

RT Kendall: The Ache I Feel as I Watch America Brings Me to Tears

I am concerned for my country. I know that you share my concern. Having spent half of my adult life in England, from a distance I have watched my beloved America decline.

I think Anne Graham Lotz has got it right, that God has taken His hand off America. It breaks my heart. In my old age (I am now 80) I am spending half of the year in America, the other half in London.

England has given me my ministry, my identity and some of my all-time best friends. I cannot adequately express the sense of gratitude I feel toward my Mother Country. That said, I have been welcomed home by so many and I am thankful for the open doors here. That I would be invited to write this open letter to you is an evidence of this.

But the ache I feel as I watch America at the moment brings me to tears.

I'm sorry, but much of the blame lies with the church, speaking generally.

Church attendance is in decline, we are losing our youth, and the world does not respect us. There is no fear of God in the land and virtually no fear of God in the church. But as Bobby Conner has said recently, "The fear of God is coming back to the church." What is especially encouraging for me is meeting an ever-increasing number of church leaders, many of them young, who have a genuine thirst for God. This speaks well for tomorrow's generation.

Is there hope? Yes. But the answer is not to be found in

politics, government or presidential elections. It is to all the church, especially to tomorrow's generation, that I share some things on my heart. We are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. We are the key. I would go to the stake for what I write below.

First is the priority of the gospel. My greatest hope for American Christianity is that the gospel will never be taken for granted. I am sure that many church leaders and many evangelists have the same concern.

The gospel is always under siege, particularly at a theological level. The enemy will always seek to rob the gospel of both its stigma and power. I applaud those who affirm Paul's teaching of the blood of Christ propitiating the justice of God. Our calling is not to make the gospel palatable but to tell it as it is and this includes the unpalatable truth about God's wrath and the judgment to come.

We all want people to become Christians. But why? To make them nicer people to live with? To cause them to be materially better off? Or to live longer? Paul said that if "in this life only" we have hope in Christ we are to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19). Why should we long for people to become Christians? It is because of the wrath of God. The earliest message of the New Testament was to "flee" from the wrath to come (Matt. 3:7).

The Bible in a nutshell is this: God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that we should "not perish"—a reference to eternal punishment—but have eternal life (John 3:16).

I love to visit the Holy Land to be where Jesus did miraculous things. I also love to visit places where the Holy Spirit did extraordinary things.

At least four times I have stood and meditated on a vacant lot in Enfield, Connecticut, where on July 8, 1741, Jonathan

Edwards preached his historic sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." So great was God's power that people literally held on to pews in the church and to tree trunks outside to keep from slipping into hell. News of this sermon spread all over New England in days and in England in weeks.

Edwards preached the same sermon two weeks later with no effect at all. God only did it once, to give us a taste of how terrible His wrath is. The intensity of the Cane Ridge Revival (1801) lasted only two days, but it gave America her Bible Belt.

Second, affirming the God of the Old Testament. I am always amazed and reassured that Jesus never apologized for the God of the Old Testament—His Father! This includes being unashamed of the Genesis account of creation, especially: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The modern redefinition of marriage reflects a disdain for God's plan in making us male and female. I thank God for those who have resisted this trend, and hold to a biblical definition of traditional marriage.

References to the inspiration of Scripture in the New Testament includes the 39 books of the Old Testament. If we affirm the New Testament it means we affirm the Old Testament as well. I accept there are things in the Old Testament hard to swallow. Yes. But this is true with the New Testament too. Part of bearing the stigma for Christ is the willingness to look like fools in the eyes the world.

Third, that the Word and the Spirit will come together as it did in the book of Acts. There is a growing conviction among evangelicals and charismatics that a remarriage between the Word and the Spirit is God's way. You may be surprised to learn that those truly open to the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the operation of spiritual gifts are now in the majority among evangelicals in the U.K.

Sadly, this is not the case in the United States; many of us are seen as the lunatic fringe of Christianity. Not to worry; embrace the stigma! But that is changing. The hypothesis of "cessationism" is dying fast. Many evangelical leaders are increasingly seeing the urgent need for the "immediate and direct" witness of the Holy Spirit—to use Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones's phrase—on their ministries.

To clarify: By Word, I mean the centrality of gospel. By Spirit, I mean signs, wonders and miracles. I believe that the simultaneous combination of the Word and Spirit will mean a spontaneous combustion of power and authority for the church and a wake-up call to the nation. Never forget that John Newton, famous for his hymn "Amazing Grace," was the impetus behind William Wilberforce, who brought incalculable social change to the world.

Part of the immediate impact of the Cane Ridge Revival brought a measure of social change, including a loathing of slavery. While we wait for a nation-changing awakening, we may thank God for encouraging signs now.

Fourth is that our very lives make the world want what we have. Arthur Blessitt was given an open door in Amman when an Arab sheik noticed him across a restaurant and said, "I want what you've got." There was something about Arthur's countenance that gripped this Arab. Arthur afterward led him to Christ. We will not win people over by theological argument alone, but by a different Spirit in us than is in the world.

What will win the world will not come about by the keenest intellect humiliating an opponent, but by the most transparently Christlike person melting hearts. When Paul determined to know nothing among the Corinthians but Jesus Christ and Him "crucified," it was his commitment both to the objective gospel of the cross but also subjectively to the manner of life he proposed to live before those who never heard the gospel.

My old mentor Rolfe Barnard preached a sermon called "The Man Who Was Known in Hell."

Based upon the incident in Acts when a demon said "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15), Rolfe pointed out that it was Jesus and Paul—and not the man trying to cast out demons—who had a reputation in hell. That sermon influenced me deeply when I was young, helping me to aspire to be a threat to the devil. If I had to choose, I'd rather be known in hell than be admired in the world.

The famed Robert Murray M'Cheyne saw a true touch of revival in Scotland. Six months after he died in 1843, a young minister traveled to St. Peter's Church in Dundee to inquire what M'Cheyne's secret was.

An old elder took the young preacher to M'Cheyne's desk, saying to him: "Put your elbows on the desk and place your forehead in your hands, and let the tears flow." The elder then took the young man to M'Cheyne's pulpit, telling him: "Now put your elbows on the pulpit and place your forehead in your hands, and let the tears flow." M'Cheyne had a passion for the lost.

May God grant us a fresh passion for the unsaved who in are in danger of the wrath to come.

After M'Cheyne died, a letter addressed to him was found in his coat pocket. It was written by a man who heard M'Cheyne preach on the previous Sunday. In it, he wrote that he came to the church unconverted but the sight of M'Cheyne's face—not the sermon itself—so gripped this man that he could not help himself—and was instantly saved.

We need to make a greater impact on our generation and on generations to come, should Jesus tarry.

"T'was not the truth you taught, to you so clear, to me so dim;

But when you came to me you brought a sense of Him.

Yes, from your eyes He beckoned me, from your heart His love was shed;

When I lost sight of you and saw the Christ instead.” –Anonymous