

Aim at Heaven

From Chapter 1 (“Encouraging Words for Discouraging Times”) of Michael Youssef’s new book, *Never Give Up*.

McLean Bible Church was founded in an elementary school by five families in northern Virginia on Easter Sunday 1961. The founders declared the new church to be a Bible-believing evangelical congregation. It has grown into a multisite megachurch with locations all around the Washington, D.C., metro area. From 1980 to 2017, the church was led by a theologically conservative preacher, Lon Solomon. In September 2017, Solomon stepped down to become pastor emeritus. His associate, David Platt, was promoted to lead pastor.

Soon after taking his new leadership position, Platt’s teachings began to change. Platt and others in leadership at McLean Bible Church openly embraced secular-left social justice rhetoric. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the church was under lockdown, a number of staffers joined a Washington, DC, Black Lives Matter protest. Photos of the staffers holding BLM signs were posted to the church’s Facebook page. (The photos were later removed.)

While genuine Christians acknowledge that Black lives absolutely matter to Jesus and his church, the organization known as Black Lives Matter is totally incompatible with the Christian church. It is an anti-Christian, Marxist organization that has openly declared its commitment to disrupt “the Western prescribed nuclear family structure requirement.”

David Platt’s “woke” social justice sermons provoked an exodus of Bible-believing members from the church, including many who had faithfully supported the church for decades. In May 2020 McLean Bible Church reported an average attendance of 12,154. One year later, average attendance had declined to seventy-

three hundred, a drop of nearly 40 percent. The sudden drop in attendance led to steep budget cuts in missions, outreach, and church facilities.

Both James White of Alpha & Omega Ministries (an evangelical apologetics organization) and conservative theologian Voddie Baucham, who is African-American, describe Platt's teaching as an attempt to merge the Bible with critical race theory—a Marxist, race-conscious concept that attacks all institutions of society as inherently racist, rejects evidence and reason as “White” ways of knowing, and ranks people as either privileged or disadvantaged according to their race, gender, economic class, and so forth.

When preachers decide that the pure, unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ is not enough, they invite falsehood and error into the church. When preachers mix worldly political dogmas with the gospel, they lead the church down the road to hell.

The polluting of the gospel with secular politics is not only tragic, but it undermines the very social justice that “progressive Christians” wish to accomplish. If you want a morally righteous society, in which all people are treated with justice, compassion, and respect, then preach the uncompromised gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

As C. S. Lewis noted, it was the early apostles who began the conversion of the Roman Empire, and it was the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade. They didn't transform society by polluting the gospel with political and social theories. No, Lewis wrote—they “left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”

As Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31).

No Room for Disagreement

In December 2019, the Church of England appointed Stephen Cottrell as Archbishop of York, the second highest position in the Anglican church. Many in the so-called “progressive” wing of the church celebrated this appointment because Cottrell has been an outspoken supporter of “gay rights” within the church. But those who are committed to remaining faithful to biblical truth took a different view. For example, Andrea Williams, an Anglican and the chief executive of Christian Concern, the United Kingdom’s most prominent evangelical organization, responded, “This is not a bishop who respects biblical truth when it comes to human sexuality or marriage.”

Of course, every person deserves to be treated with respect and kindness. We are all sinners and God loves the homosexual sinner as much as he loves the heterosexual sinner. So, as Christians, we are to love everyone with the same unconditional love that Christ has shown to us. But we don’t do sinners any favors by normalizing or celebrating sin, or by denying the teaching of Scripture.

The Scriptures make clear—in such passages as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, and 1 Timothy 1:8–11—that homosexual behavior is a sin. We must treat homosexual people with Christlike love and respect, just as Jesus treated the woman caught in adultery with love and respect. But we remember that he also told her, “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11).

That is not how Stephen Cottrell, the Archbishop of York, treats the issue of homosexuality. He takes the position that human wisdom supersedes the wisdom of God. He supports what Anglican “progressives” call a “radical new Christian inclusion.” He claims that the church damages itself by

rejecting the secular view of human sexuality. The world now views the church as “immoral,” he says, because of biblical teaching on homosexuality. The biblical view of same-sex relationships, he says, is “homophobic”—a buzzword intended to prejudice the argument and frame Bible-believing Christians as “phobic” (afraid of homosexual people).

Archbishop Cottrell claims that Bible passages that condemn homosexual behavior are merely “part of our story and our inheritance.” He says that “what we know now about human development and human sexuality requires us to look again at those texts to see what they are actually saying to our situation, for what we know now is not what was known then.” In other words, we in the twenty-first century know so much more about human sexuality than God did when he inspired the writing of his Word.

Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that Archbishop Cottrell believes God’s Word is not inspired at all, but is merely a collection of ancient stories and opinions that we can safely ignore. Either way, the Archbishop of York has explicitly departed from the traditional teachings of the church and a commonsense understanding of the Scriptures.

Worst of all, he has made it clear that there is no room for disagreement with his position on homosexuality. Anglican clergy have said that on more than one occasion Archbishop Cottrell stood before a meeting of clergy and declared that anyone who disagreed with the progressive view of human sexuality should leave the church. Clergy who hold the biblical view of human sexuality are not welcome in today’s Church of England.

We have come a long way since the time of the English reformers, who willingly went to the stake to be burned to death rather than betray the holy Scriptures.

For more information on Never Give Up, check out . {eoa}

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