

EMERGING TRUTH AND THE NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN

Session 1 – Foundations

WHAT IS THE EMERGING/EMERGENT CHURCH?

It is a movement within Christianity that is notoriously hard to define.

It is a new movement that dislikes labels and presents itself as a “conversation.”

This conversation features authors, pastors, professors, conferences, websites, blogs and churches, all with their own interests and points of emphasis. When pressed for clarity, and especially when criticized as drifting from or denying the Bible, many of these conversationalists argue that they have been misunderstood, that they were just talking, that they’re still in process and figuring things out, or that the critic is being unkind or unhelpful. For all of these reasons, it’s hard to define the conversation!

The goals of this series:

1. We will attempt to understand how we came to this point in American Christianity, beginning with the idea of postmodernism.
2. We will read and listen to some of the actual words and teachings of a few major figures in the conversation. These clips will be necessarily short, but always fair. Their sources will be cited.
3. We will identify a few of the major challenges that the emergent movement makes to Biblical teaching and the Christian faith.
4. We will learn what the Bible clearly says about these topics and ask God to help us believe it.

I will gladly acknowledge:

1. I have not read everything that has been published in the conversation. I doubt anyone has, or that it’s even humanly possible. I have, however, read a variety of both EC authors and their critics.
2. That this survey is too short and some of its points are too briefly made to cover all of the important topics to anyone’s satisfaction. This includes both proponents and opponents of emerging Christianity.
3. That the goals of this study are offensive to some postmodern, emergent Christians. They would likely argue that their positions are not yet firmly established, that my statements about doctrine are too narrow, and that it is arrogant for any individual to believe he knows what the Bible “clearly says.” I acknowledge those rebukes, but maintain that they are simply not true because of what God has graciously done through His Son, His Spirit and His Word.

BASICS ABOUT THE EMERGENT CHURCH

1. The Emergent church (EC) movement began as an effort to reach the new generation using innovative methods that addressed a culture which everyone agrees is changing rapidly. "Seeker" churches such as Saddleback and Willow Creek reached Boomers, but Emerging leaders were alarmed that younger generations were rapidly leaving the church.

2. The EC is a protest and a pendulum swing.

A. Against traditional evangelicalism and fundamentalism

B. Against the "seeker church"

C. Against institutions and their authority in general

3. The EC comes from the cultural soil of postmodernism.

4. The EC's core issue is truth. The academic word for this area of knowledge is *epistemology* - how we know things, or think we know them.

TRUTH

Does it exist? How do we know? Can we know anything for certain?

Discussion Question: Can you name something that is true for all people, regardless of culture, whether anyone accepts it or not? (Try to do so without appealing to the authority of the Bible.)

Torturing babies for fun

This is what we call "objective truth" – something that is true for everyone, always.

The Biblical explanation of why some truths are obvious to everyone:

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (Romans 2:14-16)

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. (1 Corinthians 5:1)

People everywhere have a conscience! - "*That's just wrong!*"

THE SOIL THE EMERGENT CHURCH GROWS FROM IS POSTMODERNISM

The EC began because its belief that we are living in a whole new way of thinking about the world. We are moving from **Modernism** to **Postmodernism**.

Modernism (1550 – 1945)

1. Starting point: the individual.
2. Believes that truth can be found through reason alone.
3. Believes that truth is found only through what we can see, hear, touch, taste and smell. - "**Science has the answers.**"

This idea makes it impossible to discuss God in a "rational" way.

"You can't talk about *God* making the universe. That's a religious thing. We're talking about *science*."

4. Science alone can deliver facts. Religion can only give us values. Everything outside of science is a matter of personal preference.

Once we abandon the realm of science, the reply we hear is: "That's true for you, but not for me."

5. Believes progress is inevitable.

THEN came two World Wars, the knowledge that government could not be trusted, the disintegration of the family, and a new connection with the world's cultures through travel and technology.

Belief in man's ability to understand the truth (there are so many!) and do what's right (power is used to oppress!) was fatally wounded.

Postmodernism (1945 – present)

1. People are fallible and very limited: they can only see things from their perspective.
2. Truth is relative.

There is no "true way" - just different ways of seeing and doing things.

Believing that some things are true for everybody is arrogant and oppressive.

3. Language itself limits our ability to know truth and express it.

This is especially true when talking about spirituality or God, because the concepts are so big that we cannot really describe them adequately.

4. Truth is found in communities, which “make” their own truth as they talk, share their perspectives, and live out their values.

5. Since we cannot be certain of anything, it is best to be authentic.

Since my own perspective is so limited and “truth” is used so selfishly, it is best to be a “citizen of the world.” I should care about the environment. It makes sense to be skeptical of patriotism, institutions and authority figures. The world is a village, after all.

Postmodernism’s bottom line: the truth is unknowable. Truth is personal and provisional at best.

