



THE SOUNDING MEGAPHONE

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Hello readers. Who wouldn't rather hike down a grade rather than up a grade. However in spiritual things the path of least resistance is one to beware of. In this issue we will look at the Downgrade Controversy. Hike with us to higher ground. God bless you.

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THE DOWNGRADE CONTROVERSY AND FAITH FOR THE UPGRADE

The party everywhere apparent has a faith fashioned for the present century – perhaps we ought rather to say, for the present month. The sixteenth century gospel it derides, and that indeed, of every period except the present most enlightened era. It will have no creed because it can have none: it is continually on the move; it is not what it is to-day. Its shout for ‘liberty,’ its delight is invention, its element is change. On the other hand, there still survive, amid the blaze of nineteenth century light, a few whom these superior persons call ‘fossils’: that is to say, there are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who consider that the true gospel is no new gospel but is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. These do not believe in ‘advanced views,’ but judge that the view of truth which saved a soul in the second century will save a soul now, and that a form of teaching which was unknown till the last few years is of very dubious value, and is, in all probability, ‘another gospel which is not another.’ 1

Charles H. Spurgeon

In the nineteenth century, modernism and theological liberalism gained wide acceptance in England. Many ministers began to view fundamentalism as being narrow, irrelevant and unaccommodating. Reverend Charles H. Spurgeon reacted against this, calling it a downward trend, and warned his fellow Englishmen of the gravity of an apostasy of this kind.

The pervasive influence of modernism upon nineteenth-century thought can hardly be understated. It was an era of intellectualism and rationalism. The spirit of criticism expressed itself in education and in common life. Theological dogmas were scrutinized and discarded in the name of logic and reason. Inquiry into science was applauded. Re-evaluation of social and religious values was thought to be an essential task in achieving the goal of greater individualism and humanism.^{2 3}

Books, such as “Principles of Geology,” “Antiquity of Man,” and Charles Darwin’s “Origin of Species,” were introducing and popularizing new ideas that proposed to explain the history of the natural world and the origins of life in ways that boldly challenged the claims of the Bible. ^{4 5}

The influence of modernism on

nineteenth-century thought carried over into theological circles and gave rise to liberal theology in England. Modernism's attack on belief in the transcendent and supernatural cultivated the perfect atmosphere for modern biblical criticism to flourish. This new age demanded theological fluidity⁷ and a spirituality that was not confined within rigid lines.⁸ Liberal theology argued that theological positions must incorporate modern enlightenment.⁹ It embraced the modernist concept of humanism, claiming that God's highest self-expression was found in a human man, Christ.¹⁰ It felt that this kind of fluidity would bring a freshness to the study of the Bible and also might help win back the modernist, educated community which was unsympathetic towards evangelicalism.¹¹ One doctrinal tenet that liberal theology challenged and redefined was the inspiration of the Bible. The former position, that the Bible was the inspired and inerrant word of God, was first challenged by a compromised position which claimed that various biblical books had varying degrees of divine inspiration. This implied that Scripture was not necessarily true in all of its claims.¹² Not only did liberal theology challenge and redefine the inspiration of the Bible, it also promoted a new

form of interpreting the Bible. It argued that spiritual truths were conveyed allegorically and poetically and that this should be the governing rule used when interpreting the Bible. Such a governing rule dismissed a literal interpretation of such things as the creation narrative and miracles.¹³ As well as challenging miracles, theological liberalism challenged the doctrine of the atonement. The evangelical position that the death of Christ was a substitutionary sacrifice on man's behalf, which appeased the wrath of God, became open for debate.¹⁴ The purpose for the death of Christ began to be viewed as simply an example of self-sacrifice for us to follow, rather than a price paid redemptively.¹⁵ In a short period of time, theological liberalism became widely accepted in nineteenth-century England. Initially, many English theologians were influenced by liberal German theologians. The German professor, J. G. T. Eichoran (1752-1827), seemed to be the first to use the expression, "higher criticism."¹⁶ Alberecht Rirschel (1822-1889) was another liberal German theologian. He rejected the doctrine of original sin¹⁷ and the juristic element in Christ's work.¹⁸ He believed that the modern man wanted, above all other

things, to live according to reason and that Christianity could aid and strengthen him in this endeavour. He believed that Christianity was an outlook upon life and morality but not an immediate relationship with God. 19 Some have viewed him as the father of liberal theology. 20

