

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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ALTERNATIVE CHRISTIANITY

A growing trend in the medical world today is toward alternative medicine. This is either in the place of or adding to the accepted medical practices. The basic idea is that of natural healing. Health food stores are prospering and drug counters are filled with natural herbs and remedies for anything that ails you. Television commercials and magazines lay out before their public the healing virtues of alternative medicine. This is not to pass judgment of this practice. We simply want to use it as an illustration of a greater problem than physical health facing the world, that of spiritual health. And though we do not pass judgment upon alternative medicine, we certainly judge alternative Christianity by its fruit.

Alternative Christianity is a trend toward either replacing or adding to accepted Scriptural teaching and practice. The basic idea is more natural than spiritual. "Christian" bookstores are prospering and are filled with rows of books espousing this new trend. Tele-evangelists, religious writers and seminars as well as local churches and preachers continually lay before the public the virtues of alternative Christianity. Just as alternative medicine is not really new (having been practiced for ages by people before modern technology came on the scene, using roots, herbs and natural remedies they found available to them) so alternative Christianity is not new (having come on the scene as early as the Apostolic era and has flourished throughout the history of the church coming to fruition in our modern day of new age thinking). As David Wells stated in *God in the Waste-land*: "The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood that is spilling from its wounds. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, His grace is too ordinary, His judgment is too benign, His gospel is too ordinary, His Christ too common." So the church has turned to alternative Christianity.

We have an interesting story in the book of I Kings that illustrates alternative Christianity. "And King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten gold, using 600 shekels of gold on each large shield, and made 300 shields of beaten gold, using three minas of gold on each shield, and put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon (I Kings 10:16, 17). After the death of Solomon we have this word: "Now it came about in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak, the king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem. And he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and he took everything, even taking all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. So King Rehoboam made shields of bronze in their place" (I Kings 14:25-27). The magnificence of gold was exchanged for cheapness and gaudiness of bronze. It gave the appearance of gold, but was counterfeit. They looked the same but the substance had changed. Today's Rehoboams are the religious teachers that substitute alternative bronze for the gold

of the gospel. Jude calls them "clouds without water" and "autumn trees with no fruit" (Jude 12) and Peter says they are "springs without water" (II Peter 2:17). Some common alternative substitutes in the religious world today are the same ones recorded in the Word. Romans 1:25: "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator..." The peril of this substitute is seen in the results of their actions. Three times in this passage (verses 18-32) the apostle states that "God gave them over to their own lusts, to degrading passions and to a depraved mind" resulting in raw idolatry, lustful homosexuality and what he calls "all unrighteousness" making them in God's sight "worthy of death." Other alternatives are: myths for sound doctrine (II Timothy 4:2-4); tradition for the Word (Mark 7:8, 13); and immortality of the soul for the resurrection (I Cor. 15:17, 18).

There are numerous alternatives we could mention, but consider the two most serious: that of an alternative Jesus, and an alternative gospel. There are two ways we can be guilty of accepting an alternative Jesus. First is like the religious leaders in his day, we can make Jesus less than the son of God. John 5:18: "...the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God." They said he blasphemed because he said, "I am the Son of God" (John 10:36). The second way we make him an alternative Jesus is to make him more than the Son of God. "By this we know the spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God, this is the spirit of the anti-Christ" (I John 4:2, 3). To say Jesus was God and not the Son of God is to deny his saving power, deny that he was the son of man and deny his intercessory power as our High Priest. Alternative Christianity is hesitant to refer to Jesus as being a man. Any reference to his manhood must be explained by the doctrine of the "Holy Trinity", a doctrine not mentioned in Scripture, and was unknown in the church until three hundred years after Christ. Therefore, he must be explained as being a "God-man" or "wholly God and wholly man". Jesus had to be a sinless man because "since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead" (I Cor. 15:21). The Apostle Paul left no room for alternative Christianity when he stated "there is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5).

The alternative gospel is where the word is not thoroughly mixed with faith. Hebrews 4:1,2: "Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." The word "united" here means to be thoroughly mixed. There is always the tendency to mix the word we hear with something else. It is not enough to hear the word of God, or even to accept it. We must mix it with faith. And if we don't mix the word of God with faith, we will mix it with something else. The Galatians took the gospel that Paul preached and mixed it with

