

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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True Spirituality and *Christianity Today* (Part 5)

Theological drifting can and does take place whenever the authority of Scripture is questioned. It does not just happen when there is an open denial. More often than not it is not a flat out denial of Biblical authority, but the subtle suggestion that what is being advanced is an attempt to *adjust* the doctrine to insights of modern scholarship. An example of this is seen in a recent book of Brian McLaren who claims that the traditional understanding of the Bible is hopelessly entangled in a Platonic dualism.¹ To begin with, McLaren declares,

The **Bible is not our authoritative constitution** because that would reinforce a dualism between God and us and enable those in the know to feel superior to those who don't get it.

There is **no Garden of Eden, no Adam and Eve, and no Fall**, because that would imply a dualism between a previously good world and our present fallen one. In fact, McLaren boldly proclaims that he would rather be an atheist than to believe in a God involved in those traditional Christian doctrines.

There is **no hell**, for that would be the ultimate power play upon those on the outside, resulting in an everlasting dualism between the saved and the damned.

Other religions must be acceptable because who are we to say that we are better than them? (another dualism).

Homosexual practice is not only acceptable, it beats advocating "the Platonic dualisms in which maleness and femaleness are two absolute, eternal categories of being into which all people fit."²

Bruce Walke, one of my former professors, has written about man's fall into sin and discusses the way Satan's first temptation took shape.³ He suggests that this original act of temptation is an archetype of sorts. All of the temptation that would follow through the long line of human experience would mimic this one. Satan tempted the second human being in the same way he tempts today. It is not just Satan who works in this way, though, but all human beings. We are prone to following Satan in luring others into sin in the same way.⁴

Here are five steps to leading another person into sin.

- I. **Be a Theologian.** There is little doubt that Satan is a theologian, and a skilled and outspoken one at that. He has had a very long time to study God and, as a leader among angels, once enjoyed free access to him and close communion with him. Satan knows God and knows about the character of God. But unlike the theologians we seek to be, Satan is a theologian who despises God with every bit of his being. When he turns to Eve and says, 'Did God really say...?' he brings Eve into a dialogue that opens her mind to a new realm of possibility, one she would not have thought of on her own. He knows God well enough to know what God has said and done. But there is more. Satan is not only a student of God but also of men. From the moment God first spoke of man, Satan must have been watching and observing. Knowing that man was the crown

of creation. Satan was surely looking for an opening, a way to destroy this jewel. He became a student of the ways of men. Gilpin long ago wrote, "*He considers and acquaints himself with the condition of every man, and for that end he studies man.*" God's question concerning Job, 'Hast thou considered my servant Job?' Job i.8, doth imply, not only his diligent inquiry into Job's state—for the original expresseth it by Satan's 'putting his heart upon Job, or laying him to his heart'—but that this is usual with Satan so to do; as if God had said, It is thy way to pry narrowly into every man: hast thou done this to Job? Hast thou considered him as thou usest to do? And indeed Satan owns this as his business and employment in his answer to God, 'I come from going to and fro in the earth, from walking up and down in it.' This cannot be properly said of him who is a spirit. Bodies go up and down, but not spirits; so that his meaning is, he had been at his work of inquiring and searching."⁵ As a theologian, a psychologist and an anthropologist, Satan has unique skill at leading men astray.

