

# CONTEMPORARY CHURCH ISSUES

## WEEK 4: INCLUSIVITY, LOVE AND THE CHURCH PART I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss various contemporary church issues. These are issues which may not have pertained to previous church eras or they have, but in a different way.
- We must remember that there is nothing new to our own time.
- **Ecclesiastes 1:9 “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.”**
- This means that the issues which face the church today have been faced by the church before. Perhaps not in every era of the church nor in the same way we face them today. But, in reality, there is no new threat to the church; just an old threat packaged in a new way.
- Week 1: Revival and Revivalism
- Week 2: What’s wrong with singing *all* worship music?
- Week 3: Does God speak to us today? If so, how can I know that’s it’s Him?
- **Week 4: Inclusivity, Love and the Church Part 1**
- Week 5: Inclusivity, Love and the Church Part 2
- Week 6: How can I find peace in an anxiety and fear laden world?
- The overall goal of this class is to give theological understanding and practical wisdom on how we can rightly respond to the issues which we are facing today.

### INTRODUCTION

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- “Many Christians today have been cocooned in a little Christian bubble of Sunday church, Christian conferences, Christian books, and Christian music. They’ve been insulated against and disconnected from secular society. Now they’re waking to the fact that the world has changed, and things can’t go on as they have before.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.9marks.org/article/summary-of-carl-truemans-the-rise-and-triumph-of-the-modern-self-cultural-amnesia-expressive-individualism-and-the-road-to-sexual-revolution/>

- “Believers used to be thought as somewhat odd but basically decent folk. Now we are increasingly regarded as a harmful influence in society. We’re now the bad guys. Things like freedom of religion and freedom of speech were once regarded as absolute rights. Now they’re being challenged. You can lose your job for expressing certain ideas, especially biblical ideas concerning things like gender and marriage. Society is dramatically different—possibly in unprecedented ways. And it’s likely to get worse before it gets better.”<sup>2</sup>
- Today, Christians and churches are under attack for not being loving, not accepting people for who they are and what they believe to be true about themselves and the world.
- In fact, there are many who blame the church for the social issues which have been taking place over the last 100 or so years.
- Many in the church have decided that to follow the world’s leadership and to begin to allow the world to come into the church is the best way the church can reach the world.
- Our question today is can the world be reached by the Biblical church? Do churches need to amend their historical beliefs about love and exclusivity in order for the gospel to go forth?
- Over these next two weeks, we are going to dive deep into the history of how we got to where we are and then how the church at large is practicing their version of love.
- We also want to find out if there is any truth to what the liberal church is saying and if there is, how can we put those ideas into practice?
- The goal over the next two weeks is to take a snapshot of our cultures history and then of the current church’s culture and how we must be discerning and ever vigilant in our own Christian walk.

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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- There is nothing new under the sun and the church’s fascination with love, inclusion and acceptance is no exception. These things did not just spring up from nothing, but they have deep and dangerous roots.
- This is just a brief snapshot of what has transpired over the past 100 or so years.
- “In 1900, the German church historian Adolph von Harnack gave a series of lectures that were later published as *What Is Christianity?* (1901). He argued that the kernel of the gospel is the commandment to love and the establishment of a just social order based on the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. Harnack was following the lead of the German theologian Albrecht Ritschl, who had argued that ethics are the core of Christianity and called for a just and moral society that emulates Christ’s example and thus realizes the “kingdom of God.” This “social gospel” understanding of Christianity was advocated in the United States by the Baptist minister Walter Rauschenbusch.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2020/05/overview-of-the-twentieth-century/>

- Walter Rauschenbusch would go on and begin Rochester Theological Seminary in the early 1900's. This seminary and its teachings were based upon the "social gospel." They sought to change (rather intentionally) the meaning and application of Biblical love.
  - Martin Luther King Jr. said of Walter Rauschenbusch "It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch that any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried."<sup>4</sup>
- It is important to remember, *what goes into the seminary, goes out into the churches.*
- Today, that seminary is known as Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. There perhaps could be a more liberal, woke, unorthodox seminary in the U.S., but I doubt it.
  - They issue degrees to anyone who has a "faith," including Muslims. Any belief about transgenderism, homosexuality, etc. is accepted and promoted.
- We are seeing today the massive consequences of what was known as the "social gospel."

## What is the social gospel?

- **"The foundation of social gospel redefinitions of Christianity was the modern historical-critical method of biblical study, which argued that the virgin birth, miracles, and the resurrection were myths used by the biblical writers to express how Jesus had influenced their lives.** Critical scholars in the nineteenth century had challenged the reliability of the Gospel accounts, declaring that Jesus was an ordinary human being who became the subject of legend. Theological liberals in Europe and the United States embraced these critical presuppositions because they **believed Christianity was actually about human experience and morality, not outdated dogmas incompatible with modern science.**"<sup>5</sup>
- First, what is the modern historical-critical method of Biblical study?
  - It is when one reads the text of Scripture from their own social and historical context. The reader places the text in their own mind and life in order to interpret it.
  - The main parts that are needed for a proper interpretation are the text, the text's structure, basic form and how the parts of the text relate to each other.
  - In other words, this method leaves out anything supernatural, anything unexplainable and anything that does not align with what we know to be true by science or reason.
  - There was a shift, not only in how we are to read and interpret the Bible, but then how what we read and interpret is to be applied in practical ways.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2020/05/overview-of-the-twentieth-century/>