the Law and tried to be justified by accepting the gospel and adding to it and mixing it with the keeping of the Law of Moses. The Colossians mixed it with gnostic philosophy. Paul writes: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental principles of the world rather than according to Christ" (Col.2:8). They had received the gospel of Christ, but concluded Christ was not enough. So they added the deceptive philosophies and traditions of Gnosticism to it and had mixed it into what Paul had preached to them. The Corinthians took the gospel of Christ and mixed it with their pagan philosophy and the paganism they had been accustomed to live in before hearing the gospel. Therefore Paul wrote First Corinthians showing that all the turmoil, the sin, the disunity in the church was an alternative gospel. The Thessalonians had taken the gospel and mixed it with the wild prophesies about the resurrection and the second appearing of Christ; thus inventing an alternative gospel. The Hebrews had taken the gospel of Christ and mixed it with a defeatist attitude, and were beginning to fall away and turn aside from the faith. This is the effect of an alternative gospel. When we mix the gospel with something else, we will defend "something else" to the death. It becomes such a part of us that when the gospel is preached in its purity and we have to make a decision between the gospel and what we have mixed it with, we choose the Alternative. Harry Blamires in *The Post Christian Mind* states: "The post-Christian mind is always happy to replace the codes of traditional personal morality by criteria of social damage-limitation. Hence the readiness to be under the offending vulnerable groups."

The modern up to date church that allows the secular culture to set its agenda should look at the Jewish religion in the time of Christ. We could call it "alternative Judaism". When it came to organized religion, none could hold a candle to the Jews. Ephesus had its Diana, Samaria had Simon the Sorcerer, Paphas had Elymas the magician, Athens had its unknown god, Corinth had its temple prostitutes, Rome had its Emperor Caesar...but Jerusalem...Jerusalem had its temple, its priesthood, its law, its ritual, its sacrifices, and could boast of 4000 years of being the people of God. They had the best, most elaborate, best located, most magnificent physical plant in town. Their priesthood surpassed Roman Catholics, their ritual and pageantry would have made Episcopalians take a back seat, they were more organized than the Baptist, more reformed than the Presbyterians, more traditional than the Methodists, and more refined than the Lutherans. They were about as legal concerning the law as the church of Christ is about the New Testament and about as independent as the Christian church. They kept the Sabbath better than the Seventh Day Adventists. Their worship would have made Charismatics jealous. They sang psalms and chanted and praised and prayed. They raised their hands and clapped and danced and offered sacrifices and burnt incense. About any practice you find in organized religion today finds its roots in O.T. Judaism...Yet it was worthless! Not that God established something of no value, but the intent of God had been lost centuries before (Isaiah Chapter One).

It is sad to see those who are committed to alternative Christianity so caught up in what A.W. Tozer describes as "the monstrous heresy that noise, size, activity, and bluster make men near to God." This was the problem of the Jewish religion that God rejected. Alternative Christianity with all its committees,

boards, councils, administrators, directors and a host of professionals with various titles, that passes itself off as the Lord's church, has made the same fatal mistake the Jews made. It is powered by a mixture of faith, psychology and politics and held together with the nuts and bolts of conformity, guided by motivational research instead of the Spirit of God and is concerned with pleasing men rather than pleasing God.

A poignant example of Alternative Christianity can be seen in the symbolic description of the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22). The most compelling verses in the message of Laodicea are verses 15 and 16 where the Lord says: "You are neither cold nor hot, I would that you were cold or hot, So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." The word translated "spew" or "spit" is literally the word "vomit." These are not pleasant words, but God is saying something important to this lukewarm church that has adopted alternative Christianity, perhaps not even realizing it. The common interpretation of the phrase "you are lukewarm" is that *hot* means an enthusiastic church that is on fire for God and *cold* means a church that is indifferent to the things of God and lacking in Godly devotion. C. J. Hemer in his book *Seven Cities of Asia Minor* states: "Laodicea was situated between two important cities, Colossae and Hieropolis. Colossae, wedged into a narrow valley in the shadow of towering mountains, was watered by icy streams which tumbled down from the heights. In contrast Hieropolis was famous for its hot mineral springs which flowed out of the city across a high plain until it cascaded down a cliff which faced Laodicea. By the time the water reached the valley floor, it was lukewarm, putrid and nauseating. At Colossae, therefore, one could be refreshed with clear, cold, invigorating drinking water; at Hieropolis, one could be healed by bathing in its hot, mineral-laden pools. But at Laodicea, the waters were neither hot (for health) or cold (for drinking)." Just as the waters at Laodicea were good for nothing, so the church was ineffectual and good for nothing. They had no influence upon society. As M. J. Riedwick and E. M. Green writes in *Expository Times*: "They offered no refreshment for the spiritually weary neither did they offer any healing for those who were spiritually sick. The church was not being called into account for its spiritual temperature but for its lack of being what it was called to be and for not doing what it was called to do." Jesus said "I know your deeds". A church can be busy and active but lukewarm in the things of the spirit and have no influence on society around it. That which brings the water of life to the weary and healing to the spiritually sick is the word of God. It is when the spirit of the alternative creeps into the church that lukewarmness sets in and respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity takes the place of the word and the church loses whatever influence it may have had on the culture around it.

NOTICE

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