

STRAIGHTWAY

And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him [Mark 1:18].

CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

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The Pied Piper of Christian Hedonism

Dr. H. T. Spence

The Neo-Christianity of the end time continues to birth various mutating strains of “another gospel,” seeking to replace the appointed Gospel of the Scriptures in the institutional churches. The Apostle Paul warned of “another gospel” that would *pervert* the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:7); he also warned of those preaching “another Jesus” and “another Spirit” (II Corinthians 11:4). It is evident by the responses of professing Christians today that the greatest potential weapon against the elect will be deception (Matthew 24:24). Often the pied pipers of another gospel are obvious to the child of God; the light of God’s Word easily exposes their overt, telltale heresy. Nevertheless, at other times some pied pipers

creep in wearing a conservative cloak while speaking a trendy and infatuating heresy. Their swelling words are assimilated with fervor and excitement as a new theological novelty. Rather than appearing as a new fundamental doctrine, their deception often begins with a needed truth for someone’s life. Though it may be a secondary truth of fundamental doctrine, this truth is forced into an acute prominence. Infatuation with this theological curiosity begins to eclipse fundamental doctrine while becoming the *heart* or *central* doctrine of a person’s theological system. From such an off-centered heart, all the tributaries of his thought begin to flow; from that off-centered hub all the spokes of his teaching of truth extend.

Heresy is often conceived when a minor truth of the atonement is distorted into a major truth. The word *heresy* comes from the Greek word *heretickon* meaning, “to choose.” Heresy is a choosing of a false teaching that when continually taught produces a faction, a party, or a following of people. The teaching is called a heresy, and the person who continues to promote it after being warned becomes a heretic.

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself (Titus 3:10,11).

In the process of teaching, how often is a biblical truth taken out of its context and made into a separate teaching that becomes an enemy to other teachings of the Scriptures?

The Neo-Evangelical Heresy

Neo-Evangelicalism has become an influentially strong, integral part

of the Neo-Christianity of our day. Thus it has also become part of the warp and woof of the Charismatic movement. Whereas most of their operable principles are the same (being born of the same womb), the Charismatic movement mainly differs with its emphasis on speaking in tongues and overt prosperity. Their commonalities are obvious: a positive self-esteem-building message, ecumenism, pragmatism, the judge-not philosophy, avoiding controversy, hatred for biblical separation, soft-on-sin approach, CCM, etc. The programming of Trinity Broadcasting Network bears witness to ever-increasing fellowship of Neo-Evangelicals with Charismatics.

The doctrinal elasticity of the Neo-Christianity enables a broad spectrum of teachings to enter its arena. The broader the spectrum is, the greater the span of deception. As Fundamentalism declines in its militant stand, more and more Neo-Christianity will increase its artful logistic invasion within the seminaries and congregations of this last bastion against liberalism, modernism, Romanism, and the various Neo’s of the end time.

Christian Hedonism – A New Theology

One recent trendy theology that has come down the pipeline of conservatism is Christian Hedonism. Its champion is a Neo-Evangelical scholar named John Stephen Piper. Piper is a graduate of the strongly

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Neo-Evangelical schools, Wheaton College and Fuller Theological Seminary. He acknowledges his allegiance to the teachings of Daniel Fuller, the protégé of Harold Ockenga, Father of Neo-Evangelicalism. Daniel Fuller also studied at the liberal, Neo-Orthodox schools of Germany. Amidst these influences, Mr. Piper has dialectically mixed the teachings of Jonathan Edwards' Calvinism with his own new twist of Neo-Evangelicalism.

Having become the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1980, John Piper went on to become the promoter of a neo view of Hedonism he called Christian Hedonism. Although his writings on this subject became very popular in the Neo-Evangelical camp in the late 1980s, such writings have now made their way into Fundamentalism. Many who have secretly tired of biblical separation and the militant aspects of true Fundamentalists are now looking to Piper for a breath of fresh air. He is providing a "shot of opium" for their backsliding and cold hearts. He is providing a solution that requires no stand anymore against apostasy; instead he promotes Christianity from a humanistic and positivistic perspective.

