

Concerns for your Christianity Pt 2

I Thess. 3:1-13

Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, ² and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, ³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴ For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also *to see you*—⁷ therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

⁹ For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do to you*, ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Introduction:

In the last 25 years I have witnessed the birth and growth of menacing trends within the church, several of which have converged under what I would call evangelical pragmatism -- an approach to ministry that is endemic in contemporary Christianity. What is *pragmatism*? Basically it is a philosophy that says that results determine meaning, truth, and value -- what will work becomes a more important question than what is true. As Christians, we are called to trust what the Lord says, preach that message to others, and leave the results to Him. But many have set that aside. Seeking relevancy and success, they have welcomed the pragmatic approach and have received the proverbial Trojan horse.

Let me take a few minutes to explain a little of the history leading up to the current entrenchment of the pragmatic approach in the evangelical church and to show you why it isn't as innocent as it looks.

Recent History

The 1970s, for the most part, were years of spiritual revival in America. The spread of the gospel through the campuses of many colleges and universities marked a fresh, energetic movement of the Holy Spirit to draw people to salvation in Christ. Mass baptisms were conducted in rivers, lakes, and the ocean, several new versions of the English Bible were released, and Christian publishing and broadcasting experienced remarkable growth.

Sadly, the fervent evangelical revival slowed and was overshadowed by the greed and debauchery of the eighties and nineties. The surrounding culture rejected biblical standards of morality, and the church, rather than assert its distinctiveness and call the world to repentance, softened its stance on holiness. The failure to maintain a distinctively biblical identity was profound -- it

led to general spiritual apathy and a marked decline in church attendance.

Church leaders reacted to the world's indifference, not by a return to strong biblical preaching that emphasized sin and repentance, but by a pragmatic approach to "doing" church -- an approach driven more by marketing, methodology, and perceived results than by biblical doctrine. The new model of ministry revolved around making sinners feel comfortable and at ease in the church, then selling them on the benefits of becoming a Christian. Earlier silence has given way to cultural appeasement and conformity.

Even the church's ministry to its own has changed. Entertainment has hijacked many pulpits across the country; contemporary approaches cater to the ever-changing whims of professing believers; and many local churches have become little more than social clubs and community centers where the focus is on the individual's felt needs. Even on Christian radio, phone-in talk shows, music, and live psychotherapy are starting to replace Bible teaching as the staple. "Whatever works," the mantra of pragmatism, has become the new banner of evangelicalism.

The Down-Grade Controversy

You may be surprised to learn that what we are now seeing is not new. England's most famous preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, dealt with a similar situation more than 100 years ago. Among churches that were once solid, Spurgeon and other faithful pastors noticed a conciliatory attitude toward and overt cooperation with the modernist movement. And what motivated the compromise? They sought to find acceptance by adopting the "sophisticated" trends of the culture. Does that sound familiar to you?

One article, published anonymously in Spurgeon's monthly magazine *The Sword and the Trowel*, noted that every revival of true evangelical faith had been followed within a generation or two by a drift away from sound doctrine, ultimately leading to wholesale apostasy. The author likened this drifting from truth to a downhill slope, and thus labeled it "the down grade." The inroads

of modernism into the church killed ninety percent of the mainline denominations within a generation of Spurgeon's death.

Spurgeon himself, once the celebrated and adored herald of the Baptist Union, was marginalized by the society and he eventually withdrew his membership.

The Effects of Pragmatism

Many of today's church leaders have bought into the subtlety of pragmatism without recognizing the dangers it poses. Instead of attacking orthodoxy head on, evangelical pragmatism gives lip service to the truth while quietly undermining the foundations of doctrine. Instead of exalting God, it effectively denigrates the things that are precious to Him.

First, there is in vogue today a trend to make the basis of faith something other than God's Word. Experience, emotion, fashion, and popular opinion are often more authoritative than the Bible in determining what many Christians believe. From private, individual revelation to the blending of secular psychology with biblical "principles," Christians are listening to the voice of the serpent that once told Eve, "God's Word doesn't have all the answers." Christian counseling reflects that drift, frequently offering no more than experimental and unscriptural self-help therapy instead of solid answers from the Bible.

Christian missionary work is often riddled with pragmatism and compromise, because too many in missions have evidently concluded that what gets results is more important than what God says. That's true among local churches as well. It has become fashionable to forgo the proclamation and teaching of God's Word in worship services. Instead, churches serve up a paltry diet of drama, music, and other forms of entertainment.

