

Postmodernism: Erasing the Distinctives, Parts 1 & 2

Walter Truitt Anderson tells the story of three umpires relaxing together after a baseball game.

The first umpire said, “There’s balls and there’s strikes, and I call them the way they are.”

The second umpire remarked, “There’s balls and there’s strikes, and I call ‘em the way I see ‘em.”

The third umpire piped in, “There’s balls and there’s strikes, and they ain’t nothin’ until I call ‘em.”

For the postmodernist, what he thinks and knows is all that matters. We are not able to get outside ourselves and check to see whether what we think, feel, or know is accurate or objective.

The problem is that everyone in the game has to live with the call of the postmodernist umpire. What rules does the umpire have, if he make his own rules as he goes along? In postmodern thinking, what you end up with is no real rules at all—just the rules of the one in power.

In the end you have anomia—lawlessness!

“For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (*Jer. 2:13*)

Truth claims, we are told, are essentially tools to legitimate power. That's why in postmodern culture, the person to be feared is the one who believes that we can discover ultimate truth. The dogmatist, the absolutist is both naive and dangerous.

Postmodernists say we should accept all beliefs as equally valid. Openness without the restraint of reason, and tolerance without moral appraisal are the new postmodern mandates.

What is postmodern thinking? Postmodernism is not really so much an “ism” as it is a mindset, attitude, or worldview.

- They believe truth is manufactured, not revealed. God and His morality is manufactured to control society.

- It denies the reality of absolute truth, believing that moral and religious “truths” are socially constructed by men. Doubt in absolute truth means that the Bible cannot be considered utterly trustworthy either.
- Brethren are now putting together a commentary based on the methods of higher criticism. Destructive higher criticism contains the poison of disbelief. It is born in speculation, cradled in doubt, and writhing in fantasy. Those who embrace higher criticism cast aside their hope. Postmodernism delights in doubt.
- According to postmodern thinking, since all religious truths are socially constructed for the purpose of controlling society, they can be deconstructed (torn apart). All truth to them is relative and subjective. So we will be hearing that Genesis is full of myths, and the four gospels contradict each other, and unknown people in church wrote the epistles for their situation in life, their own needs and culture.
- Postmodernism loves the cultural argument: that what is true in one culture is not necessarily true in another. Those who embrace female leadership in the church love the cultural argument, as do those who embrace the gay agenda. It allows them to dismiss the word of God for their own desires.
- By saying that all truths are relative and subjective, postmodernists believe no truth can claim to be superior over or exclusive of the others.
- Since Christianity claims to be exclusive (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), it poses a threat to other humanly constructed social systems and must not be allowed exert its power over others.
- God’s truth and morals can only be one voice among many voices.
- In postmodern thinking, the only real sin is being controlling, exclusive, or judgmental. “We must all get along; to do that we cannot say we are right and others are wrong about anything.”

The point of postmodern thinking has little to do with determining what the truth really is, since postmodernism denies that there are absolute truths that come from God.

The point of postmodern thinking is power. It is the means by which those who oppose the truth in their own minds are able to throw off the power of the Biblical truth for the amoral and irreligious systems they prefer.

They might say, “If you wish to believe in God, okay; but do not impose Him or His morals on anyone else!”

Radical Postmodernists like the “politically correct” crowd are bullies. They accuse anyone with whom they disagree of being sectarian, judgmental, and narrow. They are never able to see their own judgmental attitudes.

Make no mistake; the postmodernists among our brethren believe that mainstream churches are guilty of “salvific judgmentalism” and will be lost like the Pharisees. **In their eyes, we are legalistic and Pharisaical and lost (yes, lost)** if we insist that God means what He says:

- about baptism as immersion
- about baptism of responsible, penitent believers
- about the purpose of baptism so that sins will be forgiven.

In their eyes we have never understood the grace of God. Have you ever stopped to ask about baptism, who is active and who is passive? In baptism God is active and we are passive. In baptism God:

- causes us to die to sin
- immerses us in the death of Christ
- forgives our sins
- buries us with Christ
- raises us up with Christ to walk in newness of life
- adds to his church
- causes our new birth so that we may enter the kingdom

In baptism, we are submitting to God’s activity. We are responding to His gift of mercy and grace. To say that we don’t need to be baptized to be saved is to interfere with God’s activity in our lives.