From a philosophical point of view, Hedonism is the primary value system of western society. Hedonism is the pursuit of personal pleasure and happiness; it is the freedom to do whatever one wants; it is a

term of aggressive selfishness. Such a pursuit has a domino effect in an individual's life. The pursuit of pleasure leads to the desire for more pleasure, which leads to cravings and lusts, which open the door for many temptations, which ultimately lead to sins. Hedonism in the end becomes a god. Both the denotation and connotation of *hedonism* have remained unchanged throughout history; it is a word that cannot be moved from its philosophical base.

Since World War II hedonism has been the philosophical pursuit of America. It dominated the drug culture and the sexual promiscuity of the 1960s; it motivated the cultural rebellion of the sixties and seventies. It has materialized in the lifestyles of the rich and famous, such as Michael Jackson and Madonna who have been pied pipers calling this generation to such a pursuit. Hedonism destroys all principles of morality and standards of living; it produces a hatred for anything that gets in the way of the pursuit of pleasure and happiness. Everywhere in the Bible that this pursuit is presented, it is viewed as sinful.

Nevertheless, John Piper has forced together these two irreconcilable words, producing a true dialectic principle in terminology. He is calling all to "Christian" hedonism. It is like bringing the "flesh" and "Spirit" together in a marriage of thought which Paul states cannot be done (Galatians 5:17).

In Piper's book *Desiring God*, he proposes that a hedonistic value system become the superlative, determining factor in living the Christian life; that hedonism become the sole or chief good in life. Although Piper endeavors to twist the understanding of hedonism to fit within a theological framework found in God, he still believes the hedonistic principle. He believes that God made us to be hedonists, and therefore we should pursue God in order to achieve pleasure and happiness. Pleasure and happiness is the goal; God is merely the means to that goal.

The important catechetical question "What is the chief and highest end of man?" is correctly answered, "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him for ever." However, according to Piper, it is not the *glorifying* of God that should be our chief purpose in life; our highest purpose should be pursuing the *pleasure* that we receive from glorifying God. This is the essence of Christian Hedonism: man's chief and highest end is to glorify God *by* fully enjoying him forever (*Desiring God*, page 15). The glorifying of God becomes irrelevant; only the pleasure and happiness one derives from glorifying God become the chief end.

Piper's New Theology

Three books that define Piper's Christian Hedonism are *Desiring God*, *Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, and

The Dangerous Duty of Delight. Like so many neo theologies, Christian Hedonism is based upon out-of-context Scriptures, misappropriation of Scripture, abridgment of Scripture, and at times redefining of terminology. In *Desiring God*, he declares, "Unless a man be born again into a Christian Hedonist he cannot see the kingdom of God (p. 55)." This new theology is forced into a Scripture that would denounce such an addition! Piper also questions the Scriptures, suggesting a more appropriate rendering:

Could it be that today the most straightforward biblical command for conversion is not, "believe in the Lord," but, "delight yourself in the Lord" (*Desiring God*, p. 55)?

He strongly exhorts his readers to pursue joy as if it is the necessary superlative:

The pursuit of joy in God is not optional. It is not an extra that a person might grow into after he comes to faith. Until your heart has hit upon this pursuit, your faith cannot please God. It is not saving faith (*Desiring God*, p. 69).

One of the many fallacies found in this new theology is that happiness and pleasure are relative and subjective to the individual. What is happiness and pleasure to one may not be the same to another. Where I go, what I do, or what I think are to be the only things that matter. Therefore having the boundaries of standards and principles is abhorred; this is why biblical separation cannot

be a part of this new theology.

Piper declares God to be a hedonist, that He is always motivated by what brings pleasure or happiness. Ezekiel 18:23 is among several Scriptures that contradict his thesis: “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? Saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways and live?” This passage indicates that God does not have pleasure that the wicked should die (that is, in his sins, eternally). Piper indicates that God is happy all the time no matter what takes place on the earth. However, it is evident in Scripture that there are some things with which God is not happy and from which He does not receive pleasure.

