

# EMERGING TRUTH AND THE NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN

## Session 3 – Jesus, the Cross, and Hell

One of the chief characteristics in postmodern thought is that little, if anything, can be known for certain. Certainty is considered arrogant and intolerant. It is said that certainty leads to the abuse of power.

This lack of confidence in certainty has shaped the Emergent view of Scripture, so that they do not believe it is clear. Without clarity, confidence in the Bible's content also disappears. ("Who knows what it really means?") Finally, Scripture's authority is also lost.

**With all of this lost, it is no wonder that the message and death of Jesus are being reevaluated by leading emergent thinkers.**

In Emergent teaching, especially in the prolific work of Brian McLaren, the central message and work of Jesus does not deal primarily with saving people from hell by paying for their sins on the cross.

From a 2005 PBS interview with Brian McLaren:  
(*Emphasis added*)

"I think it would be safe to say that everything we're doing with the emerging conversation is summed up in saying, "What is the message of Jesus, and what is the message of the kingdom of God? What does that mean?" In many ways, what we feel has happened is the church has tended too often to be about institutional survival, which results in horrible things, from fund-raising scandals to covering up pedophilia scandals. When institutional survival is the purpose of the church -- Jesus said it: "If you save your life you lose it. You can gain the world and lose your soul." So the church starts to lose its soul. **The church has been preoccupied with the question, "What happens to your soul after you die?" And that has resulted in, all too often, an abandonment of the ethics of the kingdom of God, the ethics of Jesus for this life and our history here and now.**"

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"The way I've tried to describe what I'm trying to do is this way: let's say you're going down a road and you come to a T in the road. And there's a sign, and it says if you turn left you get to Boston, and if you turn right you get to New York City. And I get to that T and I think, "You know what, I actually want to go to Los Angeles." At that moment, my answer isn't to turn left or to turn right, my answer is to turn around and rethink how I got to where I am now.

**"I think we're in a similar situation in not just evangelical Christianity, but really in Western Christianity -- that for a very long time we have been very preoccupied with the question, as if the reason for Jesus coming can be summed up in 'Jesus is trying to help get more souls into heaven, as opposed to hell, after they die.' I just think a fair reading of the gospels blows that out of the water. I don't think that the entire message and life of Jesus can be boiled down to that bottom line."**

The entire interview is here: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week846/interview.html>

The message of Jesus, as presented by Brian McLaren, Tony Campolo and others in the Emergent "conversation" has to do with their understanding of the Kingdom of God – which they say is a primary concern for earthly injustices and tragedies, like poverty, slavery, and disease.

From the PBS interview:

***“In GENEROUS ORTHODOXY you’re pretty critical especially of the evangelical focus on personal salvation. Why does that trouble you? That is one of the basic concepts in many people’s theology in the evangelical church.”***

“Well, first of all, I’m not at all against the idea of a personal relationship with God. I think that’s where it all begins. I think this is part of the beauty of the message of Jesus. Every individual is invited into a personal relationship with God. But personal is not private, so personal doesn’t just mean it’s me and God, or me and Jesus, but personal means that my connection to God also connects me to other people and connects me to what God is doing, the mission of God in our world.”

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“You know, you could look at it like this: if becoming a Christian makes a person withdraw and isolate so that their focus is on what will happen to [them] after death, and makes them less involved in the problems and needs of this world here, today, every person who becomes a Christian in some ways is taken out of the game. But if being a Christian means converting from being part of the problem to being part of the solution, then every person who is a dynamic, growing Christian is engaged in the world as an activist on the cause of justice and peace.”

## **Response:**

Once again we are confronted with a **false dilemma**. In this one, a personal concern for your eternal salvation makes you withdrawn, isolated (and consequently very selfish) so that you have no concern for earthly problems like poverty and disease.

This is an amazingly unfair reading of Christian history because God’s people have always been concerned with both issues. Genuine Christians are the greatest force for good on earth, counting among their good works hospitals, orphanages, and relief work of all kinds. The Gospel has invariably produced what missiologists call “redemption and lift.” Cultures with a large number of genuine Christians always become more peaceful, just, compassionate and productive.

