

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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A CHARGE AGAINST AMERICA

Guest article. We print the following article by our friend John Vogua. It might sound pessimistic to some, but we find it to be an echo of both the Prophets and the Apostles on the subject of God's judgment.

The land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord. There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. These people stumble day and night and are being destroyed by a lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). The days are coming when a famine will stalk the land; not a famine of food or thirst for water, but a famine of hearing and understanding the words of God (Amos 8:1). The citizens of the Republic will stagger from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the boarder of Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, searching for the Word of God, but they will not find it! A spirit of prostitution has led them astray and they have exchanged the truth of God for something disgraceful (Rom.1:25-27). Although many flock to their religious shrines each week and clap and sing songs with their lips, they have sunk deep into corruption and have consecrated themselves to shameful idols and have become as vile as the things they love and worship (Psalm 115:4-8). Their so-called worship centers are void of meaning for they worship in vain, honoring the name of God only with their lips and teaching man made rules and traditions (Mark 7:6-8). Their land is full of idols (Isa. 2:7, 8). They bow down to the work of their hands. They make many promises, take false vows and make agreements; nevertheless, lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field (Hos. 10:13).

Ah, such a sinful nation, once a bright beacon of liberty and justice, now a people loaded with guilt. A brood of evil does given to corruption. People have forsaken the Lord, spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on Him (Isa. 1:4; Jer.2:13, 27). America staggers, is falling; sitting destitute and deluded, looking for justice but seeing only bloodshed, and violence. Thus, God will pronounce violence upon them. They rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink and stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them. Their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; but they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, nor do they consider the work of their hands (Isa. 5:11, 12). Their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek (Duet. 32:15). Their evil deeds have become foolish and senseless, they have eyes yet cannot see, ears but do not hear (Isa. 6:9; Jn, 12:40; Acts 28:26, 27). The word of God is offensive to them (Mt. 15:12; I Pet. 2:8), they find no pleasure in it. Preachers and politicians are alike, all practice deceit. They attempt to dress the wounds of the people as though it was not serious. They cry "peace, peace," when there is no peace! (I Thess. 5:3). They are not ashamed of their loath-some conduct. They have no shame at all. They do not even know how to blush (Jer.6:15; 8:12). In their shame they have acted corruptly toward the Almighty God of Heaven (Isa. 47:3; Jude 1:13; Zeph. 3:5) and are a warped and crooked generation. Even as they sing with wishful voices "God bless America," God will send fearful plagues upon them (Deut.

28:59), harsh and prolonged disasters and severe lingering illnesses (Deut. 28:22). They will be in dread night and day and have no assurance of life. In the morning they will say "I wish it were evening," and in the evening they will say "Would it were morning!" because of the dread of their heart which they dread, and the sight of their eyes which they shall see (Deut. 28:67). During these times men will seek death but will not find it, they will long to die, but death will elude them (Rev. 9:6). They will gnaw their tongues in agony and curse the God of Heaven because of their pains but refuse to repent (Rev 6:10; 9:21). The wicked in America are like the tossing of the sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. There is no peace for the wicked, says God (Amos 48:22), they are indeed a nation without sense (Hos. 7:11). There is no discernment in them; they have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, they mouth empty boastful words by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful nature. They appeal to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, degrade their bodies with one another, exchanging natural relations for unnatural (Rom. 1:26-29). They have inflamed themselves with the idol of greed (Isa.57:5) and blasphemed and slandered the Creator in matters they do not understand. They will become as brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be destroyed like beasts (II Pet. 2:12). This generation is like springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Black darkness is reserved for them (II Pet. 2:17). They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind, autumn trees without fruit and uprooted, twice dead (Jude 12). They are indeed Godless men who change the Grace of God into license for immorality (Jude 4). "Since they rejected me when I called, and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, ignoring my advice and spurning my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster. I will mock when calamity overtakes you. Then when you call I will not answer, since you hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord" (Jer. 7:12, Prov. 1:26).

What should we say about this indictment? What does God say about it? "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3: 10-18). In order to gratify their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (I Tim. 4: 3, 4). Justice is driven back, and truth stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets and honesty cannot enter. Clearly the voices of the prophets of God remind us that in later times many will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. Such teaching come through hypocritical liars whose conscience has been seared with a hot iron (I Tim. 4:1-5). This article is summarized by Romans 1:22-25: "Professing to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the image of corruptible man...and they exchanged the truth of God for a lie."

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY: THE MYTH

Now we've done it! To infer that New Testament Christianity is a myth is to commit the ultimate heresy. One of the hallmarks of many churches is their claim to be a "New Testament church." This means we must, by all that is sacred, embrace a new Testament Christianity. Everything we believe, and practice must be found in the New Testament. This is as important as being a "born again Christian," which brings up another subject. The term "born again Christian" is widely used in most fundamentalist and charismatic circles today. Our question is simply: Are there Christians who are not "born again?" (A more accurate translation is "born anew" or "born from above").