While German liberal theology was being read in England, English liberal theologians were spreading their teaching, as well. Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) began teaching that the virgin birth was false, that Christ was less than infallible and that the teachings of the Apostle Paul were not given absolute authority. Edward Evanson (1731-1805) denied the apostolic authorship of the Gospel of John. 21 Thomas Belsham (1750-1829) began teaching that the Pentateuch had more than one author and that the creation narratives were in contradiction with scientific knowledge. 22 Possibly the most significant English liberal theologian of this time was D. F. Strauss. He determined to differentiate between the facts of history and what he viewed as mythological expressions of Christian ideas. He proposed to “get behind” the accounts of Christ and find out who Jesus “really was.” 23 He determined that “in the person and acts of Jesus no supernaturalism shall be suffered to remain.” 24 The

persuasive influence of these liberal theologians, and others, can hardly be understated. Anglican Bishop, J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), stated; “Whether we like it or not we cannot shut higher criticism out. Like frogs in the plague of Egypt, it creeps in everywhere.” 25

While theological liberalism was spreading like frogs in England, not all ministers accepted these changes. Perhaps the most vocal opponent to the new teachings was Reverend Charles H. Spurgeon. He began publishing a warning to all Christians in his periodical, “The Sword and the Trowel.” A series of messages became known as “The Down Grade” articles. The first two articles were not actually written by Spurgeon but, rather, by an associate of his, Robert Schindler. Spurgeon continued this series, beginning with the third article. To give a mental picture of what they were trying to say, they began speaking of a high pinnacle. This pinnacle had a great downgrade. Truth and churches occupy a position on the top of the pinnacle. As many churches compromised their beliefs, they gradually became disconnected from the truth. With this disconnection, they lost their footing also, and began tumbling down the great downgrade.

In the third issue, Spurgeon began warning his readers of some specific things. He lamented that preachers were spreading unbelief. He warned that such ministers are ten times more dangerous than atheists. ²⁶ He argued that along with the abandonment of sound doctrine also went the living of a holy life. Spurgeon warned that some ministers were amusing themselves at play houses or theatres. He said that there was a time in England when a Nonconformist minister would lose his whole church for making such a compromise. ²⁷ He lamented that the doctrines of atonement ²⁸ and of the inspiration of the Scriptures were being derided, that the Holy Spirit was being degraded, that punishment for sin and belief in the resurrection was treated as fiction. ²⁹ He reminded his readers that many of them were called by the name of “Nonconformist,” and that “Our nonconformity is beyond measure precious as a vital spiritual force, but only while it remains such will it justify its own existence.” ³⁰ With strong and compelling language, Spurgeon communicated the gravity of the downgrade issue. Liberal theology was not just another side of Christianity, it was apostasy. He declared; “A new religion has been initiated, which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese.” ³¹

Spurgeon told his readers that the stand that he was taking was simply his duty to take as a minister. He assured them that he did not gain pleasure in stirring up antagonism and that he had not written in hate. His motive for writing was that “the gospel is too precious for us to be indifferent to its adulteration. By the life we bear to the Lord Jesus we are bound to defend the treasure with which He has put us in trust.” ³² Spurgeon was well aware that liberal theology had spread within his own denomination. He weighed the decision and then made the difficult choice to withdraw his personal membership. It wasn’t easy for him, for there were others within the denomination who were loyal to him and who shared his concerns. Spurgeon opposed the humanistic focus of modern liberalism. He maintained that theology should not be man-centred, nor should it be shaped to accommodate human wisdom. He lamented that, “The new religion practically sets ‘thought’ above revelation, and, constitutes man the supreme judge of what ought to be true.” ³³ Spurgeon’s decision to oppose theological liberalism, both by word and by action of disassociation, offended many in nineteenth-century England. The *Down Grade* articles