Second, evangelical pragmatism tends to move the focus of faith away from God's Son. You've seen that repeatedly if you watch much religious television. The health-wealth-and-prosperity gospel advocated by so many televangelists is the ultimate example of this kind of fantasy faith. This false gospel appeals unabashedly to the flesh, corrupting all the promises of Scripture

and encouraging greed. It makes material blessing, not Jesus Christ, the object of the Christian's desires.

Easy-believism handles the message differently, but the effect is the same. It is the promise of forgiveness minus the gospel's hard demands, the perfect message for pragmatists. It has done much to popularize "believing" but little to provoke sincere faith.

Christ is no longer the focus of the message. While His name is mentioned from time to time, the real focus is inward, not upward. People are urged to look within; to try to understand themselves; to come to grips with their problems, their hurts, their disappointments; to have their needs met, their desires granted, their wants fulfilled. Nearly all the popular versions of the message encourage and legitimize a self-centered perspective. Third, today's Christianity is infected with a tendency to view the result of faith as something less than God's standard of holy living. By downplaying the importance of holy living-both by precept and by example-the biblical doctrine of conversion is undermined. Think about it: What more could Satan do to try to destroy the church than undermining God's Word, shifting the focus off Christ, and minimizing holy living?

All those things are happening slowly, steadily within the church right now. Tragically, most Christians seem oblivious to the problems, satisfied with a Christianity that is fashionable and highly visible. But the true church must not ignore those threats. If we fight to maintain doctrinal purity with an emphasis on biblical preaching and biblical ministry, we can conquer external attacks. But if error is allowed into the church, many more churches will slide down the grade to suffer the same fate as the denominations that listened to, yet ignored, Spurgeon's impassioned appeal.

(Taken from articles gty.org "Whats inside the Trojan Horse"
John MacArthur)

Review

I.BE STRONG

II.BE STEADFAST

III.BE SURE

IV.BE SOOTHING

V.BE SATURATED

VI.BE SPECTACULAR

VII.BE SANCTIFIED

I.BE STRONG

Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, ² and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,

II.BE STEADFAST

³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴ For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

Lesson

III. BE SURE

⁵ For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

For this reason

For this reason (dia touto) means in essence "since I knew that you were so liable to be persecuted, and since I feared that some might be turned from the truth by this opposition."

I sent to know your faith

Richison makes a pithy point writing that...

No doubt all phonies will throw in the towel quickly.

Persecution always sorts out the fakers.

The church popular is the church polluted.

The church persecuted is the church purified.

If the church receives nothing but favor from the world system then there is something wrong with the church.

The world hates the church when it finds out what the church believes. (Ref)

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the

world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you ([John 15:18, 19](#)).

Lest by some means

Wuest adds the phrase **lest by any means** - Barnes comments that Paul is referring to

Either by allurements to apostasy, set before you by your former heathen friends; or by the arts of false teachers; or by the severity of suffering. Satan has many methods of seducing men from the truth, and Paul was fearful that by some of his arts he might be successful there. (Albert Barnes. Barnes NT Commentary)

Tempter

ὁ

the [one]

Art-NMS

πειράζων ,

tempting

V-PPA-NMS

This is a reference to the Tempting ONE Pres.Act Participle. This is characteristic of this person, He is known as the Tempting ONE The Tempter

(**peirazo [word study]** from the noun **peira** = test from **peiro** = perforate, pierce through to test durability of things) is a morally neutral word simply meaning “to test”. For example it may mean to put to the test and so to search out or to discover what kind of

person someone is. And so it may be used of God or Christ in a good sense as putting men to the test that they may stand approved, as when Abraham was tested by God's request to him to offer Isaac, his son of promise, his only begotten son ([He 11:17-note](#)).

Peirazo on the other hand when used of the devil always has a bad connotation, meaning to test or tempt in order to disapprove. It is always the devil's aim to entice men to sin and bring them to a fall as in the temptation of Christ

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be **tempted** by the devil ([Mt 4:1](#))

And so the meaning of peirazo depends on the intent of the one giving the test and also on the response of the one tested. (See study of another word for testing [dokimazo](#))

In this passage the definite article (Greek = **ho** corresponds to English article "the") precedes the verb **peirazo** (*ho peirazon*), and is clearly a reference to specific tempting one, the Devil, Satan, the Serpent, the Evil one, Lucifer. Paul however does not now identify this nefarious foe by his name but by his characteristic activity. The **present tense** is indicating that temptation is his continual evil activity. It pictures him as persistently engaged in the effort to destroy the faith of the Thessalonians through temptation. He never gives up his sinister efforts. Do believers really understand and believe this today? Remember that Satan's tests are never with a good end in view but are always calculated to do us harm.