How do we evaluate these two different ways of seeing the world and truth?

They’re both wrong!

Modernism is fatally flawed because it begins with man, and leaves no room for God. Human reason and motives are selfish and will be turned to evil.

5 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.

6 He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.

8 He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

10 "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

Postmodernism is fatally flawed because its reaction to the errors of modernism is to diminish or deny truth altogether, leaving us in a world with no objective morality, no certainty, and no destination.

“The one thing about trains: It doesn’t matter where you are going. What matters is deciding to get on.” From the conclusion of the movie “The Polar Express.”

BUT NO ONE lives a single day of their lives as if the truth does not exist and cannot be known.

People know who they are. They know that the destination does matter. They know when they are being wronged, and are very quick to say so. (And sue!)

HOW POSTMODERNISM HAS SHAPED THE EMERGING CHURCH

Emerging Christians tend to be diminish, deny, or be uncertain about:

The clarity and authority of the Bible

“The Bells started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself—‘discovering the Bible as a human product,’ as Rob puts it, rather than the product of divine fiat. ‘The Bible is still in the center for us,’ Rob says, ‘but it’s a different kind of center. We want to embrace mystery, rather than conquer it.’

‘I grew up thinking that we’ve figured out the Bible,’ Kristen says, ‘that we knew what it means. Now I have no idea what most of it means. And yet I feel like life is big again—like life used to be black and white, and now it’s in color.’”

Source: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/november/12.36.html?start=2>

The Bible says:

I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth. (John 17:14-17)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16)

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, 40 yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life.”
(John 5:39-40)

The trustworthiness of doctrinal statements

“WHAT DOES EMERGENT VILLAGE BELIEVE?

“We believe in God, beauty, future, and hope - but you won’t find a traditional statement of faith here. We don’t have a problem with faith, but with statements ([read more here](#)). Whereas statements of faith and doctrine have a tendency to stifle friendships, we hope to further conversation and action around the things of God.”

Source: <http://emergentvillage.com/about-information/faqs>

Catch this: They have a statement saying they have a problem with statements!

The Bible says:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 3-4)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

The Emergent Church conversation questions and recasts basic Biblical teachings like the purpose of the death of Jesus, the existence of hell and the nature of God Himself. Generally, if the doctrine is controversial, it is being questioned and revisited. We'll address these important topics later in this survey.

Their position on controversial issues, like homosexuality

“Frankly, many of us don't know what we should think about homosexuality. We've heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say "it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us." That alienates us from both the liberals and conservatives who seem to know exactly what we should think. Even if we are convinced that all homosexual behavior is always sinful, we still want to treat gay and lesbian people with more dignity, gentleness, and respect than our colleagues do. If we think that there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships, we know that the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex. We aren't sure if or where lines are to be drawn, nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn.

“Perhaps we need a five-year moratorium on making pronouncements. In the meantime, we'll practice prayerful Christian dialogue, listening respectfully, disagreeing agreeably. When decisions need to be made, they'll be admittedly provisional. We'll keep our ears attuned to scholars in biblical studies, theology, ethics, psychology, genetics, sociology, and related fields. Then in five years, if we have clarity, we'll speak; if not, we'll set another five years for ongoing reflection. After all, many important issues in church history took centuries to figure out. Maybe this moratorium would help us resist the "winds of doctrine" blowing furiously from the left and right, so we can patiently wait for the wind of the Spirit to set our course.”

Brian McLaren

Source: http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/01/brian_mclaren_o.html

“I now believe that GLBTQ can live lives in accord with biblical Christianity (at least as much as any of us can!) and that their monogamy can and should be sanctioned and blessed by church and state.” **Tony Jones**

<http://blog.beliefnet.com/tonyjones/2008/11/same-sex-marriage-blogologue-h.html>

The Bible says:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

The legitimacy of preaching

"Why do I get to speak for 30 minutes and you don't?

"A sermon is often a violent act," says Pagitt, a key figure among emerging leaders.

"It's a violence toward the will of the people who have to sit there and take it."

Source:http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2462&Itemid=117

The Bible says:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Timothy 4:1-4)

YOUTUBE VIDEO FROM PBS SPECIAL HERE: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGSQjtWTpaw>

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW:

The truth is – there IS TRUTH.

God has spoken and acted so that we can know the truth.

His gracious work to communicate the truth overcomes our limitations to understand and love the truth.

You don't have to know all the truth to have a genuine relationship with God.

You can be absolutely sure who God is and what He has said without being arrogant.

Uncertainty is not humility.

All of Scripture and all truth points to Jesus, who IS the Truth in the flesh. (John 14:6)

The Bible says that the truth can be known, and known so well that its counterfeits can be detected and should be rejected.

The most readable of the books describing and countering the Emergent movement is *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* by Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck (Moody Publishers, 2008)

