice, O Christ of God! No, brethren, let me correct myself; the preaching of Christ usually ceases when these frivolities come in. These things are so opposed in spirit, that one or the other will have to be dropped; and we know which it will be.

What is to be next done in our chapels? To what length of tomfoolery will ministers of the gospel yet go? Amusements beneath the contempt of idiots have been tolerated in our schoolrooms. It has not come to that yet with us, personally; but, brethren, we ourselves have to battle hard against it, for the people are all agog for these vanities, and there are so many societies and institutions more or less remotely connected with our churches that it is difficult for us to keep them all from wandering. Brethren, we are not here to play away our time, but to win souls for Jesus and eternal bliss. By the solemnities of death, and judgment and eternity, I beseech you, keep yourselves clear of the follies, the inanities of the day. Remark with interest how ‘the wisdom of this world’ and the follies of it seem to be boon companions, and turn from them both with equal loathing.<sup>16</sup>

### **Extract 11**

This is the suggestion of the present hour – if the world will not come to Jesus, shall Jesus tone down his teachings to the world? In other words, if the world will not rise to the church, shall not the church go down to the world? Instead of bidding men to be converted and come out from among sinners and be separate from them, [the inevitable call will be:] ‘Let us join with the ungodly world, enter into union with it and so pervade it with our influence by allowing it to influence us. Let us have a Christian world. To this end let us revise our doctrines. Some are old-fashioned, grim, severe, unpopular. Let us drop them. Use the old phrases so as to please the obstinately orthodox, but give them new meanings so as to win philosophical

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<sup>16</sup> C.H.Spurgeon: ‘The Evils of the Present Time, and Our Object, Necessities and Encouragements’ in *An All-Round Ministry*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1960, pp291-294, emphasis his.

infidels who are prowling around. Pare off the edges of the unpleasant truths of God, moderate the dogmatic tone of infallible revelation... For the times are altered and the spirit of the age suggests the abandonment of everything that is too severely righteous, and too surely of God’.

The deceitful adulteration of doctrine is attended by a falsification of experience. Men are now told that they were born good, or were made so by their infant baptism, and so that great sentence: ‘You must be born again’, is deprived of its force. Repentance is ignored, faith is a drug in the market as compared with ‘honest doubt’, and mourning for sin and communion with God are dispensed with to make way for entertainments... A new creature in Christ Jesus is looked upon as a sour invention of bigoted Puritans... What was good and great two hundred years ago is mere cant today. That is what ‘modern thought’ is telling us. And under its guidance all true spirituality<sup>17</sup> is being toned down. True spirituality<sup>18</sup> is despised and a fashionable morality is set up in its place. Do yourself up tidily on Sunday – behave yourself...

Thus is the church going down to the world. Men seem to say: ‘It is of no use going on in the old way, fetching out one here and another there from the great mass... Let us abolish the separation between the regenerate and unregenerate. Come into the church, all of you, converted or unconverted. You have good wishes and good resolutions. That will do – don’t trouble about more. It is true you do not believe the gospel but... you believe something or other. Come along. If you do not believe anything, no matter. Your “honest doubt” is better by far than faith’.

‘But’, you say: ‘nobody talks so’. Possibly they do not use the same words but this is the real meaning of the present-day religion. This is the drift of the times. I can justify the broadest statement I have made by the action or by the speech of certain ministers who are treacherously betraying the gospel<sup>19</sup> under pretence of adapting it to this progressive age. The new plan is to assimilate the church to the world and so include a larger area within its bounds.

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<sup>17</sup> Original had ‘religion’.

<sup>18</sup> Original had ‘Spiritual religion’.

<sup>19</sup> Original had ‘our holy religion’.

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By semi-dramatic performances they make meeting houses<sup>20</sup> to approximate to the theatre. They turn their services into musical displays, and their sermons into... philosophical essays – in fact, they exchange the temple for the theatre and turn the ministers of God into actors, whose business it is to amuse men. Is it not so, that the Lord's day is becoming more and more a day of recreation or of idleness, and the meeting house...<sup>21</sup> a house full of idols...? Ah me, the hedges are broken down, the walls are levelled, and to many there is henceforth no church except as a portion of the world... This, then, is the proposal. In order to win the world, the Lord Jesus must conform himself, his people and his word to the world. I will not dwell any longer on so loathsome a proposal...

