

# EMERGING TRUTH AND THE NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN

## Session 2 – Thinking about doctrine – Reason and Scripture

The core issue with the emergent movement is not couches, candles, or style. The issue is **doctrine** – what the Bible is and what it **teaches**. As we survey emergent theology, we'll encounter many arguments against historic Christian doctrine.

PLAY ROB BELL'S "VELVET ELVIS" UNTIL 3:44 MARK

## Common mistakes in the postmodern/emergent conversation:

### 1. Self-contradicting arguments

This is probably the single greatest flaw in postmodern reasoning when it comes to truth claims. The EC says it distrusts statements. But it ultimately has to *make* statements saying that the statements it doesn't like are false!

"There are no absolute truths."

**"Really? Do you believe that absolutely?"**

An example from [emergentvillage.com](http://emergentvillage.com) -

"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>

**Response:**

They have a statement saying they have a problem with statements!

They also "hope to further conversation and action around the things of God" but to do that someone is going to have to say WHAT "the things of God" are! Caring for the environment? Feeding the hungry? Blessing gay marriage? Learning things from other religions? Telling people that only Jesus can save them from sin?

### 2. False dilemmas

"As an American citizen, would you rather have freedom of speech or the right to a fair trial?"

**"The Bill of Rights guarantees me both!"**

## An example from Tony Jones:

"As I gained a little prominence as an author in the youth ministry world, people began asking me my opinion on homosexuality. I often quoted one of my seminary professors, Bill Pannell, who was involved in the civil rights movement. I had lunch with him during my last semester at seminary and as we drove back to campus he said to me, "**Civil rights and abortion will be nothing compared to how the church has to deal with homosexuality.**" I'm glad it's your generation and not mine who'll have to figure that out."

With that in mind, I always responded, "**I'm holding that issue in abeyance.**" I haven't made up my mind yet, and I'm in no hurry to. Homosexuality," I would say, "I (sic) one issue that I don't want to get wrong."

And yet, all the time **I could feel myself drifting toward acceptance that gay persons are fully human persons and should be afforded all of the cultural and ecclesial benefits that I am.** ("Aha!" my critics will laugh derisively, "I knew he and his ilk were on a continuous leftward slide!")

"In any case, 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.

"Well, I suppose this blogologue will be a test of whether I have good theological and philosophical reasons for supporting the rights of GLBTQ persons to marry, or whether I've simply caved to the mushy inclusivity of pluralized nothingness. In either case, Rod, I'm looking forward to this conversation, and I'm praying that it is ultimately glorifying of God."

### Tony Jones

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

## Response:

This implies that anyone who believes gay marriage is wrong must believe that gay persons are less than "fully human."

## 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, 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)

## 3. Choosing beliefs that accommodate today's sensibilities rather than affirming what God has clearly said in His Word.

DOUG PAGGIT "CHRISTIANITY WORTH BELIEVING 5" video found here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf2gDprVpDI>

#### 4. The need for absolute knowledge before anything can be known for sure.

The EC correctly points out that people, including Christians, have done evil things because they were certain it was the right thing to do. So they say, "Let's not be so sure of ourselves."

But the problem is not with certainty itself, much less with Scripture. Those who did evil in the name of Jesus were simply wrong. The EC has the right diagnosis, but the wrong medicine.

"When we 'do theology,' we are clay pots pondering the potter, kids pondering their father, ants discussing the elephant. At some level of profundity and accuracy we are bound to be inadequate or incomplete all the time, in almost anything we say or think, considering our human limitations, including language, and God's infinite greatness.

"Our words will seek to be servants of mystery, not removers of it as they were in the old world. They will convey a message that is clear yet mysterious, simple yet mysterious, substantial yet mysterious. My faith developed in the old world of many words, in a naïve confidence in the power of many words, as if the mysteries of faith could be captured like fine-print conditions in a legal document and be reduced to safe equations. Mysteries, however, cannot be captured so precisely. Freeze-dried coffee, butterflies on pins, and frogs in formaldehyde all lose something in our attempts at capturing, defining, preserving, and rendering them less jumpy, flighty or fluid. In the new world, we understand this a little better." (Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*. Cited in D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, p. 129.

#### **Response:**

Brian McLaren uses many words to tell us that we can't really capture the truth in words!

We are told that clarity and certainty tend to kill living things. In this analogy, the faith is never static. It's always moving, changing, and fluid.

We are told that the distance between God and us is simply too great for us to be too sure about anything.

By this standard, it's hard to imagine how anyone could be sure about much of anything. In EC terms, this is "mystery."

#### **Four words to remember about the Bible:**

Clarity – The Bible is clear.

Content – The Bible delivers a definite message: truth from God.

Authority – God's truth has the right and the power to change our lives.

Life – God did all this that we may have life.

## CLARITY

### The Bible speaks clearly

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether." (Psalm 19:7-9) ESV

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105 ESV

The unfolding of your Words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. (Psalm 119:130) ESV

**God made His Word clear so that it would give life and change life.**

## CONTENT

**God's message has been delivered once for all to all believers.**

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) ESV

*So the task is not "repainting the Christian faith" but faithfully passing it on to others!*

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2) ESV

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the Word I preached to you unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) ESV

Gospel means "**Good News**." There is a definite, clear, life giving truth to announce, and it's **personal**.

## AUTHORITY

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

# LIFE

## The Bible tells us about Jesus – The written Word testifies to the incarnate Word

"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) ESV

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13) ESV

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him Who is true; and we are in Him Who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20) ESV

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:14-17) ESV

## WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

God has personally spoken in His Word and by His Son. He has spoken clearly so that we may know Him, and be sure that it is Him!

While our understanding of God will always be incomplete and growing, that does *not* mean it is uncertain.

God's power graciously overcomes our sinful limitations so that we may really know Him. This points to His goodness, not our wisdom.

Yes, we are "kids pondering the Father." He has created us, spoken to us and forgiven us so that we may know Him!

Understanding this will make us truly humble.

*Issues we will consider next week:*

**Jesus** – His message and the purpose of His death.

**The existence of heaven and hell**