Satan is referred to as **the Tempter** only here and in Matthew 4...

And the tempter (peirazo) came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." ([Matthew 4:3](#))

Comment: He who was the tempter of our Lord is also the tempter of His people.

Tempted

peirazó: to make proof of, to attempt, test, tempt

Original Word: ΠΕΙΡÁΖΩ

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: peirazó

Phonetic Spelling: (pi-rad'-zo)

Short Definition: I try, tempt, test

Definition: I try, tempt, test.

HELPS Word-studies

3985 *peirázō* (from **3984** /*peíra*, "test, trial") – "originally to *test*, to *try* which was its usual meaning in the ancient Greek and in the *LXX*" (*WP*, 1, 30).

"The word means *either test or tempt*" (*WP*, 1, 348). *Context alone* determines which sense is intended, or if both apply *simultaneously*.

Tempted (**3985**) (**peirazo**) is the same verb discussed above but without the definite article preceding and in a different verb tense, **aojist.**, referring here to a past fact. In other words Paul takes for granted that the saints have already been tempted by the tempter. **Vine** comments that...

the point tense (**aojist tense**) indicates that the apostle feared not merely an assault on their faith, but a successful assault = "that the tempter had succeeded in tempting you." Satan was doubly active, he had hindered the missionaries from continuing the work at Thessalonica; had he succeeded in overthrowing what they had done? (Vine, W. *Collected writings of W. E. Vine*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson **or** Logos)

Richison warns us that...

The Devil will take advantage of your vulnerability. He knows about your history. He knows where he can stick it to you.

Satan seldom comes to Christians with great temptations, or with a temptation to commit a great sin. You bring a green log and a candle together, and they are very safe neighbours; but bring a few shavings, and set them alight, and then bring a few small sticks and let them take fire, and the log be in the midst of them, and you will soon get rid of your log. And so it is with little sins. You will be startled with the idea of committing a great sin; and so the devil brings you a little temptation, and leaves you to indulge yourself. "There is no great harm in this; no great peril in that;" and so by these little chips we are first easily lighted up, and at last the green log is burned.

(J. Newton.)

be

ginomai: to come into being, to happen, to become

Original Word: γίνομαι

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: ginomai

Phonetic Spelling: (ghin'-om-ahee)

Short Definition: I come into being, am born

Definition: I come into being, am born, become, come about, happen.

HELPS Word-studies

1096 *gínomai* – properly, to *emerge, become, transitioning* from one point (realm, condition) to another. **1096** (*gínomai*) fundamentally means "become" (becoming, became) so it is *not* an exact equivalent to the ordinary equative verb "to be" (*is, was, will be*) as with **1510** /*eimí* (**1511** / *eínai*, **2258** /*ēn*).

1096 (*ginomai*) means "to become, and signifies a change of condition, state or place" (Vine, Unger, White, NT, 109).

Labor

kopos: laborious toil

Original Word: ΚÓΠΤΟΣ, ΟΥ, Ó

Part of Speech: Noun, Masculine

Transliteration: kopos

Phonetic Spelling: (kop'-os)

Short Definition: trouble, toil, labor

Definition: (a) trouble, (b) toil, labor, laborious toil, involving weariness and fatigue.

HELPS Word-studies

2873 *kópos* (from **2875** /*kóptō*, "to hit, strike") – properly, a strike (blow) that is so hard, it seriously weakens or debilitates; (figuratively) *deep fatigue*, extreme *weariness* (*wearisome toil*).

Labor (2873) (**kopos** [word study]) is used in secular Greek of "a beating," "weariness" (as though one had been beaten) and "exertion," was the proper word for physical tiredness induced by work, exertion or heat. **Kopos** speaks of great effort and exertion, to the point of sweat and exhaustion. It pictures one who is physically become worn out, weary or faint. It describes intense toil even to the point of utter exhaustion if necessary. The work described by **kopos** left one so weary that it was as if the person had taken a beating. **Kopos** speaks not so much of the actual exertion as the weariness which follows the straining of all one's powers to the utmost.

Paul had used **kopos** earlier in the letter writing that...

you recall, brethren, our **labor** (**kopos**) and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of

you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ([1Th 2:9-note](#)) (**Comment:** They worked and ministered, either one of which is enough to sap one's energy, thus we can understand Paul's allusion again to labor, although of course he is not concerned about his physical labor being in vain but his spiritual labor.)

in vain

kenos: empty

Original Word: ΚΕΝΌΣ, ἡ, όν

Part of Speech: Adjective

Transliteration: kenos

Phonetic Spelling: (ken-os')

Short Definition: empty, vain, hollow

Definition: (a) empty, (b) met: empty (in moral content), vain, ineffective, foolish, worthless, (c) false, unreal, pretentious, hollow.