The Lord Jesus Christ heads that grand emigration party which has come right out from the world. Addressing his disciples, he says: 'You are not of the world, even as I am not of the world'. We are not of the world by birth, not of the world in life, not of the world in object, not of the world in spirit, not of the world in any respect whatever. Jesus and those who are in him constitute a new race. The proposal to go back to the world is abhorrent to our best instincts – yes, deadly to our noblest life. A voice from heaven cries: 'Bring not my Son there again'. Let not the people whom the Lord brought up out of Egypt return to the house of bondage. But let their children come out and be separate, and the Lord Jehovah will be a Father unto them... The way of God with his church has been to sever a people from the world to be his elect – a people formed for himself who shall show forth his praise. Beloved, God's plan is not altered. He will still go on calling those whom he did predestinate. Do not let us fly in the teeth of that fact and suppose that we can save men on a more wholesale scale by ignoring the distinction between the dead in sin and the living in Zion...

Brethren, there are two seeds – the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent – and the difference will be maintained even to the end – neither must we ignore the distinction to please men...

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<sup>20</sup> Original had 'houses of prayer'.

<sup>21</sup> Original had 'the Lord's house'.

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Brethren, we also are heirs of the promise of things not seen as yet. For the sake of this we walk by faith and hence we become separate from those around us. We dwell among men as Abraham dwelt among the Canaanites – but we are of a distinct race – we are born with a new birth, live under different laws and act from different motives. If we go back to the ways of worldlings and are numbered with them, we have renounced the covenant of our God, the promise is no longer ours, and the eternal heritage is in other hands. Do you not know this? The moment the church says: ‘I will be as the world’, she has doomed herself with the world. When the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair and took them wives of all which they chose, then the flood came and swept them all away. So will it again happen should the world take the church into its arms – then shall come some overwhelming judgment and, it may be, a deluge of devouring fire.<sup>22</sup> The covenant promise and the covenant heritage are no longer ours if we go down to the world and quit our sojourning with the Lord. Besides, dear friends, no good can come of trying to conform to the world...

And all the converts that the church will ever make by softening down its doctrine, and by becoming worldly will become worthless.<sup>23</sup> When we get them, the next question will be: ‘How can we get rid of them?’ They would be of no earthly use to us. It swelled the number of Israelites when they came out of Egypt that a great number of the lower order of Egyptians came out with them. Yes, but that mixed multitude became the plague of Israel in the wilderness and we read that ‘the mixed multitude fell a lusting’. The Israelites were bad enough, but it was the mixed multitude that always led the way in murmuring.

Why is there such spiritual death today? Why is false doctrine so rampant in the churches? It is because we have ungodly people in the church and in the ministry! Eagerness for numbers and especially eagerness to include respectable people has adulterated many churches, and made them lax in doctrine and practice and fond of silly amusements. These are the people who despise a prayer

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<sup>22</sup> Even more pertinent, the same can be said when the church welcomes the world into its arms.

<sup>23</sup> Original had ‘will not be worth one bad farthing a gross’.

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meeting, but rush to see ‘living waxworks’ in their schoolrooms. God save us from converts who are made by lowering the standard and tarnishing the spiritual glory of the church!... True converts are never daunted by truth or holiness – these, in fact, are the things which charm them...<sup>24</sup>

Are you afraid that preaching the gospel will not win souls? Are you despondent as to success in God’s way? Is this why you pine for clever oratory? Is this why you must have music and...? After all, is it by might and by power and not by the Spirit of God? It is even so in the opinion of many.

Beloved brethren, there are many things which I might allow to other worshippers which I have denied myself in conducting the worship of this congregation. I have long worked out before your very eyes the experiment of the unaided attractiveness of the gospel of Jesus. Our service is severely plain. No man ever comes here to gratify his eyes with art, or his ears with music. I have set before you, these many years, nothing but Christ crucified and the simplicity of the gospel. Yet where will you find such a crowd as this gathered together this morning? Where will you find such a multitude as this meeting, Lord’s day after Lord’s day,<sup>25</sup> for five-and thirty years? I have shown you nothing but the cross, the cross without the flowers of oratory; the cross without the blue lights of superstition or excitement; the cross without diamonds of ecclesiastical rank; the cross without the buttresses of a boastful science; the cross is abundantly sufficient to attract men first to itself, and afterwards to eternal life! In this house, we have proved successfully, these many years, this great truth of God – the gospel plainly preached will gain an audience, convert sinners and build up and sustain a church. We beseech the people of God to mark that there is no need to try doubtful expedients and questionable methods. God will save by the gospel, still – only let it be the gospel in its purity. This grand old sword will cleave a man’s spine and split a rock in half. How is it that it does so little of its old conquering work? I will tell you. Do you see this scabbard of artistic

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<sup>24</sup> I recall a man saying many years ago: ‘There are too many Ishmaels in the church’.