shocked many evangelicals who were going with the flow of modern thought. Spurgeon was urged to soften his rhetoric. 34 Because Spurgeon was suffering from kidney problems during this time, some felt that his writings were just the rantings of a stressed, dying man. Others thought that Spurgeon was being too vague. 35 Some claimed that Spurgeon was crying “wolf,” making an issue unnecessarily. Others responded with a defence of theological liberalism. One newspaper, *The Christian World*, said that young ministers, and others, must now decide whether or not they would accept the “modern thought” which in Mr Spurgeon’s eyes is a ‘deadly cobra’,” but in their eyes was “The glory of the century.” 36 This magazine said further that “Mr. Spurgeon professes to despise or ignore the science and criticism at the progressive life and thought of the present day.” 37 John Clifford, the vice-president of the denomination in 1887, said that Spurgeon’s statements had not been proved. 38 Spurgeon was subsequently censored in April, 1888.

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Was liberal theology the glory of the nineteenth century? Did it bring to England a new and improved form of Christianity that Englishmen of other generations did not know? While it is true that sometimes God did express Himself through human form, liberal

theology was wrong to centre its teachings on human expression and humanism. Their redefinition of the inspiration of the Bible was too great an alteration to be tolerated. It directly undermined the authority of the Bible, the very grounds of Christianity itself. Although the Bible does convey some of its truths through allegory and poetry, this does not mean that we should view the bulk of Scripture in this way. By making allegorical interpretations the governing rule of hermeneutics, many in Spurgeon’s day were able to dismiss the difficult teachings or commands of Scripture. While Christ’s sacrifice was an example, it was foremost an atonement. By challenging the doctrine of the atonement, nineteenth-century English theologians were challenging Christianity’s most central theme. By simply flowing with the downgrade, many Victorian Englishmen were making a compromise. Spurgeon may have been suffering from kidney problems but the nineteenth-century modernist Church was suffering from *spiritual* sickness that was much more serious. Spurgeon was not being vague. He named his issues: the inspiration of the Scriptures, the atonement, punishment for sin, the resurrection and holiness. Then he

addressed these issues directly, clearly and with great persuasion. This is in contrast to many liberal theologians whose writings were deeply philosophical and often mind-bending in their complexity. It is because Spurgeon approached these issues so directly that he was asked to temper his rhetoric. It was precisely his strong preaching that was needed to communicate the seriousness of the situation. As Spurgeon said; “A little plain speaking would do the world of good just now.” 40 Because liberalism had spread in nineteenth-century England to the extent that it had, it cannot fairly be said that Spurgeon was crying “wolf.” The old story of the boy who cried “wolf” does not apply because, as Spurgeon has said; “The parallels only fail in the all important point that he cried ‘Wolf’ when there was none, and we are crying ‘Wolf’ when packs of them are howling so loudly that it would be superfluous for us to shout at all if a wretched indifferentism had not brought a deep slumber upon those who ought to guard the flocks.” 41 Spurgeon was not overreacting on his point, for theological liberalism in England was as plenteous as the frogs in Egypt. The liberal theologians of Spurgeons day were more dangerous to the English Church than atheists. Atheists did not have the trust of the

English churchmen. Many liberal theologians did have this trust and were undermining the truth of sacred Scripture. Spurgeon was a Nonconformist in the true sense of the word and voiced his concerns out of his duty as a minister. While it is true that nineteenth-century England saw many changes in technology, politics and philosophy, does this necessitate a change in spirituality? Spurgeon’s question is a fair one; “Do men really believe that there is a gospel for each century?” 42 Spurgeon’s question is a fair one and his stand was a true one; theological liberalism had effectively placed many Churches on the downgrade.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTES

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Dec. 1888, *The "Down Grade" Controversy* (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d), 71.
2. Vernon F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century 1800-1860* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1913), 201.
3. Louis A. Drummond comments, "Moreover, as is so often the case, that general humanistic atmosphere soon infiltrated theological circles. It began to manifest itself as an emphasis on human development and far less on a God-centred approach to the realities of life as prevailed for centuries." Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 661. Taken from *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* © Copyright 1992 by Louis A. Drummond. Published by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Used by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.
4. H. A. Wilson, "The Development of Evangelicalism," in *Liberal Evangelicalism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1970), 19-20.
5. Louis A. Drummond comments; "... Evolutionary theory began to take such a hold on the mindset of many Victorians that resulted in a humanistic approach to all reality." Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers*, 661. Taken from *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* © Copyright 1992 by Louis A. Drummond. Published by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Used by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.
7. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil : The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).
8. Vernon F. Storr, "The Bible and Its Value," *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 87.
9. H. A. Wilson, "The Development of Evangelicalism," in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 26-27.
10. E. A. Burroughs, "Evangelicalism and Personality," in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 52-53.
11. Robert Anderson, *The Bible and Modern Criticism* (London: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.), 39.
12. Ibid., 178-171.
13. Vernon F. Storr, "The Bible and its Value," in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 83-85.
14. H. A. Wilson, "The Development Of Evangelicalism," in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 23-24.
15. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and*

Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology, 128.

16. Ibid., 40.

17. Ibid., 82.

18. Ibid., 85.

19. Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century : Its Background and History* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 2001), 641, 644.

20. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 74.

21. Ibid., 41.

22. Ibid., 42.

23. D. F. Strauss, Quoted in Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince Of Preachers*, 662.

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24. D. F. Strauss, “The Life of Jesus,” quoted in *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 45-46.

25. J. C. Ryle, quoted in *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*,

51.

26. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Aug. 1887, *The “Down Grade” Controversy* (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d.), 19.

27. Ibid., 18.

28. Because Spurgeon was a Calvinist, it would be easy to misinterpret the issue that he was addressing with regards to the atonement. In the *Down Grade* Articles, he was not directing his objections towards those such as Methodists, who held Arminian understanding of the atonement. He clarifies this point in these words; “In our fellowship with Methodists of all grades we have found them firmly adhering to those great evangelical doctrines for which we contend ... We care far more for the central evangelical truths than we do for Calvinism as a system ... Those who hold the eternal verities of salvation, and yet do not see all that we believe and embrace, are by no means the objects of our opposition: our warfare is with men who are giving up the atoning sacrifice, denying the inspiration of Holy Scriptures, and casting slurs upon justification by faith. The present struggle is not a debate upon the question of Calvinism or Arminianism, but of the truth of God

versus the inventions of men.” Charles H. Spurgeon, quoted in Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers*, 678. Taken from *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* © Copyright 1992 by Louis A. Drummond. Published by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Used by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

29. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Aug. 1887, *The “Down Grade” Controversy*, 17.

30. *Ibid.*, 19.

31. *Ibid.*, 17.

32. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Sept. 1887, *The “Down Grade” Controversy*, 23.

33. Charles H. Spurgeon, “Choice Teachings for the Chosen,” in *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 187.

34. John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel : When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 207.

35. *Ibid.*, 208.

36. “The Christian World,” quoted in Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Aug. 1887, *The “Down Grade” Controversy*, 30.

37. W. Copeland Bowie, “The Christian World,” Sept. 22, 1887 in *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 184.

38. Ernst W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 133.

39. Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald, Cd., *C.H. Spurgeon Autobiography. 2 Vols* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 470.

40. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Aug. 1887, *The “Down Grade” Controversy*, 20.

41. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel” Oct. 1887, *The “Down Grade” Controversy* (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d.), 28.

42. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Apr. 1888, *The “Down Grade” Controversy*, 50.

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London: Longmans Green and Co., 1913.

THE DOWNGRADE CONTROVERSEY AND FAITH FOR THE UPGRADE – PART 2

We have discussed Charles Spurgeon and the *downgrade controversy*. Our day is seeing an attack upon our faith which is just as great as the one that Spurgeon saw in his day.

While Spurgeon defended Christianity against the influence of modernism, Christians today are called upon to defend the faith from attack by a new world-view known as

postmodernism. The term “postmodernismo” was first used by Frederico de Onis in the 1930s.

However, the concept that is, today, understood as postmodernism was probably first laid out in “The Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture,” which came out in 1972. 1

Prior to this, the beginnings of postmodernist thought can also be found in the writings of the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. 2

There are many thoughts within postmodernism, the central thought being that there is no absolute truth. Postmodernists believe that truth is formulated by societies for practical purposes and that truth changes along with the changes within society. Gavin Hyman says; “The notion of a static, fixed, and stable truth apprehensible by means of rational inquiry, has ended and is ending.” 3

Postmodernism rejects the concept of absolute and universal truth.

Postmodernism reacts against all ideologies and dogmas, believing them to be nothing more than clever inventions. How are ideologies and dogmas invented? Postmodernists would say that they are invented through the use of language.

Language becomes the great inventor, or constructor, of reality.

Reality is said to be linguistic.

Because postmodernists believe that societies construct truth and reality in much the same way as literary authors would narrate a story, recorded concepts of reality such as historical records are said to be narratives. Ideologies, world-views and religions that claim to be universally true are referred to as “grand-narratives,” “metanarratives” or “master-stories.” Postmodernism challenges grand-narratives by trying to give voice to the different or dissenting “alternative stories” of minorities.

The object of much postmodernist writing is to “deconstruct” other pieces of writing. This means uncovering internal differences, contradictions and inconsistencies in a piece of writing. Postmodernist deconstruction is based on the assumption that no text of writing has a singular, knowable meaning. 4

Deconstruction goes further in attempting to break down whole systems of belief. 5

In general, postmodernism can be regarded as part of a longer running philosophical tradition of scepticism, which is intrinsically anti-authoritarian in outlook and negative in tone: more concerned with undermining the pretensions of other theories than putting anything positive in their place. 6

So we see that postmodernism is relativistic, deconstructive and feminist, viewing all reality as linguistic reality. Hyman says that “[i]n this linguistic reality, Christian theology, as traditionally understood, also comes to an end.” 7 With the supposed ending of traditional Christian theology, postmodernists have a replacement theology for the 21st century Church.

Some postmodernists have a postmodernist Christianity to replace conservative evangelical belief. I know that some of you are thinking, “Those two words ‘postmodernist’ and ‘Christianity’ don’t go together.” I agree. There are, however, some within the mainline Church system that consider themselves postmodernist Christians. Let us examine this strange creature. Watch your footing, this is a downgrade. At the outset, I want to refer to two kinds

of alleged “postmodernist Christians”. Because no one that I know of, or have read of, has made this division, I must create the terms myself.

A “Class A” Christian postmodernist has fully accepted the concept that there is no universal truth. This invariably leads to a liberal theology. The modernism of Spurgeon’s day spread through organized Churches and became the foundation for neo-orthodoxy, or theological liberalism. Today, postmodernism is popularized in some Church circles and, as a foundation, it produces the very same result, theological liberalism. The goal of Class A Christian postmodernists is the “recuperation” of a Christian theology that is “profoundly informed by the insights of postmodernist thought.” 8 To establish relativity within Christianity, they begin by pointing out that creation was created “out of nothing.” They argue that reality that hangs between nothing and eternity must be in flux. 9 They say that a fluctuating reality means a fluctuating theology. George Lindbeck, a representative of the Lutheran World Federation, taught that theology doesn’t “make first-order statements about reality but, rather, makes rules for “communities

