



## *Christian Vanity of Vanities*

*<sup>8</sup>All things are wearisome;  
Man is not able to tell it.  
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,  
Nor is the ear filled with hearing.  
<sup>9</sup>That which has been is that which will be,  
And that which has been done is that which will be done.  
So there is nothing new under the sun.  
<sup>10</sup>Is there anything of which one might say,  
"See this, it is new"?  
Already it has existed for ages  
Which were before us. — Ecclesiastes 1:8–10*

The book of Ecclesiastes has been rightly referred to as "God's book on philosophy". Although it provides a genuine message to non-believers that our various obsessions in and of the world are ultimately futile—as even secular literature and media admit in all the books, plays and movies on the tragedy of those who become obsessed with wealth, works and/or the flesh, we must remember that first and foremost this is a book written **by** a believer **to** believers. Yes, the very first and plain context of the book is the futility of **believers** pursuing the same things in the same manner as non-believers, but there is also an accompanying, deeper application for all Christians at present, and that is the futility of pursuing the wrong thing in the name of Christianity. Every false teaching and its resultant false movement are documented in each of the trial and error approaches explored in Ecclesiastes.

### **Category I: The Intellectual Search**

*<sup>13</sup>And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning  
all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task  
which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. —  
Ecclesiastes 1:13*

These are false teachings/false movements which can be characterized as devoted to the truth, and nothing but the truth. Their point of embarkation may have had honorable intentions, often seeking to address a serious error of doctrine or egregious behavior not compatible with God's Word and ways, but the ultimate result is betrayed by the complete lack of biblical love.

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When just a single characteristic of God is over-realized to the point that it is given the over-riding priority over all others, not only is a lack of balance jettisoned, but other attributes are often completely forsaken. The problem is not in seeking to value or uphold biblical truth, it is when the pursuit gives way to establishing the absolute standard of righteousness by which all things are then measured. No one, not even the saved, actually meet the minimum requirements of God's righteousness, which is why we need the work of the cross in the first place.

*<sup>10</sup>as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; —  
Romans 3:10*

But when someone reaches the point of personally applying this standard to everyone and everything, the ultimate casualty is love. This is because the pursuit of truth alone leading to the over-elevation of righteousness leaves no room for anything except judgment.

This has been witnessed time and again where extreme forms of Calvinism have taken hold, such as in Zwingli's police state of Switzerland, apartheid South Africa, and in the institution of slavery in the American Old South. The late Dave Hunt of Berean Call authored an excellent book addressing what can best be described as the variant I describe as "hyper-Calvinism", giving it the appropriate title, "What Love Is This?" When someone embraces the notion that God actually created some to go to hell, the issue of God's love has been so severely subjugated to something else that it naturally disappears from the practitioners behavior as well.

The worst example of this is found in the self-proclaimed hyper-Calvinists of the infamous Westboro Baptist Church and their public protests at military funerals. Having probably begun with the biblical truth that homosexuality is a sin, they made this the be-all-end-all standard until today, if you search for their church's website, it is actually named [www.godhatesfags.com](http://www.godhatesfags.com). So much for hating the sin but loving the sinner.

But although not usually rising to this extreme level, the lack of love is richly prevalent among too many so-called "discernment" ministries. Those genuinely attempting to inform the Christians they are trying to disciple are far outnumbered by what has become professional full-time criticism and finger pointing. The lack of love is not only evident, but is pursued in the absence of the biblical qualities of edification, exhortation, and/or

consolation. Those on the extreme end of this spectrum cannot exist without something to rail on about.

Likewise, are so many “ministries” dedicated to all things prophetic. I’m not talking about those attempting to practice the gift of prophecy (that’s a different problem), but those who prioritize the prophetic portions of God’s Word to the point that it completely overshadows the rest of God’s Word. The obsession is such that they become myopic where the whole counsel of God’s Word is concerned and dogmatically assert the working of things in contradiction to God’s Word.

For instance, in the discussion of who it is that “restrains” in 2 Thessalonians 2:6, there are aggressive proponents of the notion that the Church leaves the earth and returns to heaven simultaneous to the Church’s removal by Rapture. Without hardly taking a breath, they continue by then being equally dogmatic that this precipitates an unprecedented world-wide revival. So first they violate the doctrine of the Triune Godhead by teaching that the Holy Spirit is not omnipresent, but “goes back to Heaven”, and then they offer that salvation is experienced by millions **without** the Holy Spirit after He leaves! This is but one of countless examples I could personally rail on about where the interpretation of a prophetic passage or verse is allowed to subvert or entirely replace something fundamental, something doctrinal, in the rest of God’s Word. What is perceived as **A** truth is allowed to cancel out **THE** truth, but is actually no truth at all.

*<sup>14</sup>As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup>**but speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. — Ephesians 4:14–16*

There are other examples, to be sure, but a Christian faith engaged in a purely intellectual search is just as futile as the secular mind viewing all things through the limited prism of science. It always falls well short of causing “*the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love*”.

### **Category II: The Hedonistic Search**

*<sup>1</sup>I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. — Ecclesiastes 2:1*

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In the greater spectrum of Christendom, these are teachings and movements which at their core are devoted to either making one feel good about their self, or seeking the things of this life to the exclusion of the next. Such end up ultimately discarding **both** biblical truth **and** biblical love. A displacement takes place wherein everything is viewed through the prism of how one feels or the pursuit of a feeling.

The most devastating and widespread example is, of course, the Faith-Prosperity falsehood popularized by the “name-it-and-claim-it” false teachers who present formulaic avenues to guarantee God’s blessings of monetary wealth and physical health. The field has been so historically littered with hucksterism that it’s difficult to know if there is anyone practicing this deception with anything but ill intentions. They subvert the very definition of biblical faith by making the barometer of a right spiritual relationship the degree to which one’s life is completely trouble free and monetarily prosperous.