Church Growth

They have used “church growth” literature to bully churches into taking a more progressive stance.

In the biography of Benjamin Franklin, the Ohio preacher, published in 1879, the subject of instrumental music comes up occasionally. Franklin was involved with W. L. Pinkerton in the first controversy over the instrument in 1859-1860. Those who favored the instrument made the argument that we have to keep up with the times or we will lose our young

people. Losing our young people has frequently been an excuse for innovations. But are we losing them? Is the argument valid?

Flavil Yeakley recently reported at FHU that the more liberal the church is among us, the more likely they were to lose their youth to the world or to other religious groups. Is that surprising? You cannot bash the church over its teachings and expect your children to keep worshiping there!

What happened in 1906?

In 1906 the US Census recognized the separation of churches of Christ from the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ. At that time the progressives numbered close to a million, while churches of Christ numbered 159,000 members in 2,600 congregations. In the last century we have grown nearly eight times larger! We have about 13,000 congregations and 1.6 million adherents.

What happened to the Disciples of Christ, the most liberal of the groups?

In 1925, they had 8,715 churches with 1.4 million members. At their height in 1960 they had 8,000 churches with 1.8 million members (thearda.com). Today they have 3,737 churches with 744,397 members. They sought to become more and more like the culture. They didn't win, they lost!

Flavil Yeakley, said recently, one can say these things about churches of Christ:

- 12th largest religious group in America
- 6th fastest growing church in America
- 4th in the nation in the total number of congregations
- 5th in the nation in number of counties in which there is a congregation
- 1st in the nation in distribution of congregations
- 1st in the nation in weekly attendance (ratio of attendance to members)

According to a survey by Barna about five years ago, churches of Christ were first in donations among religious groups, that is a greater proportion of members gave than in other groups.

Each year the United States sees 4,000 new congregations (of all kinds) started and 7,000 close their doors. Between 2000 and 2006 churches of

Christ lost 69 churches. This is in spite of the fact we are the 12th largest group and have the fourth most congregations and are the best distributed for our size.

When you consider that we lost only 69 churches out of a total loss of 42,000 nationwide during that period, it is rather remarkable.

Brethren we are not dying!! A closer look at the churches which are dying might show that it has much to do with local factors and leadership and very little to do with doctrine.

This is not the time for discouragement about being a member of the Lord's church. Rather it is a time to keep up the good fight of faith and finish the course.

The postmodern mindset is to dismiss God, to ignore Him, and to regard His teachings as irrelevant. He is just one voice among many and may be told to "hush."

Postmodernists regard Christianity as a socially constructed religion and not *the* truth. In their minds Christianity is no better than other humanly developed religions. They believe they can set aside the doctrine of Christ for whatever they prefer.

Here are some examples of what I mean:

1. In June, 2005, LBI Institute announced a new edition of the Gospels that identifies Christ as a woman named Judith Christ of Nazareth. The new version was published to acknowledge the rise of women in society. It revises familiar stories, transforming the "Prodigal Son" into the "Prodigal Daughter" and the "Lord's Prayer" in the "Lady's Prayer."
2. Disregard for Scripture opened the door to the ordination of women and has paved the way for practicing homosexuals to fill the pulpits of these apostate denominations.
3. B.C. has become BCE (Before Common Era) and A.D. has become CE (Common Era). Christ has been removed from our dating system.

4. For many, religion is like a big smorgasbord, from which “customers” may freely choose whichever foods one desires and may ignore other foods. Self-made religion.
5. Postmodern Biblical interpretation transfers truth away from the intention of the author of the Biblical book to *the culturally biased lens of the interpreter*. The reader determines what he thinks or feels the truth is, regardless of what the writer wrote. Frankly, the reader believes what he thinks about the Biblical text not what the text actually says.
6. Ultimately, the postmodernist does not believe God enough to take Him seriously. He will arrogantly sit in judgment of God and of God’s teaching rather than submit to God’s Word.
7. Everyone’s opinion is as good as anyone else’s. The main criterion of moral and doctrinal truth is how you, as an individual, feel about it. God’s Word must be filtered through how one feels.
8. In postmodern hermeneutics, the goal of exegesis is transformed from questions about what the Biblical text means into how the text can be used to serve the new social agenda of the postmodernist.
9. Slightly more than half of teens (53%) say that Jesus committed sins while He was on earth.
10. Thirty percent of teens believe that all religions are really praying to the same God, they are just using different names for God.
11. In total, 83% of teens maintain that moral truth depends on the circumstances, and only 6% believe that moral truth is absolute.
12. One of our Christian universities has decided to publish a commentary on the Bible that has as its base the methods of higher criticism. Negative higher criticism was built upon the belief that religion evolved from man instead of being divinely revealed.