of faith” to “organize and understand themselves.” He states further, that religion is “a cultural – linguistic system.” 10 Philip Kenneson, a Christian college professor, declares that “there is no such thing as objective truth, and it’s a good thing, too.” 11 Some liberal theologians use the term “process theology” to describe their views. John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffen say that process theology denies the existence of a God who is a “Cosmic Moralist,” who acts as a divine law-giver and judge, setting moral rules and recording offences that He will one day punish. They also deny that God is male. 12

Many Class A Christian postmodernists are militantly feminist. Mary Daly, a Catholic professor who was fired from a Jesuit school for rejecting a literal interpretation of the fall of humanity, wrote the controversial line; “If God is male, then the male is God.” 13 Daly is not the only Christian feminist who rejects the idea of God being male. Dr. Sallie McFague offers three alternative models to the concept of God, one alternative being of God, as mother. 14

Some Class A Christian postmodernists even defend homosexual relations and abortion rights. In his book, “Postmodern

Christianity,” theologian John W. Riggs objects to many Christians “turning Scripture and religion against those men and women whose sexual lives are orientating toward the same gender...” 15 He teaches that the application of Levitical purity laws towards homosexual activity is an illegitimate use of Scripture that harms lesbians and gays. 16 In the case of abortion, he teaches that the “loss of human fetal life” is not the “killing of a human person.” 17

If a “Class A” Christian postmodernist rejects the concept of absolute truth then a “Class B” Christian postmodernist mixes the ideas of absolute truth and constructive reality. Class B Christian postmodernists affirm the Christian view of God and they affirm that God has inspired the Bible as Holy Scripture. They recognize that the Bible makes declarations on points of theology and issues of morality. Some of these declarations they personally believe and hold as absolute truth. However, they restrict their list of truths to a very small handful of scriptural statements that are emphatically stated. Most of their beliefs are outside of this category and they view most of their beliefs as constructed reality. As much as

possible, they refrain from developing strong opinions on theological or scriptural issues. They feel that many of today's moral issues are not addressed by Scripture, except perhaps in a very general way that can be interpreted different ways by different Christians. They dislike religious controversy and usually prefer compromised positions over inflexible theological or moralistic stands. They may emphasize the importance of unity over the importance of accuracy, or precision, in spiritual matters. Many times, they view theology as an obstacle to unity. Many of them are open to ideas such as the ecumenical union of Catholics and Protestants, modern feminism and theistic evolution. They may say, "I am not a theologian, anyway."

So called Postmodernist Christianity constitutes part of the downgrade today. I believe that just as there is a downgrade, there is also an upgrade that leads us towards God. To be on the upgrade, we need to regain faith in truth.

To re-establish an understanding of truth, we should begin by learning what Scripture says about God. We are told that God is the "God of truth." (See Psalm 31.5 and Isaiah 65.16). The God of truth speaks only truth; "... I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right." (Isaiah

45.19) and; "... *thy* counsels of old *are* faithfulness *and* truth." (Isaiah 25.1). We also read; "*Thou are* near, O LORD; and all thy commandments *are* truth." (Psalm 119.151). Not only does God speak truth but neither God, nor the truth that He speaks, changes; "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." (Isaiah 40.8) and; "For I *am* the LORD, I change not;..." (Malachi 3.6)

Truth that is spoken by the unchanging God of truth is antithetical, meaning that it opposes all opposite views as false. Scripture rebukes those who have "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, ..." (Romans 1.25). Such people "... suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." (Romans 1.18,19 NASB). From this we see that God reveals truth to men, that truth is knowable to them and that many reject it. A rejection of God's truth is not a matter of choosing another alternative truth. Instead, it is a suppressing of the truth in unrighteousness and a trading of the truth for lies. Scripture declares; "... let God be true, but every man a liar; ..." (Romans 3.4). Jesus teaches that

truth is to be practiced, and shows the difference between those who practice evil and those who practice truth. He says:

