

What Does the Bible Teach About Postmodernism?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

- A. We often wonder why it is so difficult to reach people with the Gospel these days.
 - 1. It is essential that we understand why in order to be more effective
 - a. 17 years ago, I was asked to do a lecture at FC on how to reach an indifferent neighbor with the Gospel.
 - b. Been considering sociological factors since then. We can ignore the changes in the world around us and continue to be ineffective in reaching the lost, or we can try to understand the changes and determine how to work around them
 - 2. Isolationism is a common, contemporary hindrance to the Gospel, and it is a problem generated by Christians.
 - a. Technology has enabled us to isolate ourselves from others.
 - b. Misguided manners prevent us from making contact.
 - c. Even families watch TV in different rooms, eat meals at different times and places, listen to personal music sources when they ride together, and seldom even ride in the same vehicle.
 - d. Isolationism comes from us; postmodernism comes from culture.
- B. We also wonder what changed from the days when religious leaders were willing to debate, and the average member of a denomination was willing to engage in Bible studies.
 - 1. Many of the differences are due to a shift in philosophy and thinking in the past century called Postmodernism.
 - 2. Postmodernism has taken hold, and in its various forms represents the views of the majority of people today, secular and religious.
- C. Postmodernism is the term that describes contemporary philosophy toward religion and politics, characterized by:
 - 1. The lack of conviction and concern for doctrine,
 - 2. The attitude that everyone may determine right or wrong for themselves
 - 3. The social rule that others must keep their beliefs to themselves
- D. It is ironic that the two matters that should be discussed more than any other subject, religion and politics, are now the two things you do not talk about in polite company.
 - 1. So instead we talk passionately about trivialities like sports, entertainment, and shopping, and then do all of our discussion of religion and politics in the social media that increases isolationism.
- E. If we're going to be able to promote the cause of Christ during our lifetime, we are going to have to understand postmodern thinking. Questions:
 - 1. What is postmodernism?
 - 2. How has postmodernism impacted religious expression and practice?
 - 3. Is postmodernism a threat to Christians?
 - 4. How does postmodernism hinder the Gospel?
 - 5. What do the Scriptures say about this matter?

6. Are there any beneficial aspects of postmodernism?
7. Will postmodernism outlast the word of God?

I. WHAT IS POSTMODERNISM?

- A. The term postmodernism seems odd; how can something come after modern?
 1. Postmodernism is a reaction to an earlier school of thought called modernism.
 2. Modernism is the term used to describe the patterns of thought from Descartes in the seventeenth through nineteenth century
 - a. Modernism exalts the abilities of man to know his entire world and to change it to suit himself.
 - b. It promoted absolutes and sought to determine the absolute laws of existence without God's word.
 - c. It glorified man and his ability to make a perfect world without the help of God.
 - d. Modernism promoted the concept of objective truth and sought to determine it for the rest of humanity.
- B. Postmodernism, coming out of changes in science and two world wars, is an over-reaction to these ideas.
 1. Postmodernism is marked by cynicism regarding humankind; human beings are basically a higher functioning animal, guided by instinct and appetites.
 2. It rejects any concept of absolute truth, and considers all truth as subjective and situational.
 3. It advocates that each person must establish his own guiding truth.

II. POSTMODERNISM'S IMPACT

- A. Promotion of atheism in public life
 1. Postmodernism, with its denial of any absolutes and the emphasis on subjectivity, promotes atheism.
 2. After all, if there is no absolute, there really can be no God.
 3. And if there is no God, there can be no revelation from God.
- B. Promotion of ecumenicalism in religion
 1. While the religious community does not agree with postmodernism's atheism, they do accept their subjective approach to truth.
 2. Therefore, different denominations who believe different things can agree to disagree, to promote unity, and not be concerned about vast differences in doctrine.
 3. This is the primary reason they no longer debate doctrinal issues; postmodernism undermines disagreement by denying man's ability to know truth, and by denying the existence of universal truth.
- C. Promotion of moral relativism
 1. With the lack of absolutes, there no longer is a moral code or universal rules of conduct giving structure to individuals or governments.
 - a. People choose what they think is good and condemn what they think is evil; elections illustrate this.