How far is a follower to go with such a theology? One ardent follower of Piper stated the following:

My purpose in life is not to help other people or ‘save’ them from hell, but so that God might enjoy me enjoying him. It just so happens that pleasure makes me hedonistically pursue helping the poor and lost, listening to Mozart and Nine Inch Nails, going camping, discussing politics, and making love to my wife. As I live this hedonistic lifestyle, myself a little Christ, I become more aware of the Ultimate Hedonist, and His full nature. And I dig it, man!

The Greatest Commandment

In these days of man existentially living by his feelings and subjective

nature, the Christian is to live for something higher than himself. The Laodicean Church age has truly assimilated a “feel-good” Christianity and is living to that end. Nonetheless, Paul tells us that biblical love “seeketh not her own” (I Corinthians 13:5b). As the Lord Jesus Christ lived His years on earth to do the will of His Heavenly Father and to please the One Who sent Him, so we must live to that end. God has not called us to live unto ourselves. The greatest commandment is still to be found in the Scriptures:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment (Matthew 22:37,38).

This commandment has nothing to do with our pursuing personal happiness and pleasure. If we love Christ, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15), even if we do not derive pleasure. There may be delights to come in our walk with God, but we do not walk with God in order to gain delight. We walk with God because He commanded us to do so. The Bible is filled with laws and principles that we must keep even if the contrary will bring us pleasure (Romans 13:8-10).

The book of Ecclesiastes is a book written by a man who pursued happiness and pleasures. But when he came to the end of life, he had to announce the following:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and

keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Conclusion

In these days when even our nation's sacred document gives us the right to the "pursuit of happiness," how far can a man go with that pursuit? The prisons are filled with those who were in the pursuit of that which they believed would make them happy and bring them pleasure. Yet, as a Christian, are we to take passages of Scripture that speak of delighting in God, and make those passages the chief end of our Christian existence? Is happiness the goal of Christianity or is God? Has Piper taken a secondary truth and made it greater than God Himself? Is God my chief end, or is the pleasure I derive from Him my chief end? We have perverted the Scriptures if we take anything other than God Himself and make it the superlative end of living.

John Piper is not the first to pursue this belief of Hedonism; there are writings of earlier decades that indicate God's men have had to confront this perverted gospel in their own generation. One such man was A. W. Tozer who dealt with this humanistic theology in his book *Of God and Men*, written in 1960. Concerning the burden of "Holiness before Happiness," he wrote the

following words that are pertinent for our existential, modern times:

That we are born to be happy is scarcely questioned by anyone. The lovelorn columns of the newspaper are wet with the tears of persons who write to inquire how they can preserve their happiness. The psychiatrists of the land are getting fat off the increasing numbers who seek professional aid in their all-absorbing search for happiness. Almost all popular books and plays assume that personal happiness is the legitimate end of the human struggle. The only question before the house is how to get the most happiness out of life.

Now I submit that the whole hectic scramble after happiness is an evil as certainly as is the scramble after money or fame or success. How far wrong all this is will be discovered easily by the simple act of reading the New Testament through once with meditation. There the emphasis is not upon happiness, but upon holiness. God is more concerned with the state of people's hearts than with the state of their feelings. Undoubtedly the will of God brings final happiness to those who obey, but the most important matter is not how happy we are, but how holy.

For those who take this whole thing seriously I have a suggestion: Go to God and have an understanding. Tell Him that it is your desire to be holy at any cost and then ask Him never to

give you more happiness than holiness. When your holiness becomes tarnished, let your joy become dim. And ask Him to make you holy whether you are happy or not. Be assured that in the end you will be as happy as you are holy (pp. 43-44).

No doubt, many will follow this pied piper of Christian hedonism and believe it to be the Promised Land for this generation. The laughing revival that broke forth in Toronto, Canada, some years ago, brought pleasure and happiness to its participants. Christian hedonism permits such an experience, calling it a valid work of God. Yet, pleasure cannot

be at the expense of principle, and happiness cannot be pursued at the rejection of holiness.

May God keep this pied piper from affecting our churches and our Christian colleges and seminaries. For his pipe call is not without significance. If followed, Christian Hedonism will tragically lead us into Antinomianism rather than to the biblical view of the grace of God. Such grace is "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). ■

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"The Wonderful Word Hour"

Wandering Stars and Delusion

Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Founder
Straightway Reprint from October 1977

There is a Greek word in the New Testament translated in the King James Version as “delusion.” Paul uses the word in connection with an adjective, “strong,” and Jude uses it in connection with a noun, “stars.”