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

John 3.19-21 NASB

Here, we read that those who love darkness conceal their actions but, in contrast to this, those who practice the truth, do it openly, giving God the credit. This also means that there are both true and false forms of worship. On one occasion, Jesus was conversing with a Samaritan woman at a well. She began disputing over a difference between the way Samaritans and Jews worship. According to her tradition, it was proper and important to worship on a certain mountain. We read of Jesus’ response:

*Jesus *said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.*

But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’

John 4.21-24 NASB

Jesus teaches that it is not enough to claim to worship God; God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Jesus not only called for living in truth and worshipping in truth; Jesus Himself is the personification of truth. He emphatically declared; “... I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14.6). Jesus is “... full of grace and truth.” and “... grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” (John 1.14, 17). When standing before Pilot, Jesus declared; “... For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” (John 18.37NASB). Jesus not only came to bear witness to the truth, but the truth that He speaks does not change. He says; “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Matthew 24.35). Not only does Jesus personify and speak the truth, the truth that He speaks frees, purifies and matures those who receive it. He taught;

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8.32). This shows us, again, that truth is knowable. It further shows us that Christ’s truth sets people free. While praying for His disciples, Jesus asked His Father in heaven to “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17.17).

If modernism put much of the Church of Spurgeon’s day on the downgrade, then postmodernism has put much of the 20th and 21st century Church on the same slippery slope. Postmodernism is relativistic and deconstructive and it rejects absolute truth. If you consider yourself a postmodernist Christian, then repent, be converted and step onto the upgrade. Put your faith in the God of truth, in the God Who does not change. Postmodernism and Christianity do not go together; it is an oxymoron. Do not let your life and faith be a great oxymoron. Accept and surrender to Jesus Christ, the very embodiment of truth. Come to the light of truth and ask God to change you that you may worship Him in Spirit and truth. Hear Jesus’ voice today and come to Him seeking His mercy. You will find Him to be full of grace and truth. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

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**THE DOWNGRADE
CONTROVERSY AND FAITH FOR
THE UPGRADE – PART 3**

In Downgrade Controversy and Faith for the Upgrade

We have looked at Charles Spurgeon's fight against the inroads of liberal theology into the Church. We looked at the erosive and destructive consequences that watering down truth can have, and has had, in the Church world. We looked at postmodernism and its influence upon many in the modern Church. We also held out a foundation for, and an appeal for, reforming and conforming to biblical truth as being part of the upgrade. We will continue that appeal in this article.

Upgrade traveling also means the recovery of truth and the embracing of truth. Embracing truth means both living it out and declaring it. There are two great arenas for the living and declaring of truth to be done in, the Church and the World.

Embracing Truth In the Church

You would think that the embracing of truth in the Church should not need to be stated. However, the Church, that is, the mainline Church, has become an arena where truth and error are up for grabs. Postmodern teaching has supplanted much Christian teaching and liberal positions on just about everything can be found taught from many pulpits. Today, many professing Christians practice anything and everything, from yoga to homosexuality, despite how God feels about rebellion. There is so much darkness and untruth practiced among professing Christians that we must ask, "What can be done?" What must be done is for us to return to God's Word, the Bible, and begin