***11Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*** — Philippians 4:11–13

But then we have the burgeoning foray into what is often called the “Signs and Wonders” Movement, which is rife with examples of people striving to achieve a feeling. And if they can get it even once, they become obsessed with making it happen again and again. Regardless of the charismatic gift being emulated, manipulated, or outright counterfeited, it is never enough. Whereas the writer of Hebrews says, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*”, (Heb. 11:1) everything for these folk must be seen, experienced, and is never, ever enough. Moses could part the Red Sea and they would hold a rally to see if he could part the Atlantic Ocean and then book a venue for the Pacific. It is utter futility because these things are so rarely authentic and are at best imagined, or worse still, manufactured. It is a complete abandonment of the biblical definition of faith for the pursuit of a feeling.

Likewise we see this in the Emergent Church, ecumenical movements and various attempts to merge New Age or Yoga with Christianity. All have in common strategies involving approaches to make one feel close to God through unbiblical prayer, the use of icons or incense, and all sorts of things the Reformers departed from some 500 years ago.

All are turning to these various “mystical” avenues which replace a biblical relationship with an idolatrous approach to Christ.

This is particularly powerful in the new wave of false worship personified in Hillsong but mimicked by so many others. The worship of “worship” is one of the most powerful examples of a hedonistic pursuit within Christendom. Far too many songs whose lyrics present, “How Jesus makes *me* feel” or “How *I* feel about Jesus” are passing as praise and worship, something which by definition unquestionably acknowledges, “You are God; I am not”. All of these are only possible when God’s Word is abandoned and no longer read, much less practiced. It is no longer forsaking self, but elevating self.

*<sup>47</sup>I shall delight in Your commandments,  
Which I love.*

*<sup>48</sup>And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments,  
Which I love;  
And I will meditate on Your statutes. — Psalm 119:47–48*

*<sup>97</sup>O how I love Your law!  
It is my meditation all the day. — Psalm 119:97*

### **Category III: Personal Works**

*<sup>9</sup>Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. <sup>10</sup>All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. — Ecclesiastes 2:9–10*

The most obvious examples are the various *Purpose Driven* initiatives and the greater Church Growth Movement from which they are derived. Biblical faith is abandoned in favor of assessing all things by works, which most often leads to the opposite of Christian intellectual pursuits, that of one consisting of all love and no truth. In the *Purpose Driven Church* model, each are assessed according the baseball diamond model as starting at bat and to which base they have arrived. Inevitably it leads to allowing anyone to join the team, not just stretching across denominational divides, but embracing other religions.

In fact, it is sometimes difficult to still find Christ in such things when they strive to cross traditional boundaries to enfold those who worship other gods by claiming they are all serving the same God. The Catholic Church’s system of substituting grace for works in order to get into heaven is taken to a whole new level by Protestants embracing everyone under the same umbrella through common participation in community social programs. We actually have missionary groups who presently offer that no one has to completely

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abandon their old religion for Christ, that a “Christian Muslim” or “Christian Hindu” is perfectly valid.

But the hidden reef doing the most unaddressed damage is the fact that we’re now about to graduate a third generation of pastors from Christian institutions who have instilled into them that the only measure of their ministry’s success is the size of their church. Instead of biblical ministers we have CEO’s trained in retail marketing techniques to get the “customer” to return to the “store” each week, forsaking the taking of the Gospel to the world, and instead substituting this consumer-driven approach.

*<sup>14</sup>How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup>How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!” — Romans 10:14–15*

### **The Ultimate Consequence**

Of course, the end conclusion of Ecclesiastes has an equal application for everyone, be they in the midst of a purely earthly pursuit or efforting a parallel compulsion in Christendom:

*<sup>13</sup>The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. <sup>14</sup>For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. — Ecclesiastes 12:13–14*

When Jesus provided the Olivet Discourse to explain what to expect pertaining to His Return, he concluded with a series of parables, all of which are exclusively hyper-directed at Believers alone:

- In the *Parable of the Faithful vs. Evil Slave* (Mt. 24:45-51), He warns believers whether He will find them performing their assigned tasks within the Church, building up the Body into the Head through the Word—metaphorically spoken of as “to give them their food at the proper time”. In other words, we are responsible for the Word where our ministry to the Church is concerned.
- In the *Parable of the Ten Virgins* (Mt. 25:1-13), the focus is on our individual concern for the Word as expressed in the lamps as representing God’s Word and the oil, or lack thereof, referring to the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we are responsible for the Word in our personal life.

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- In the *Parable of the Talents* (Mt. 25:14-30) the issue is whether or not we have carried out our responsibilities as to the Master's work to the world. In other words, we are responsible for the Word in our ministry to non-believers.

All of the aforementioned futile pursuits and their many and varied offshoots all have in common an ultimate corruption, if not outright abandonment, of these three aspects of a biblical faith. They not only prevent God's Word from taking root in us personally, but nullify the fruit which would have otherwise resulted from our ministry and witness both within the Church and to the world at large. Instead of seeing in us something unique in the Person of Christ, they see people in the name of Christianity engaged in the same, futile pursuits of the mind, flesh and personal skills in which they are likewise entangled.

I have known those who have come out of every one of these false movements, and the turning point which they all have in common is some kind of spark of recognition that they need to return to the Word. Although they may have jumped around and experienced many of these things in succession, they finally reached a point where they realized the futility of never actually achieving what they were striving for through any of these endeavors. For those who can recover, it always comes back to, "*fear God and keep his commandments, because this applies to every person*". But far too many have yet to reach that ultimate realization of futility.

In Him,

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