- How we interpret the Bible matters, more than most people would ever admit.
- Secondly, (and this comes as no surprise) because the shift was from theological and objective truth to subjective experience, the church began to look for ways it could cure social issues like poverty, racism, homelessness, etc.
  - The goal was no longer seeing people born again from the bondage of their sins but that their apparent and immediate sufferings were to be alleviated.
  - This came to be known as the modernist movement, a drift from Biblical orthodoxy to liberalism.
  - The largest problem, according to modernism, was the suffering of mankind because of the social injustices which had befallen him.
- The modern social gospel has redirected the emphasis of Christ's sacrifice to redeem sinners to solving social problems such as racism, class distinctions, crime, economic inequality, etc.<sup>6</sup>
  - The social gospel sees the redemption which is needed is not from our sins but from a corrupt and unjust system.
  - The ideology has shifted from transformed people transforming the world to bringing Biblical principles down on people and forcing them to "live like Christ."
  - This "gospel" says that people are good. They are just products of their unjust and unfair society which has been set up to keep them oppressed.
  - What they hope for is a Christian society, not Christian people.
- All of this is based upon one man's idea, Walter Rauschenbusch. He taught it was the duty of the church not to get people to heaven, but to transform life on earth so that it would be in harmony with heaven.<sup>7</sup>
- This social gospel does not see sin in the hearts and lives of people but innocent people who have been acted upon by people who have power. In a sense, the victims are not sinful, they are pure and free from any wrongdoing. But those in power are sinful and need to be overthrown.
- Rauschenbusch would go on to say in 1907, "The fundamental purpose of Jesus was the establishment of the kingdom of God, which involved a thorough regeneration and reconstitution of social life. Primitive Christianity cherished an ardent hope of a radically new era, and within its limits sought to realize a social life on a new moral basis. Thus Christianity as an historical movement was launched with all the purpose and hope, all the impetus and power, of a great revolutionary movement, pledged to change the world-as-it-is into the world-as-it-ought-to-be."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://carm.org/social-justice/what-is-the-social-gospel-biblical/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/20-the-progressive-era/walter-rauschenbusch-christianity-and-the-social-crisis-1907/>

- While at this stage it was certainly on the fringe of modern Christianity, the ideas and goals of this movement were slowly being brought into the church and believed to be true.

## **The impact of the sexual revolution**

- Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the father of psychoanalysis, is a key figure in this story. He equated happiness with “sexual pleasure.” **This is the point at which personal identity became equated with sex and sexuality. Now that idea dominates the Western world—so people are categorized according to their sexual desires: gay, bi, straight, etc. For many, this is the most prominent truth about who they are.**<sup>9</sup>
- Before Freud, the vast population believed that sex was for procreation and pleasure (Pro 5:19), not something to do with our identity.
- Freud puts a person’s sex drive at the core of the being and says that it is what makes us human.
- This means that the happiest people are those who are able to constantly engage and indulge themselves with their sexual desires.
- Ironically, it is from this belief that Freud also claims that there is not true happiness in society because it is society which will constantly curb this appetite.<sup>10</sup>
- **Do you see where this is heading?**
- You have a social gospel that says Jesus did not come to bring salvation to sinners, but He came to make the earth just like heaven.
- This “gospel” also says that the way this is going to happen is by transforming the oppressed, the poor, the downcast, etc.
- On the heels of the social gospel, you have the new sexual ethic by Freud. He proposes that people are to live according to their deepest, darkest sexual desire...but are unable to because they are oppressed by the society around them.
- **The sexual revolution of the 60’s and 70’s has a greater impact in our society today than most people realize.**
- For the first time, there was a public acceptance and a growing desire for men and women to have multiple partners before getting married.
- Interestingly enough, because of a desire to have more partners before marriage, the average age of a married person started to increase as people wanted to experiment more before getting married.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.9marks.org/article/summary-of-carl-truemans-the-rise-and-triumph-of-the-modern-self-cultural-amnesia-expressive-individualism-and-the-road-to-sexual-revolution/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

- Those who had only been sexually active in a marriage relationship, were seeking divorces so that they too could partake in the newfound freedom.
- However, the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was even more marked by profound shifts in the mores and attitudes towards women's sexuality, homosexuality, and freedom of sexual expression. It was the culmination of three essential developments: **the intellectual contribution of radical Freudian theorist Wilhelm Reich** and the empirical sex research of Alfred Kinsey; **the battles of pornographers, performers, and literary writers to secure the right of sexual speech**; and the **permissive context** created by the social movements of the period, especially the counterculture movement, the women's movement, and the gay and lesbian liberation movement.<sup>11</sup>
- Wilhelm Reich (1897 – 1957) took Freud's ideas and expounded on them tremendously. He was certain that it was not healthy nor natural for people's sexuality to be controlled by any social mechanism.
- This would include the family, the government or the church. He also believed that any such control of sexual expression would "profoundly distort psychological development and lead to authoritarian behavior (such as fascism)."<sup>12</sup>
- The sexual revolution of the 60's was directly started and supported by people who held to these beliefs which were championed by Reich.