reading and following it. We need a revival of Bible truth. Friend, if we give up truth we will become like the religions that don't know God. We need to rediscover the truth that has been given to us, handed down to us from God, by way of prophets and apostles, through martyr's hands, and laid before us. Then, having discovered it, we need to delight in the truth. We cannot allow skepticism and unbelief to flash from the pulpit and spread among believers. It is not that we want to spread disunity. We are happiest when others are walking in truth and unity. However, when truth is subtracted from unity, what kind of fellowship do we have? What kind of unity do we have? Are we uniting with God or with men when we let go of truth? We need to stand for matters that are vital for our faith. It is ironic that at the same time one section of the Church world may be full of the freshly grown wheat of truth and another section may be full of thorns and briars of falsehood. What are we to do with the thorns and briars? Let us pull them out and replant wheat. Let us purge out the lies that weaken and pollute. Let us not tolerate the watering down of doctrine. Our leaders must accept the responsibility of holding God's Word high. There is only one direction of travel that we can accept, forward. This is no time to blend our truth with the world's philosophy. If early preachers of the truth had not taken their stand in history, would we have the truth today? Now it is time for us to stand for truth so that there is still truth passed on after us. The stakes are so high, so high. Now is the time to guard our life and doctrine. Let us allow God's word to be our plum-line and our measuring stick. We can't afford to lose the truth. All too often the threat is from within. Little compromises become

larger ones and, before long, our beliefs are changed by people on the inside of the Church who have not kept the standard high and who have not defended truth. If we are not careful, that folly spreads in the Church, to us, and we may become agents of error. Truth in the body of Christ is too precious to be lost. It brings stability and security. Many will be offended by truth, even in the Church world, but what is more offensive, piety or hypocrisy? Surely there is nothing more offensive than hypocrisy, so let us not take our values from television, the theatre or secular education. God is so much higher than all of these things. Many are sacrificing reverence for relevance, or so they think. However, truth is always relevant. Let us be careful in living it out and forthright in its proclamation.

Living And Speaking The Truth In The World

The other arena to live and proclaim truth in is the “world.” We are not of the world but we are in it and we can very definitely have an impact on our world by how we live our lives and by what we stand up for. In so many ways, skeptical daring has pushed out evangelical zeal. It is time to resist this push and raise high the banner of truth. We are to love truth and hate every false way. We read in Scripture: “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.” (Psalm 119.104). When a strong sense of duty and conviction pervades public speech, truth is not so easily put down. Let’s speak our conviction for truth in

the public square and push the battle to the gates. Let the cause of truth be our goal, no matter how much men oppose us. Are we afraid of the educated and the influential in the secular world? Let it never be. Let us be zealous for God and His truth in society’s sphere. This is not a time for fear; this is a time for faith, determination and bold opposition to evil. Truth does not just automatically become established in the earth; truth must be fought for. Is truth worth fighting for? I will answer that with another question: “Do we want our lives to be lived in vain?” The gospel makes men fear sin and it is the gospel that we need proclaimed. Society wants a philosophy which is inclusive and broad. However, we learn from Jesus that the way to destruction is broad. (See Matthew 7.13). It is time to reveal to the world the narrow road of truth that confronts error, sin and evil. Truth combats evil in its many philosophical and religious forms. The challenge is for the truth-loving Christian to take his stand and not to change. (See 1 Timothy 4.16). Christian, when society resists truth, don’t change. Christian when society says you are closed-minded, don’t change. When society offers incentives to compromise, don’t change. The unflinching declaration

of truth will lead to some men becoming free. It is worth the stand. Keep your perspective. If the true God is your God, if Jesus is your Lord and if heaven is your home, what does it matter what others think of us? Run your race and don't take your hand from the plough.

Liberal theology in Spurgeon's day put much of the Church on a long spiralling downgrade. Much of the 20th and 21st century Church has been sliding down a downgrade of her own, postmodernism. However, those brave souls who hear the voice of Jesus and choose to obey and follow Him are on a very different pathway. This one leads up. The upgrade is that heavenly pathway which is marked by truth and faith. Let us be the upward-climbing Christians who learn, live and declare truth in both the Church and the world. Let it be that we climb this

pathway with all of the vigor and tenacity of the mountaineer who would scale Everest, yearning and stretching and persevering to the peak.

Shawn Stevens

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