- b. A Democrat believes that his candidate supports what the voter thinks is the greater good of feeding the poor by taxing the middle class, and is willing to overlook the evils supported by the candidate, such as abortion and homosexual rights. He weighs what he chooses to believe as good against what he chooses to believe as evil and calls his candidate the moral choice.
 - c. A Republican believes that his candidate supports what the voter thinks is the greater good of protecting business from confiscatory taxation and protecting unborn children from abortionists, and is willing to overlook the evils supported by the candidate, such as predatory business practices and divisive social policy. He weighs what he chooses to believe as good against what he chooses to believe as evil and calls his candidate the moral choice.
 - d. Do you see how that Christians have accepted postmodern thinking as just part of doing business in the world we live in?
 - 2. When each person establishes his own morals, we should not be surprised to see people engaging in every kind of immorality.
 - 3. Postmodernism states that there are no right or wrong choices, except what we choose to believe is right or wrong; and that our choices are only right or wrong for ourselves, not others.
- D. Promotion of relativism in speech
 - 1. Postmodernism also emphasizes the subjectivity of language, stating that language cannot be fully understood since it changes with the whims of humankind.
 - 2. The only meaning that exists is the meaning you take from whatever you hear or read.
 - 3. The meaning you intend for your words is not relevant.
 - a. The intentions of the framers of the Constitution are not relevant in a postmodern world; the only relevant principles are those that liberal judges want to see in it.
 - b. The purpose and intentions of God's word are not important; the only thing important is what you want to see in God's word.

III. PROBLEMS WITH POSTMODERNISM

- A. Postmodernism is a threat to the Christian's faith since it denies the existence of any absolute truth.
 - 1. To a true postmodernist, this statement "there is no absolute truth" is ludicrous, since it is purported to be an absolute truth; this contradiction is the fundamental weakness of postmodernism.
 - 2. That contradiction does not bother postmodernists, since contradiction is to them a part of life and not a problem requiring a solution.
 - 3. We know that there is an absolute; God and what He says is absolute.
 - a. Gen. 1:1 - And since it is His creation, He has ordered it according to His purposes.

- b. He is not troubled that the postmodernist doesn't believe in Him or that it dismisses God's word as relative.
 - c. He heard the serpent treat His word as relative in the Garden of Eden, and look how that turned out for the serpent.
 - 4. But how do you prove the existence of God to those who deny the existence of absolutes?
 - 5. The only hope is to try to show them that there is more to this world than what an individual can see.
 - a. How can you be certain that there is no underlying truth?
 - b. You have built your life and are determining your future on a flawed premise you are unwilling to examine.
 - 6. Do what God did with Job when he tried to argue God's justice and goodness as relative - Job 38-41
 - a. Isa. 55:8-11
 - 7. However, most secularists will not consider the absolute existence of God, and most religionists will not consider the absolute binding nature of His revealed truth.
- B. Postmodernism denies the ability of man to know absolute truth.
 - 1. The Bible is clear:
 - a. Jesus is THE truth - John 14:6
 - b. Man is able to know the truth - John 8:32
 - 2. Neither text carries much weight in postmodern thinking; they see truth in all religions, and object to the exclusiveness of the Gospel.
 - 3. Likewise, they would argue that man cannot really know the truth since man is fallible and can be wrong, both present day readers and the men who wrote the Bible, because the postmodernist denies the inspiration of the Bible.
 - 4. The problem we encounter in teaching the truth to such persons complicated by the fact that our confidence in the Scriptures is based on faith - Heb. 11:1, 6
 - 5. We can show them evidences supporting our faith, hoping that they will begin to doubt their choice to refuse to believe.
 - a. But we must remember that they have chosen their faith in spite of what the word of God says and in spite of the evidences all around them.
 - b. Rom. 1:16-25, 28-31
 - 6. Likewise, the religious world considers us strange and obsolete for placing such importance on believing the Bible as God revealed it, and charges us as exclusive or cultic.
 - 7. They forget that they departed from interest in truth and doctrine over the years and will be judged for changing the Gospel into an irrelevant book of suggestions - Gal. 1:6-9
 - 8. We should not merely defend right practices, but also right beliefs - 1Peter 3:12-17
- C. The moral relativism in postmodernism leads most to do as they wish.
 - 1. God is the arbiter of right and wrong - Gal. 5:19-23

