

Carlton Pearson's Tragic Journey to Deception

Carlton Pearson, the Pentecostal bishop who was labeled a heretic by his peers because he rejected the authority of the Bible, is now "at death's door" according to a video he posted last week from his hospital bed. The 70-year-old preacher, who has battled prostate cancer off and on for years, was put under hospice care a few days ago.

From his deathbed, Pearson smiled and told his followers he would see them in heaven. But will he? I'm glad I'm not the one to decide that. But I wouldn't want to be in this man's shoes as he steps into eternity.

In the 1980s, Pearson was one of the most recognized preachers in America. Raised in the Church of God in Christ, and mentored by evangelist Oral Roberts, Pearson established his Higher Dimensions Christian Center near Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Pearson's popular Azusa conferences attracted thousands to Tulsa every year, and his church grew to 5,000 members at its peak.

But one day a bizarre message appeared on the marquee in front of the Higher Dimensions sanctuary on South Memorial Drive. The sign said, in plastic moveable letters, "JESUS IS THE WAY. HE'S JUST NOT THE ONLY WAY."

That was one of the more obvious signals that Pearson had begun to move away from biblical faith. Decades before anyone would talk about "Christian deconstruction," Pearson began dismantling his beliefs—adopting instead what he called a "gospel of inclusion." The Pentecostal bishop became a universalist, and he announced that all people—whether Muslim or Hindu, Christian or non-Christian, repentant or unrepentant—would go to heaven.

Pearson also began teaching that the Bible wasn't inspired by God. He claimed it was mistranslated and full of errors.

"I won't get into great detail, but I'm just saying that which we revere as the most sacred lexicon of truth on the planet is not necessarily—and any true scholar will tell you—infallible or inerrant," Carlson said. "I am saying what we were taught was wrong. We've been sold a bill of goods. I'm assaulting 1,500 years of tradition."

Some secularists applauded Pearson because they viewed his outlandish statements as bravery. But members of his Bible-believing church left in droves, and the Higher Dimensions facility ended up in foreclosure. Oral Roberts then refused to allow Pearson to host his Azusa conference on the ORU campus' Mabee Center.

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After the Joint College of African-American Pentecostal Bishops Congress labeled Pearson a heretic in 2004, he doubled down on his deception and became a Unitarian. He publicly denied the existence of hell, declaring that a God of love would never sentence unbelievers to eternal damnation. And before long, fawning secular reporters were calling on Pearson every time they needed a nonbelieving liberal to make social commentary.

When Pearson's critics argued that Jesus often preached about the reality of hell, and that the Bible clearly states that God judges the wicked, he said the Scriptures are themselves flawed.

"The average person, even preachers, that you approach and ask, 'Where did we get the Bible?' most of them can't tell you that," Pearson once said. "Men sat around tables in rooms for weeks drinking wine, eating and taking breaks, fussing, and

sometimes cussing, arguing over what would be in the Bible and what would not."

I have nothing but sympathy for a man who is battling cancer in a hospital bed, and I wish Mr. Pearson no ill will. But as people mourn this man's passing, I hope we won't feel any sympathy for his dangerous teachings—which no doubt misled thousands of people during the two decades that he preached a counterfeit gospel.

In times like these we must remember that God holds people accountable for spreading heresy. The letter written by Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, is a short epistle, but it is blunt in its condemnation of false prophets who "turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4).

The Bible isn't "nice" to heretics because they lead people astray. Jude offered no sympathy to false teachers who had every chance to repent, but didn't. He said: "Woe to them!" (v. 11), and he compared them to "clouds without water," "autumn trees without fruit," "wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever" (v. 12,13). False teachers incur God's wrath because their lies are the ultimate form of spiritual abuse.

I wish I could call Pearson my brother, but the Bible says those who depart from the faith have fallen from grace. Even though this man wore a clerical collar, stood behind a pulpit and carried ordination credentials, he butchered the Bible, misled naïve Christians and arrogantly opposed God with his heresies. Thankfully this man's "assault on 1,500 years of tradition" was unsuccessful.

In the last moments of his life, I pray that Pearson can repent and be reconciled with his Maker. May God have mercy on his soul. {eoa}

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