HELPS Word-studies

2756 *kenós* – properly, *empty*, *void*; hence, *worthless* ("null"), *amounting to zero* (of no value, profit).

Vain (**kenos**) means literally to be without something material and thus means empty or without content. It was used with this literal meaning (as in [Mk 12:3](#) "they took him and beat him and sent him away **empty handed**"). More often **kenos** is used figuratively referring to things that lack effectiveness and thus are futile, useless, of no purpose or without result. **Kenos** is used to refer to endeavors, labors, acts, which result in nothing and thus are vain, fruitless, without effect and will not succeed. **Kenos** can refer to being devoid of intellectual, moral, or spiritual value.

In **Galatians** Paul voices similar concerns writing...

2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with *me*.² And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

MacArthur explains **in vain** here writing that "Paul hoped the Jerusalem leaders would support his ministry to the Gentiles and not soften their opposition to legalism. He did not want to see his ministry efforts wasted because of conflict with the other apostles {MacArthur Study Bible: Word}

I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored (**kopiao** = intense toil which include straining to point of exhaustion) over you **in vain** (**eike** - for nothing - it means without any result or for no purpose) (**Gal 4:11**)

Comment: His intense efforts of evangelizing and discipling the Galatians churches might prove futile if they fell back into legalism. Paul would write this same concern to professing Christians today who seek to attain holiness by legal observances!

KJV Bible Commentary sounds a warning note "Paul's labor would have been in vain if all that was accomplished was for the Galatians to exchange their pagan religion for the old abrogated legalism of the Jews. Turning to legalism is equivalent to rejecting the gospel and renouncing Christ. Paul's admonition to the Galatians should be a solemn warning to Christians not to

sacrifice their spiritual liberty in Christ for the slavery of forms and ceremonies." { [KJV Bible Commentary: Nelson](#) }

Galatians

4:8

⁸ But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Galatians 5:2-4

² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Philippians 2:14

¹⁴ Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain

Matt 13:3

³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying:
 “Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some *seed*
 fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.
⁵ Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth;
 and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of
 earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and
 because they had no root they withered away. ⁷ And some fell
 among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸ But
 others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a
 hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.
 Now verse 18 the parable explained

¹⁸ “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone
 hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*,
 then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was
 sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the
 wayside. ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places,
 this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with
 joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a
 while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of
 the word, immediately he stumbles. ²² Now he who received
 seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the
 cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the
 word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ But he who received seed
 on the good ground is he who hears the word and
 understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a
 hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

John 6:60-69

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said,
 “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”

⁶¹ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² *What* then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

⁶⁶ **From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.**

⁶⁷ Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

⁶⁸ But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

John 8:28-31

²⁸ Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. ²⁹ And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” ³⁰ As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

Romans 11:22

²² Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

²³ And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

Colosians 1:21

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,

Hebrews 3:14

¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Hebrews 10:38

³⁸ *Now the just shall live by faith;
But if anyone draws back,
My soul has no pleasure in him.”*

³⁹ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

James 1:25

²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

I John 2:19

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they*

went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

I John 2:24

²⁴ Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father

James Montgomery Boice

There is a fatal defect in the life of Christ's church in the twentieth century: a lack of true discipleship. Discipleship means forsaking everything to follow Christ. But for many of today's supposed Christians — perhaps the majority — it is the case that while there is much talk about Christ and even much furious activity, there is actually very little following of Christ Himself. And that means in some circles there is very little genuine Christianity. Many who fervently call Him 'Lord, Lord' are not Christians (Matthew 7:21)...There are several reasons that the situation I have described is common in today's church. The first is a defective theology that has crept over us like a deadening fog. This theology separates faith from discipleship and grace from obedience. It teaches that Jesus can be received as one's Savior without being received as one's Lord...Discipleship is not a supposed second step in Christianity, as if one first became a believer in Jesus and then, if he chooses, a disciple. From the beginning, discipleship is involved in what

it means to be a Christian....Is 'faith' minus commitment a true biblical faith?...If faith without works is dead—how much truer is it that faith without commitment is dead...True faith involves these elements: knowledge...heart response...and commitment, without which 'faith' is no different from the assent of the demons who 'believe...and shudder' (James 2:19) (James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), pp. 13, 14, 16, 21).