**But Christians have correctly put the ultimate and urgent focus on what happens to a person after death, just as Jesus did!**

The Emergent understanding (which echoes the “Social Gospel” of the early 1900’s) necessarily changes the reason Jesus died and questions or denies the existence of hell.

A 2006 podcast interview with Brian McLaren makes this clear.

### **(Portion of Brian McLaren interview)**

You can hear the entire interview here:

Part 1: <http://bleedingpurplepodcast.blogspot.com/2006/01/brian-mclaren-interview-part-i.html>

Part 2: <http://bleedingpurplepodcast.blogspot.com/2006/01/interview-with-brian-mclaren-part-ii.html>

## What does the Bible say about Jesus' message and the purpose of His death?

### **Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand. People should respond by repenting and believing the Good News!**

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

### **After feeding the hungry 5,000, Jesus framed people's earthly and eternal needs in clear terms. *And they rejected Him for it!***

22 On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone— 23 however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks— 24 when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. 25 And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?"

26 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

30 Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, '*He gave them bread from heaven to eat.*'"

32 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. 40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:22-39)

### **Jesus predicted His death on the cross for the salvation of those who believe:**

13 "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:13-19)

### **John the Baptist explained the message and purpose of Jesus in stark terms:**

25 Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. 26 And they

came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I *must* decrease. 31 He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32 And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. 33 He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. 34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. 35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. 36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:25-35)

### **Jesus said belief in Him was the difference between life and death:**

21 Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come."

22 So the Jews said, "Will He kill Himself, because He says, 'Where I go you cannot come'?"

23 And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins."

25 Then they said to Him, "Who are You?"

And Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. 26 I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him."

27 They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.

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.

### **Jesus said that He alone grants people eternal life and a home with God:**

1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. 4 And where I go you know, and the way you know."

5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)

### **John explains that He wrote His Gospel so we would believe and have eternal life:**

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)

### **Jesus warned of the reality of hell in the most graphic, horrible language:**

43 "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched — 44 where

*' Their worm does not die  
And the fire is not quenched.'*

45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched — 46 where

*' Their worm does not die  
And the fire is not quenched.'*

47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— 48 where

*' Their worm does not die  
And the fire is not quenched.'* "

(Mark 9:43-47)

### **God is the One who has authority over life, death and hell:**

4 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

6 "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

8 "Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. 9 But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

(Luke 12:4-8)

### **Hell is justified because of the horrendous offense of defying God:**

1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Hebrews 2:1-3)

28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(Hebrews 10:28-31)

***The hardest question regarding hell: How can never-ending punishment for finite sins be justified?***

**Answer: The degree of punishment is not determined by the length of time it takes to commit the crime, but by the dignity, worth, and honor of the One we offend.**

**The greater our obligation to love, honor and obey a person, the greater the offense when we refuse to do so.**

### **But Isaiah explained that God would make Jesus absorb the punishment for our sins:**

4 Surely He has borne our griefs  
And carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted.  
5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,  
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.  
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,  
And who will declare His generation?  
For He was cut off from the land of the living;  
For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.  
9 And they made His grave with the wicked  
But with the rich at His death,  
Because He had done no violence,  
Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.  
10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;  
He has put *Him* to grief.

### **God did this because of His great love, to save us from His righteous wrath:**

6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have now received the reconciliation.  
(Romans 5:6-11)

### **God accomplished this through the death of His Son on the cross:**

13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,  
14 in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.  
(Colossians 1:9-14)

### **WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW:**

- 1. Major leaders in the EC are denying basic Biblical teachings and recasting them in the image of contemporary sensibilities. The crises facing humanity are enormous, so they affirm this is Jesus' main concern. The thought of a God who punishes sin is unthinkable, so they deny His existence.**
- 2. Our concern over people's earthly troubles will be of no comfort to them if they die without finding eternal life in Jesus Christ.**
- 3. The horror of sin, the dread of God's wrath, and the depth of His love is most clearly and gloriously seen in the Cross of His Son, Jesus.**