Back to "New Testament Christianity"...Is there any other kind of Christianity? If Christ ushered in the New Testament (New Covenant) then how could there be an "Old Testament Christianity?" or any other kind for that matter. There are, however, many denominations using the term "New Testament Christianity" and claiming to be a "New Testament church." If a church is truly Biblical, it must by its very nature embrace both "Testaments." The Bible is one book and without attention to the Old Testament our understanding of the New will always be, at best, fragile. The claimants of "New Testament Christianity" have emphasized the term so much that they have virtually laid aside the Old Testament Scriptures and thought of them as only being "examples" for us. In so doing they have severed redemption from creation and made a distinction between the "God of wrath" in the Old Testament and the "God of Love" in the New Testament. They forget that the only Scriptures Jesus and the Early church had were the Scriptures of the Old Testament and when the New Testament speaks of all scripture being "inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:1) is speaking of the Old Testament Scriptures.

When people say they are a "New Testament church" we wonder which church mentioned in the New Testament they claim to be? ...The church at Corinth with all its division, immorality, the rejection of authority, desecration of the Lord's Supper, abuse of spiritual gifts and denial of the resurrection?... or the church in Galatia which was rife with legalism...or the church in Colossae with all its additions to the gospel... or the church to whom the book of Hebrews was written, which was slowly drifting away from the great salvation they had received, and were concerning themselves only with "first principles of the Word?... or maybe one of the five of the seven churches in Revelation which Christ puts under judgment? To look at some "New Testament" churches today they could fit into all the above.

More than likely most advocates of the "New Testament church" would say they are the church like the one in the book of Acts. If that were true why are they not "going everywhere preaching the Word" (Acts 8:4), and "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6)? Why do they not "have all things in common" (Acts 2:44), and share together in such a way as to see no need being unmet? Where are those who "rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ" (Acts 5:41)? Early Christianity was originally a revolution that challenged the attitudes, lifestyle, and values of the ancient world. It was more than a mere set of doctrines, it was an entire way of life. And all the military, economic, and social world could not stop it. Perhaps we should re-examine our claim to New Testament Christianity.

THE REALITY

It is time the church began asking some hard questions relative to their claim to be a "New Testament" church or for that matter their following the example of the early church. Do we really want to return to the principles of the New Testament? Is the Word of God really our guide or do we just mouth platitudes about it being the only basis of our faith and practice? Or more importantly could we actually put into practice the teaching of the Scripture relative to the church? Oz Guinness in his book *No God But God* asks: "Is the church primarily guided and shaped by its own character and calling, or by considerations and circumstances alien to itself? Or, to put the question differently, is the church a social reality truly shaped by the Word and Spirit of God?"

If we ever entertained the idea of following the precepts and examples set forth in Scripture concerning the church it would mean a radical change in the church culture that could be compared to the difference in what Christ taught and advocated to the existing religious system of the Jews in his day. His teachings were radical. His actions unheard of. His ministry rejected by the religious system. But note: this religious system, held on to so tightly and defended so strenuously by the religious leaders, was brought to an abrupt end in seventy AD while the rejected teachings of Christ brought about a world revolution which continues to this day and will continue until he returns. Anyone advocating even a partial attempt to bring the church today into the practices revealed in the New Testament would be castigated as a religious fanatic and a radical trouble maker. In fact, if the church today returned to the pattern taught in the New Testament it would destroy most of the religious system today which is thought of as "the Lord's work." Perhaps if we returned to the simple pattern of the early church, and divorced ourselves from the world (a divorce that would have God's unequivocal blessings and is long overdue) we would have to forego the raising of money for a new sanctuary to seat thousands on Sunday morning, or the plans for a family life center and recreational facility to attract and compete with what the world is offering our young people. Perhaps preachers would once again become preachers and forget about being administrators. Preachers would once again emphasize simple holiness, genuine love and cross-bearing. Gone would be the light, bouncy, simple, engaging, uplifting and fun spirituality in a cocktail party atmosphere where pleasantries are served up in twenty-minute pep talks and all unpleasantness, such as sin and Christian responsibility is never mentioned. "But that would give credence to non-Christians who say they don't go to church because it is boring." Why should the church uncritically accept the diagnosis of fallen men and women? Understanding how the unchurched are thinking is important; letting them set the church's agenda is dangerous. The prevailing attitude today is that the church must gain the respect and acceptance of the world in order to grow or to be heard and accepted. The aim many times is to make the transition from life in the world to life in the church as painless and invisible as possible. Some churches are careful not to make outsiders find anything alien or intimidating in their services. If we were to fashion our churches after the church revealed in Scripture the first thing we would have to deal with is our attitude toward the world. The gospel preached today, in many churches, is a gospel of being relevant and acceptable in the world's way of thinking. James says that "whosoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Where is this friendship taking us and where will it end?