### **A New Sexual Ethic**

- The homosexual culture of the 1950s and early 1960s reflected its bitter consciousness of the oppressive stigma against homosexuality in its flamboyant, irony-charged camp humor, but it was not political. Gay culture in the 1950s was invested in protecting the "secret" of an individual's homosexuality and expressing it only in a symbolic or heavily coded way. Cultural resistance to the heterosexual norm was expressed through cross-gender performances and sex role-playing.<sup>13</sup>

## **THE SEXUALLY POLITICIZED SELF**

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- It was the basis of *self* that this train has been moving down the tracks.
- Essentially, the new belief by Freud and Reich is that there is nothing that should ever stop me from being who I truly am.
- I am in charge of finding out who I am, nobody can tell me anything about myself because all I need to know about me is inside me.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/sexual\\_revolution\\_S.pdf](http://www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/sexual_revolution_S.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

- Because identity is now all about our inner-self, and by Freud's standards especially our sexual desires, if you are not allowing someone to be who they are, you are oppressing them.
- Not only do people need to express themselves without restraint, but this is also no longer a private activity because it directly relates to the community at large.
- With this new ideology, to outlaw or only tolerate any form of sexual expression is to only tolerate or outlaw an actual person, who *identifies as that thing*.
- This means that any restrictions whatsoever hit at the very heart of who a person believes themselves to be in their inner most core.
- Our society has latched onto a new understanding of victimhood and oppression. How do they suppose that the chains of oppression be broken?
- Philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) says that Western ideals concerning the family are to be overthrown. Tolerance is just a sham and a way of simply pacifying people. The fight must be specifically against the “educational institutions which teach tolerance.”<sup>14</sup>

### **How is this in our modern culture today?<sup>15</sup>**

- In order for one's true identity to really flourish, it must be acknowledged by others.
- In any society, for something to be legitimate, it must be verbalized and promoted.
- It is because of the focus on self over the past 100 years, that our society's deepest desire is for inner happiness and well-being.
- **That means that in order for you to be happy, you must find out who you are, accept those findings and then it must be acknowledged, accepted and promoted by others.**
- When you find out who you are on the inside, this is, what is called, your *true you*. Your *true you* takes all precedence over your own body, which means that you may have been born as a male but your *true you* is female.
- **As Freud and others have said, if you are not living out what you have found within, you are never going to find true happiness.**
- **The reason why the push for acceptance has turned into a push for promotion is because, even though clouded by sin, these people need to be accepted by society at large.**
- If they are not, then they are never going to accept who they believe they are. To find ourselves comfortable, we look to our larger culture to be comfortable with us.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.9marks.org/article/summary-of-carl-truemans-the-rise-and-triumph-of-the-modern-self-cultural-amnesia-expressive-individualism-and-the-road-to-sexual-revolution/>

- This trait is in everyone, that is why you have friends who have similar interests.
- This is why when you travel or go to places, there are other people there who have similar interests and enjoy similar things.
- You know when you go to a particular place, the kind of people who are going to be there and you are either comfortable or not.
- This push is an attempt to normalize what society has called sin or disorders over the year and then for those who are not practicing it to accept and promote it.

## HOW THIS ALL GOES TOGETHER

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- This started with an idea that the gospel was incomplete somehow. When Walter Rauschenbusch ministered on the streets of New York City, **he was moved** by the poverty and overall oppression that he saw. **The issue was not the gospel did not work; the issue was that the gospel was not there.**
- Instead of relying on the Scriptures, he decided to preach a different gospel, a *works of Jesus* gospel which aimed to cure societies ailments **by doing what Jesus did without the power that Jesus had.** He taught this from the seminary and the idea has been flowing freely since then.
- As the word *oppression* was being brought into not only modern society but the church, Freud's idea of sexual oppression started to take root in the minds of many people.
- While these two streams of thought were seemingly unrelated, the sexual revolution began in the 60's which sought to cast off the bonds of oppression.
- There was no one who could tell someone what was right or wrong and they could do what they wanted to with their own bodies.
- **The sexual revolution produced people who thought of themselves as *oppressed* by a system that only sought to keep them down. The social gospel is for people who are *oppressed* by a system which seemingly seeks to keep them down.**
- Over the past couple of decades, and certainly more prevalent in the last decade, we have seen a merger of the two streams into one main river.
- **Our culture has said that if someone is under the oppression of normal Western identity, they are oppressed. They need the social gospel of love, acceptance, and inclusion. If that is not happening, then they are not going to know the real Jesus.**
- That's where we are going to go next week...how the church has fully accepted, embraced and promoted the sinful actions and consequences of the past 100 years.