Phil's Rule of Thumb defining a postmodernist: A postmodernist will tell you he has very strong convictions about his beliefs; but if he finds his beliefs are offensive to others, he will take it back. (It is a greater taboo to offend someone than it is to compromise one's beliefs.) Of course, if you take it back, you really don't believe it in the first place!

There are Distinctive Beliefs in Christianity, and these distinctions are tied to eternal destinies.

1. Jesus is the only Way to the Father (**John 14:6; Acts 4:12**)
2. The broad and narrow way have differing destinies (**Matt. 7:13-14**)
3. The wise and foolish man have differing outcomes (**Matt. 7:24-27**)
4. Belief in Jesus as the Christ/Messiah and unbelief (**John 8:24**)
5. Belief that confesses Christ openly and faith that does not (**John 12:42-43**)
6. Belief that is living and working and faith that is dead (**James 2:14-18**)
7. Repentance and perishing (**Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30**)
8. Obedience and rejection of God's will (**Luke 7:28-30**)
9. one true gospel and all others (**Gal. 1:6-9**)
10. one true baptism and all others (**Eph. 4:4-6**)
11. one true body and all others (**Eph. 4:4-6**)
12. one true faith and all others (**Eph. 4:4-6**)
13. one true Lord and all others (**Eph. 4:4-6**)
14. one true hope and all others (**Eph. 4:4-6**)

THE PROBLEM OF RIGID PATTERNISM

"Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13).

Rom. 6:17-18 "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were committed. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

A "form" is a mold or a norm. The concept of a mold indicates an exact pattern, to which one who submits to God willingly shapes his life. There is a pattern of teaching in the Bible which reveals God's requirements for salvation.

2 Thess. 2:15 "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings (traditions) we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter."

Everything God ever made has a pattern. The ark had a pattern (Gen.6:14-22), the tabernacle had a pattern (Ex. 25:9, 40), but according to some the Lord's church has no patterns.

Every leaf on every tree, every blade of every piece of grass has within it the pattern of the plant. God determined from the beginning that plants, animals and man himself would produce only after its kind. Every one of the trillions of cells in your body has within it a greatly detailed pattern of DNA, enough information in one molecule of each cell to fill 100 encyclopedias. The sun, moon, and stars move in discernable and regulated patterns, so that we can know where and when each star, planet, moon, or comet will be. If every leaf on every tree has a pattern, and if every cell in every person has a DNA pattern, and if the whole universe is laid out in a set pattern, why should it seem so strange that the church our Lord built and died for should have a pattern?

We do not understand the thinking of our brethren who suggest that the church should be patternless, that the grace of God dismisses the rules and laws of God. **If the church is patternless, it is the only patternless thing God ever made.** The church is a kingdom with a king and laws, a body with a head whom it obeys, and a household with a Father. Of course it has patterns!!

The Covenant God Made through Christ is Unchangeable

We are being told that God can change His mind at the last minute and allow whomever He wishes to come into heaven. We do not wish to question the sovereignty of God, but we do suggest this is not correct.

Once the terms and promises of a covenant are set, those terms can never be annulled or changed.

Galatians 3:15-17, “To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.”

Some things are set in stone and will not change!!

There is no covenant promise of blessing to the unbeliever, to the impenitent, to the disobedient, or to those who are involved in self-made religion.

THE PROBLEM OF JUDGING

Postmodernists have an unwritten agreement among themselves: “I won’t judge you, if you won’t judge me.” That way everyone can feel good about themselves. *Anyone who makes judgments today threatens this balance of lawlessness.*

The passage postmodernists know best:

Matt. 7:1-5 Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

Jesus was here speaking against the abusive judging of the Pharisees who were condemning others on the basis of their humanly-constructed traditions.

