



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

“The Rise of Extreme Tolerance”

By Joe R. Price

The above title is given an article by John MacArthur, published online at www.christianity.com and adapted from his book, *The Truth War* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007). MacArthur is an Evangelical pastor of the Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and President of The Master’s College and Seminary. He is Calvinistic in theology, and unquestionably uses “Christian” and “church” in an inclusive sense that is foreign to the New Testament (Acts 11:26; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4). No one reading these comments should conclude this is an endorsement of MacArthur; it is not.

That said, MacArthur offers insights we would do well to ponder. As he warns evangelicals about “postmodern” objections to clear and authoritative preaching, we are reminded that similar attitudes exist among us. Brethren have been warning of and battling against this very thing for the past thirty years and beyond. [It is worth noting that opposing “extreme tolerance” does not mean “moderate tolerance” of error is acceptable; it is not (Eph. 5:11).]

Downplaying Doctrine

MacArthur bemoans that evangelicals are downplaying doctrine to attract crowds:

Many evangelicals (once known for a very prudent and biblical approach to doctrine) are fast becoming as doctrinally clueless as the unchurched people they are so keen to please. At least three decades of

deliberately downplaying doctrine and discernment in order to attract the unchurched has filled many once-sound churches with people who utterly lack any ability to differentiate the very worst false doctrines from truth. I constantly encounter evangelical church members who are at a loss to answer the most profound errors they hear from cultists, unorthodox media preachers, or other sources of false doctrine.

We have seen a similar turn among brethren who admit they are going in a “new direction.” Being tired of preaching they perceive to be “dry” and “boring” (that which identifies error, rebukes sin with the word of God, and calls sinners to repentance), they clamor for something more pleasing to their ears (2 Tim. 4:3-4; 1 Cor.

2:1). Sermons on how to establish and apply Bible authority are becoming rarer in some churches of Christ these days (Col. 3:17). Bible preaching is being replaced with seminars, workshops, and the latest “how to” book—as if the word of God is out of date and incapable of addressing present-day concerns. Lessons that uphold “sound doctrine” by exposing denominational error as well as error in churches of Christ are fewer and farther between these days. Yet, inspired Scripture continues to be profitable for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16). We must not downplay the apostles’ doctrine. Hold it up for all to see, believe, and obey (Phil. 2:16).

Shades of Gray

MacArthur continues:

The culture around us has declared war on all biblical standards. . . .Some Christians unwittingly began following suit several years ago. That has opened the door for a whole generation in the church to embrace postmodern relativism openly and deliberately. They don’t want the truth presented with stark black-and-white clarity anymore. They prefer having issues of right and wrong, true and false, good and bad deliberately painted in shades of gray. We have reached a point where the typical churchgoer today assumes that is the proper way of understanding truth. Any degree of certainty has begun to sound offensive to people’s postmodernized ears.

Many in the church, caught up in the spirit of the age, think Christians should never take an uncompromising stand, should never argue about anything. We’re not supposed to engage in polemics. I hear this frequently: “Why don’t you just state the truth in positive terms and ignore the view you disagree with? Why not steer clear of controversy, forget the negatives, and present everything affirmatively?”



Olsen Park Church of Christ

Sound familiar? The battle against unity in doctrinal and moral diversity that has raged among us for the past four decades comes down to whether definitive truth is sufficiently revealed in the Scriptures so that we can conclusively know it, believe it, obey it, rebuke those who sin against it, and refuse to have fellowship with those who go beyond it (Eph. 3:3-5; 5:17; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11). From the innovations of institutionalism, to the errors of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, to the length of the days of Genesis 1, and more, shall we “agree to disagree” when the word of God says, “It is written”? No! We will continue to affirm that we can answer “What does the Scripture say?” with divine authority (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 4:30). Jesus said that we can know the truth and be freed from sin (John 8:31-32). God calls us to the old paths of truth; may we ever walk therein (Jer. 6:16).

“Don’t Be So Negative”

MacArthur takes on the whole notion of “positive” preaching (which he sees as a symptom of postmodernism tolerance). We restate his concern here for emphasis:

Many in the church, caught up in the spirit of the age, think Christians should never take an uncompromising stand, should never argue about anything. We’re not supposed to engage in polemics. I hear this frequently: “Why don’t you just state the truth in positive terms and ignore the view you disagree with? Why not steer clear of controversy, forget the negatives, and present everything affirmatively?”

Within the past thirty years some of our brethren said there has been far too much “negative preaching” among us and that we need a more “positive” approach to Christianity. Some warned that being too straightforward with the truth builds walls and runs people off. Bold Bible preaching continues to be seen by some as rudeness and a stumbling block to advancing the cause of Christ. The Bible never describes it in these terms. By way of contrast, the New Testament commands us to “reprove” and “re-

buke” as well as “exhort”—always with proper attitudes of heart (2 Tim. 4:2-5; 2:24-26).

What has been the result of positivism among the evangelicals? MacArthur says,

That ethos is why it is no longer permissible to deal with biblical issues in a straightforward and uncompromising fashion. Those who dare to take an unpopular stand, declare truth in a definitive way—or worst of all, express disagreement with someone else’s teaching—will inevitably be marked as troublesome. Compromise has become a virtue while devotion to truth has become offensive.

In striking similitude, the so-called “positive approach” to Christianity by brethren has resulted in flagging allegiance to definitive truth and compromise with those who teach and practice error. Watchmen are called “watchdogs” while those who advocate demonstrable error are championed as heroes of the faith (Isa. 52:7-8; 62:6; Jer. 6:13-17). Will we learn anything from the evangelicals? Or, will we join them on the path of compromise?

Absolute Truth

MacArthur tells of one Rudy Carrasco, an Emergent Church movement pastor who believes preaching is “simply too one-sided, too authoritative, and too rigid for postmodern times.” He quotes Carrasco as saying: “Every day, every week, there’s stuff that pops up in life, and it’s not resolved, just crazy and confusing and painful. When people come across with three answers, and they know everything, and they have this iron sheen about them, I’m turned off. Period. I’m just turned off. And I think that’s not unique to me” (Tom Allen, “Post-moderns Value Authenticity, Not Authority,” *The Baptist Standard* [July 8, 2004]).

Do you see the rationale? Nobody knows everything; therefore no one can

know anything for certain! That is the devil’s lie! When we preach God’s word of truth as definite and absolute we are charged with “thinking we know everything” (2 Pet. 1:3-4). It is a lie. Such a charge tries to divert attention away from what the Bible actual says; we can know truth that has been revealed to us in the Son (Eph. 3:3-5; Col. 2:2-3; 2 Pet. 1:3).

MacArthur closed with the following challenge:

The world needs Christians who embrace an antithetical worldview, a biblical mindset that answers questions of truth and morality in terms of black and white. Why? Because there is no salvation without absolute, unshakeable truth. Compromising, changing, tolerant opinions don’t provide answers for the “crazy and confusing and painful” issues. . . . Only truth saves and sanctifies and gives hope.

God’s word is sure and certain; it is powerful to save. We must not fail to “**hold fast the pattern of sound words**” and preach the whole counsel of God (2 Tim. 1:13; John 17:17; Col. 3:17; Acts 20:27).

The battle for truth has not ended. It will not end until the kingdom is victoriously delivered up to God the Father. Until then, brethren, we must not sheath the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:2-5; Jude 3).

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