False teachers and Antichrist are accompanied with this “strong delusion” from God (II Thess. 2:11), and they react in their various ministries like “wandering stars.” The King James’ translators certainly realized the great meanings involved because the two words, “delusion” and “wandering,” are from that one Greek word *planei*. Therefore, a delusion is a wandering; and a wandering is a delusion. Vine says that the word, literally, is “a wandering, whereby those who are led astray roam hither and thither, is always used in the New Testament, of mental straying, wrong opinion, error in morals or religion.”

We are living in a time of the manifested wholesale departure, wandering, roaming, straying, and going away from the Old-Time Gospel of the Bible. People, churches, denominations, leaders, movements, groups, and individuals are on their way out of orbits and orderly systems of truth which were formerly held dear and sacred. We are never shocked to hear of another star leaving an orderly pulpit, life, and practice to spin down into the darkness of the apostasy. It is manifested with “strong” and energized (*energeian*) deliberations now. They are on fire, like stars, burning out in the night of the End-Time. We are told that when stars leave their orbits, they ignite, only to burn up. While they are in their orderly orbits, they shine out without burning up. The fixed stars survive; the falling stars disintegrate.

We must always remember that we only have the protection of God’s Word as long as we abide under biblical principles. We must remain fixed, in orbit, in God’s Word.

We are presently experiencing a grave proliferation of Neo-Christianity (Neo-Orthodoxy, New Evangelicalism, Neo-Morality, and Neo-Pentecostalism). The unsatisfied craving for a new indicates that we have left the old. The charismatic fever is burning up the star; the admixture of old truth of the pentecostal fire is a counterfeit of the original, fixed Spirit-filled Christian. The old, liberal ecumenicity needed this fever and false fire to cover up for the fact that the genuine fire had burned out. Now, the charismatic *nova* appears, but in reality, Neo-Pentecostalism is but an old mass of cinder aflame again. There is really no difference at all between old modernism and the new charismatic. There was a bit more black in the old star, whereas there is a bit more white in the new star; but they are both the same part and identity of gray. There is a difference between a pentecostal fever and the pentecostal fire. The first is wandering; the second is fixed. The first will burn out; the second just simply shines out. In the old liberalism some truth was present as well as in the new charismatic. In the former, other truth was subtracted; in the latter, some error is added.

It is most important that we observe in this connection: a delusion is not the total *absence* of truth, but rather is the deceptive *addition* of error to the truth. Whenever we wander away from the Crystal Truth of the Word of God, there is no path left to roam but in a lie. In every false teacher we find today, there is *some* truth, but the test of it lies in the fact it is never *solely* the truth—with neither subtraction nor addition. **THEY DO NOT LOVE THE TRUTH!**

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thess. 2:11-12).

But as if someone would ask, “How can you know you believe the truth?” The answer was given by Paul in the previous and clear words. Because we have “the love of the truth” (v. 10).

Getting Back to the Scriptures

Church Of God, Awake! We Must Rise Up!
Rid Ourselves Of Our Modern Ways!
Cease To Drink The Wine From The World’s Cup!
Cease To Give Its “Methods” Praise!

Schools Of Christian Name, Heed The Warning!
Intellect Alone Will Not Do!
Compromise Of Truth Is Alarming!
All The “Right” It Will Undo!

Christians, Do Not Heed Cries For “Neo”!
Nor The Cries For “Love” Without Truth!
Leaving The Old Paths Will Bring Sorrow,
And Destroy Our Sons of Youth!

Now’s The Time To Look To The OLD Cross!
Leave The NEW; It Will Not Withstand
All The Hordes Of Hell That Confront Us!
Heed The Scriptures! They Will Stand!

We Need To Get Back To God’s Holy Scriptures!
We Need To Pursue The Truth Of God’s Word!
We Need To Maintain Our Journey T’ward Heaven!
And Commit Our Lives To The Lord!

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