

Is There Any Room for Repentance in Our Modern Preaching?

I am not one given to visions, but in 1975, upon graduation from Bible school, I saw a vision of a coming great falling away in the church, followed by an even greater revival. I have lived to see the first part of the vision—the falling away—fulfilled. I believe the second part of the vision—the great revival—could be at the door and tarries, perhaps, until we make some much needed adjustments in how we see and present Jesus.

When I saw the great falling away I heard the words, “Jesus is a *means*, not an *end*.” I knew immediately and instinctively that the falling away would be characterized, not by a rejection of Jesus, but by Him being preached and embraced as a *means* to personal happiness rather than as the *end* or goal for life.

A *means* is “how” we reach a desired *end* or goal. If my *end* or goal is to travel from Dallas to New York, there are various *means* at my disposal for reaching that goal. The *means* may vary but *the* end is stationary, for the *end* is what is important.

In the vision, churches were filled with people who had accepted Jesus, not as the *end* or goal in life, but as a *means* for them obtaining their own *end* of personal happiness and fulfillment. They were like the people in John’s Gospel who sought Jesus, not for who He was, but for what they could get from Him.

What’s in It for Me?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus chided a large crowd for seeking

Him as a *means* rather than as the *end* or goal of life. This happened when He multiplied a lad's lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fishes and fed a large multitude. After the miracle, Jesus departed from that area with His disciples. The people, however, were so enthralled by what they had seen and experienced that they crossed the Sea of Tiberius looking for Him.

Their motives, however, were all wrong and Jesus confronted their distorted perception of Him by saying, "Truly, truly I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled" (John 6:26).

Remember that in John's Gospel, the *signs* Jesus performs are indicators that point to who He is—His identity. It is thus clear that Jesus recognizes that the people are seeking Him, not for who He is, but for what they can get from Him. They see Jesus as a *means* for satisfying their personal needs and desires, not the *End*—the Lord—deserving their love and devotion because of who He is.

This Is Where Repentance Comes In

The preaching of Jesus as a *means* rather than the *end* ignores the ramifications of the fall wherein our first parents heeded the serpent's lie that God's command was keeping them from personal happiness and fulfilment in life. They, therefore, declared their independence from God, rejected Him as the ultimate *end* of life, and replaced Him with their own happiness as the ultimate end, in other words, they themselves became the *end* and goal of life. They became the first humanists.

Since that time, their posterity—the human race—has been in a continuous search for the *means* that will bring them to their *end*, or goal, of personal happiness and fulfilment. A myriad of *means* have been used (and continue to be used) to try and achieve this *end*, including entertainment, sports,

drugs, power, sex, career, crime, religion, etc.

What is needed, however, is not another *means*, but a completely different *end*. This is what the Bible calls “repentance.” In Acts 20:21 Paul said the he preached a two-fold message—*repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*.

The word “repent” is from the Greek word *metanoeo* and literally means “to change the mind.” It refers to a radical change of thinking wherein self is no longer the *end* or goal, but Christ is made *the* end or goal for life. This was the message preached by Charles G. Finney, the Prince of Revivalists, who described repentance in this manner:

“It consists in the sinner changing his mind, or disposition, in regard to the supreme object of pursuit. It is a change in the *end* at which he aims and not merely the *means* of obtaining his *end*. It is a change from a state of selfishness in which a person prefers his interests above everything else, to that disinterested benevolence that prefers God’s happiness and glory, and the interests of His kingdom, to his own private happiness.”

It has been estimated that 80 percent of Finney’s converts never backslid. In contrast, a follow-up was done on those who responded during a modern evangelistic crusade and it was found that, only six months later, only 5 percent had any sort of meaningful relationship with Christ.

I would suggest that preaching Jesus as a *means* rather than as the *End* is one reason we have seen so many people drop out of church and let go of their faith. They accepted Jesus as a *means* to their own personal happiness, not as the *end* and goal for their life. So when they encountered tests of faith, it was all too easy to let go of Jesus and try something else, in other words, try another *means*.

Finding Fulfillment and True Happiness

Jesus and His kingdom are the highest and greatest value in all creation. This is why we only find true meaning in life when we give up self as the *end* and make Jesus and His kingdom the *end*. This is the point Jesus made when he said, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25).

I believe the great revival I saw could be at the door. It tarries, perhaps, until we tweak our message and begin presenting Jesus, not as a mere *means* for personal happiness, but as the Lord and Master of the universe who calls each and every one of us to an absolute and unconditional surrender to Him and His will. Then, and only then, will we see His kingdom come and His will done on earth as it is in heaven. Only then will we know true happiness and fulfillment.

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