<sup>25</sup> Original had ‘sabbath after sabbath’.

work, so wonderfully elaborated? Full many keep the sword in this scabbard, and therefore its edge never gets to its work. Pull off that scabbard. Fling that fine sheath to hades and then see how, in the Lord's hands, that glorious two-handed sword will mow down fields of men as mowers level the grass with their scythes. There is no need to go down to Egypt for help. To invite the devil to help Christ is shameful. Please God, we shall see prosperity yet, when the church of God is resolved never to seek it except in God's own way...

When we lie dying, if we have faithfully preached the gospel, our conscience will not accuse us for having kept closely to it – we shall not mourn that we did not play the fool... in order to increase our congregation. Oh, no! Our Master will give us full absolution, even if few are gathered in so long as we have been true to him... Do not try the dodges which debase the gospel.<sup>26</sup> Keep to the simple gospel. And if the people are not converted by it, [even so] you will [still] be clear.

My dear hearers, how much I long to see you saved! But I would not give a false impression of<sup>27</sup> my Lord, even to win your souls, if they could be so won. The true servant of God is responsible for diligence and faithfulness. But he is not responsible for success or non-success. Results are in God's hands. If that dear child in your class is not converted, yet if you have set before him the gospel of Jesus Christ with loving, prayerful earnestness, you shall not be without your reward. If I preach from my very soul the grand truth of God that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will save my hearers – and if I persuade and entreat them to believe in Jesus unto eternal life – if they will not do so, their blood will lie upon their own heads. When I go back to my Master, if I have faithfully told his message of free grace and dying love, I shall be clear. I have often prayed that I might be able to say at the last what George Fox could so truly say: 'I am clear, I am clear!' It is my highest ambition to be clear of the blood of all men. I have preached God's truth so far as I know it, and I have not been ashamed of its peculiarities. That I might not stultify my testimony, I have cut myself clear of those who err

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<sup>26</sup> Original had 'religion'.

<sup>27</sup> Original had 'belie'.

from the faith, and even from those who associate with them. What more can I do to be honest with you? If, after all, men will not have Christ and his gospel and his rule, it is their own concern.<sup>28</sup>

## **Extract 12**

The church has been captured by the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. In spite of the prophetic voices that are raised here and there among us, present-day believers are drawn to the world with irresistible force...

Not only has the church nothing to say to the world, but the tables have actually been turned, and the ministers of Christ are now going to the world for light. They sit at Adam's feet for instruction, and clear their message with the wise and the prudent, before they dare deliver it. But the certainty that comes from seeing and the assurance that springs from hearing – where are they?

Let us be more specific. About whom am I speaking here? The liberal who denies the authenticity of the Scriptures? I wish it were so. No, I write off the liberal as long dead and expect nothing from him. It is of the evangelical church that I speak, and of their so-called churches.<sup>29</sup> I speak of the theology of popular evangelism which quotes the Bible copiously but without one trace of authority, accepts the world at its own estimate, chides sinners like a weak-chinned father of a family who has long ago lost control of his household and doesn't expect to be obeyed, offers Christ as a religious tranquilliser who is without

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<sup>28</sup> C.H.Spurgeon sermon 2047, entitled 'No Compromise'.

<sup>29</sup> Original had 'gospel churches'. If the adjective is used to distinguish churches which hold to the gospel from those who do not, in a very real sense we have a tautology. If a church does not hold to the gospel it is not a church. Again: 'a gospel church' is a phrase used by covenant theologians who sprinkle infants; they think the old and new covenants are different administrations of one covenant, that Israel was the church in the Old Testament and the church is the church in the New, and that infant baptism has replaced circumcision. This is utterly wrong. See my *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law; Infant Baptism Tested; 'A Gospel Church': A Warning* (in a shortened version as an article also), in addition to several other of my works.