- II. **Turn commands into questions.** Satan takes the command of God and rephrases it as a question. 'Did God really say?' What was a clear statement suddenly becomes hazy. Posing as a theologian he asks, 'Are you sure about this, or is this only Adam's testimony as to what God said? Are you sure? How do you know? Is this really a command? Can we discuss this a little bit? Is it possible that you misinterpreted what God said? Is it possible that there is some context here we've ignored?' Waltke says, 'Within the framework of faith, these questions are proper and necessary, but when they are designed to lead us away from the simplicity of childlike obedience, they are wrong.' And so we see Satan raising questions of interpretation and authority necessarily designed to create doubt and confusion and to lead away from the simplicity of a childlike obedience. Candlish observes, "Thus, first, he insinuates doubts regarding the equity and goodness of God:--" Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (ver. 1). Can it be? Has he really subjected you to so unreasonable a restraint? And the insinuation takes effect. Suspicion begins to rankle in the woman's breast. In her very manner of citing the terms of the covenant, she shows that she is dwelling more on the single restriction, than on all the munificence of the general grant. In the Lord's first announcement of it, the main stress is laid upon the grant. It is expressed with a studied prodigality of emphasis; "of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." And the single limitation is but slightly, though solemnly, noted; "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." The woman, however, drinking in the miserable poison of suspicion which the serpent has instilled, reverses this mode of speaking. How disparagingly does she notice the fullness and freeness of the gift;--"we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden!" That is all the acknowledgment she makes; and there is no cordiality in it. It is not "every tree," nor, "we may freely eat;" but, "we may eat of the fruit of the trees;"—as if the permission were grudgingly given;—and as if it were altogether a matter of course, and even less almost than her right. On the other hand, she dwells upon the prohibition, amplifying it and magnifying it as an intolerable hardship;—"but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it" (ii. 16, 17; iii. 2, 3)."⁶
- III. **Emphasize prohibition over freedom.** Satan carefully and deliberately distorts, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden' into 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?' He overlooks the great freedom God gave Adam and Eve and instead overstates the one prohibition. He gets Eve to focus on the prohibition rather than the gift and the freedom. Instead of focusing on the Tree of Life, from which she was free to eat, and on the millions of other trees available to her, Satan got her to focus her heart on that one tree from which she was not allowed to eat. And Eve began to focus not on what she had been given, but on what had been forbidden. And suddenly nothing but what was forbidden could satisfy her.
- IV. **Doubt God's sincerity and motives.** Satan casts God's motives as self-regard rather than love. 'God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' He convinces Eve that God is limiting her, that he is not giving her the full measure of humanity. He is holding back, reserving for himself things that she deserves to know and to experience. As Waltke says, we hear this message all around us today. 'Be liberated! Be free! Self-actualize! Unleash your inner potential! The Serpent's message even echoes in the

church. Instead of sanctification, the church seeks self-improvement. Instead of holiness, the church seeks happiness.' When you hear such things, you can rest assured that the Serpent is once again at work seeking to convince you that you need to be something other than what you were created to be.

- V. **Deny what God says is true.** In the final step. Satan flatly denies what is true. "You will not surely die." The fruit of all of the doubt and the resentment is unbelief. If God's words happen to hinder us from becoming what we want to be or from doing what we want to do, Satan convinces us that we can safely ignore them. In the church today many people de-emphasize sin because it may hinder the quest self-actualization or it may make people feel guilty or damage their self-esteem. "Sadly, says Waltke, many evangelical churches are in the process of buying into a guilt-free, pain-free, judgment-free gospel."

CONCLUSION: In the face of such temptation, the woman yields to Satan's denials and half-truths. Having stripped Eve of her spiritual defenses, Satan's work is done. Without God, the decision will be made purely on the basis of pragmatism, of what works best to bring about the desired end, on the basis of aesthetics, of what is beautiful, and on the basis of self-improvement, of what will bring her supposed wisdom. It is only one short step from here to outright disobedience. And so Satan works through questioning, doubt, focusing on what is forbidden and finally on outright denial of the truth. And Eve is only the first to be drawn in and to succumb to the temptation. But note carefully how it all began. She begins to question God's Word and harkens to *another* source of authority. This is exactly what Joanna Quintrell does. The fact that Christianity Today would praise her for her efforts is even more disappointing.⁷ Robert Reymond, one of the finest Reformed Theologians of this generation, has written, "In spite of Protestantism's historic confessional testimony, however, many people under the influence of the claims of the modern charismatic movement are calling into question the position of historic Protestantism on this matter and are being persuaded by the most extravagant claims that God is speaking directly to men today, short-circuiting thereby the *absolute necessity* for the Scriptures as far as a revelation from God is concerned, and calling into question its sufficiency. I would emphasize that this is precisely the immediate result of such teaching, for *just to the degree that men today claim to receive revelations from God directly, and propagate these so-called 'revelations,' just to that degree, they and the men who hear and accede to them do not need the Scriptures alone.* The Christian who asserts that he or others receive such revelations, to be consistent, must cease to speak of the Bible as the *only* infallible rule of faith and practice, for he or they have another, namely, the *new* revelations. Such revelations by their very nature would be on a par with Scripture respecting their authority. Paul Woolley is absolutely right when he says: 'If such communications were actually being made, every Christian would be a potential author of Scripture. We would only need to write down accurately what God said to us, and we would be legitimately adding to the Bible, for such writings would be the Word of God' (*The Infallible Word*, p. 192). And how is the Christian to respond to the first verb in the imperative mode in such a revelation when it comes, and it will come, indeed, it already has! Must he dismiss it out of hand? Must he heed it? Is it not true that he faces nothing less than a crisis in authority? The answer is obvious."⁸