2. Postmodernism objects to the idea of conduct described in terms of righteousness and sin.
 3. How do you get one to look to God for answers to moral questions?
 - a. By measuring the outcome of God's way versus the chaos of the moral bankruptcy inherent in the postmodern morally relative lifestyle
 4. Occasionally people see how bad choices can produce suffering and death; they are unwilling to see that these choices are sin, and sin always produces pain and death, whether in this life or the life to come - Rom. 6:23
 5. Unfortunately, most choose to uphold their choice and stay in that state.
- D. Postmodernism in religion denies our ability to understand the Bible.
1. It suggests that we cannot really understand the Bible since:
 - a. We are not ancient Hebrews or Greeks and therefore cannot understand the cultural context fully,
 - b. We cannot have full confidence in what the Hebrew and Greek words mean in English,
 - c. We cannot be certain that our English words mean what we think they mean.
 2. However, the postmodernist does not consider that when he says that language cannot be understood, he voids his statement that language cannot be understood, because it requires language to communicate it.
 3. We know that God can be known to us.
 - a. Hosea 6:3; Psalm 119:160; John 17:17

IV. BENEFICIAL ASPECTS OF POSTMODERNISM

- A. Not everything about postmodernism is bad.
 1. Just as modernism was excessive in one direction, so postmodernism goes too far in the other direction.
 2. Some parts of it are true; know them and take advantage of them.
- B. Mankind cannot know everything.
 1. Isa. 55:8-9 indicates that God's ways are higher than our ways.
 2. Job 38-41 indicates that we cannot understand the intricate nature of all of God's creation.
 3. We need to realize that we are not going to know everything; we can recognize and understand that what God has revealed to us is absolute truth, but there is much that is true but unrevealed that we simply cannot comprehend, and we need to accept that.
 - a. Infinity and eternity, God in three persons, the Deity and humanity of Jesus, the nature of our eternal form, how the soul dwells in a physical body, et al.
- C. Not every matter in scripture is mandated in a particular way.
 1. Romans 14 indicates that there are some matters of no consequence to God, and therefore multiple practices accepted.
 2. There certainly are matters that are not to be compromised, but this does not mean that all matters are beyond compromise.

- a. Eating of meats, observing days, color of clothes, Bible versions, apostle Paul accepting or refusing support, marrying or not, et al.
 - b. All acceptable practices that are not mandated by revelation
- D. Language does have some ambiguity.
 - 1. It is important for us to do our best to understand how language is being used, especially in spiritual matters.
 - 2. We must be on the watch for language that should be taken literally, that is figurative, and other language devices.
- E. Postmodernism is temporary.
 - 1. The best thing that can be said about any philosophy or wisdom of men is that it will change over time, not necessarily for the better, but be assured that it will go away.
 - 2. Descartes modernism is gone; Alexander Pope's Deism is gone; Voltaire's rationalism is gone.
 - 3. They come, and they go; and, postmodernism will go.
 - 4. Those who are enamored with it will go down with it - John 12:48
- F. And when postmodernism is just a footnote in the history books of the next century, God's word will still be here, unchanged, undimmed, and unconquered.
 - 1. Mark 13:31; 2Tim. 3:16-17; 1Peter 1:23-25