Jonathan Edwards, who is considered by many the finest theological thinker that America has ever produced, concluded from his experiences during the Great Awakening the following: "God has given his infallible Word and it is not an insignificant or harmless thing when people mistakenly claim to be inspired by God. One erroneous principle, than which scarce any has proved more mischievous to the present glorious work of God, is a notion that it is God's manner in these days, to guide his saints, at least some that are more eminent, by inspiration or immediate revelation. They suppose he makes known to them what shall come to pass hereafter, or what it is his will that they should do, by impressions made upon their minds, either with or without texts of Scripture; whereby something is made known to them, that is not taught in Scripture. By such a notion the devil has a great door opened for him; and if once this opinion should come to be fully yielded to, and established in the church of God, Satan would have opportunity thereby to set up himself as the guide and oracle of God's people, and to have *his* word regarded as their infallible rule, and so to lead them where he would, and to introduce what he pleased, and soon to bring the Bible into neglect and contempt. Late experience, in some instances, has shown that the tendency of this notion is to cause persons to esteem the Bible as in a great measure useless."⁹

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ B. McLaren, A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming The Faith (Harper, 2010). Not only does McLaren lack any formal Theological training, he displays a very superficial grasp of philosophy, especially ancient Greek philosophy. His facile labeling of all things in Christianity that he doesn't like as Platonic dualism would make college level philosophy students laugh out loud.
- ² This analysis is taken from Mike Wittmer and can be found at <http://mikewittmer.wordpress.com/2010/02/008/brian-mclaren-a-new-kind-of-christianity-q...>
- ³ B. Waltke, Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical and Thematic Approach (Zondervan, 2007).
- ⁴ This complete outline is taken from Tim Challies, cf. <http://www.challies.com/2/16/2010>.
- ⁵ Richard Gilpin, Daemondogia Sacra; or A Treatise of Satan's Temptations (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 2000) p. 59.
- ⁶ R. S. Candlish, Studies In Genesis: Expository Messages (rpt. Kregel, 1979) p. 62.
- ⁷ This trend appears to be growing amongst professing Evangelicals. Steve Brown, (professor of Communication and Practical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida and best known as the host of the well-known radio program *Key Life*) also claims to receive direct revelation from God. Brown interviewed William Young, the controversial author of the best selling book The Shack (see sermon notes 4 through 8 in this series) and raved about how great the book was. My friend Dan Phillips recently addressed some of his concerns about Brown, especially his claims about God giving his direct revelation: "Brown says some things that are **absolutely, barkingly, wildly irresponsible**; and if his students take any of them seriously, they will **ruin** their **ministries, themselves, and other people**. For instance: Brown keeps talking about **dialogues** he has **with God**, and quoting (usually without qualification) things God supposedly says to him, Steve Brown, that are **not in Scripture**. But it's okay, remember, don't be alarmed – because he says believes in the Reformed position on the inerrancy and sufficiency of the Bible, and he isn't a charismatic, and maybe he's hearing God wrong. (Those are his "covers.") Yet Brown natters on about things **God says to him**, about God laughing, and a bunch of dribble attributed to God – and Brown isn't talking about the Bible. Which, as you now...yikes. Fingernails on the chalkboard of my soul." <http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2/17/2010>
- ⁸ R.L. Reymond, What About Continuing Revelations and Miracles In the Presbyterian Church Today? (P & R, 1976) p. 26.
- ⁹ As cited by Victor Budgen, The Charismatics and the Word of God (Evangelical Press, 1987) p. 176.