John 7:24 “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”
Some examples of right judgment:

- **Matt. 7:6** there are dogs and swine
- **Matt. 16:21-23** Peter was told “Get behind me, Satan,” for setting his mind on man’s interests not God’s interests
- **Matt. 11:20-24** Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”
- **Matthew 23** Jesus spoke to scribes and Pharisees: hypocrites, everything to be seen, exalting self, shutting the kingdom in people’s faces, children of hell, blind guides, blind fools, straining a gnat and swallowing a camel, greedy, self-indulgent, sons of murderers. **Mt. 23:33** “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?”
- **Acts 5:1-11** Was Peter right to condemn Ananias and Sapphira?
- **Acts 8:20-23** Was Peter right to say to Simon that he was going to perish with his money?
- **Rom. 16:17-18** Was Paul wrong to suggest that we take note of and turn away from those who are divisive and cause hindrances contrary to the doctrine we were taught?
- **1 Cor. 5:1-13** Was Paul right to condemn the man who was living with his father’s wife? Was he right to rebuke Corinth for tolerating him?
- **1 Tim. 1:18-20** Was Paul right to hand over Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan for making shipwreck their faith and blaspheming?
- **1 Tim. 5:20** Was Paul wrong for saying: “As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.”

- **Titus 1:12-13** Was Paul wrong to instruct Titus: One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.”
- **Titus 3:10-11** Was Paul wrong to instruct Titus to reject a factious man after a first and second admonition?
- **Rev. 2:14-16** Was Jesus wrong to call Pergamum to repentance for holding the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans?
- **Rev. 2:20** Should Jesus have rebuked the brethren of Thyatira for tolerating Jezebel? Was he wrong to warn Jezebel?
- **Rev. 3:16** Was Jesus wrong to say to the Laodiceans: “So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

Rev. 3:19 “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

An amoral society is a lot like Crete, and when no one speaks out against what is wrong, generations grow up that are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons.

The devil, the wolf, the criminal, and the postmodernist don't like anybody making judgments.

Abraham Lincoln said, “The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep's throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as his liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the same act. Plainly, the sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon a definition of liberty.”

The wolf was liberty to be lawless and destroy. This is not the liberty Christ gives.

Gal. 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Giving people false hope is not loving; it is deceptive and dangerous.

Some have mistaken the call to repentance for unfair judging. The call to repentance is a kindness; it is a call to correction!

Let's say you ran across a man who had broken his leg in a car accident. This man is bellowing in pain, "Please help me! Get rid of this pain! Just knock me out!" Now giving him a pain shot will help for the moment, but it will not correct the problem. Unless the leg is set back in the correct place, the pain will return when the shot wears off." Repentance is **the gift of correction!** It is gracious and kind.

What is unkind is giving a person a shot of grace and leaving the person to think that the pain shot solves the problem. Unless the problem of sin is corrected, the pain of sin will continue.

Postmodernists confuse matters of faith with matters of judgment.

There is a substantial difference between

- how many songs are sung before the prayer and whether one is a Christian who has been sprinkled for baptism.
- having the Lord's Supper before or after the sermon and whether to baptize babies.
- the use of a song book and the use of instruments of music.

How do we tell the difference?

1. *Let us distinguish between generic and specific commands.* When God is specific, let us respect the fact that He has been specific. When the Lord has given us a generic command, let us not demand our "specific" way. Let us neither make laws for God nor dismiss the laws God has made.
2. *Let us distinguish between additions and expediencies.* An expediency helps us do what God instructs, while an addition changes the command.

The Difference between Expedients and Additions

*Expedients Help Fulfill the Instruction,
but Additions Change the Instruction.*

Bible Example	Expedients Lawful and Authorized	Additions Unlawful and Unauthorized
Noah's Ark Gen. 6:13-22	Tools to cut, join, and to spread pitch	Larger size, additional windows, additional woods
Tabernacle Ex. 25:9,40; 26:30 Ex. 39:32,42,43	Tools to work silver, gold, and wood in making the tabernacle and its furniture.	Making ark of covenant out of both acacia and pine wood
Lord's Supper Bread and Fruit of the Vine	Trays and Cups	Roast Lamb
Baptize, Be Baptized	Baptistery, pool, river, lake, sea, or bathtub	Sprinkle and pouring Are different actions.
Singing Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15	Songbook, pitch pipe, tuning fork	Piano, Organ Different kind of music, Different means of praise

3. *Let us remember that the church is a kingdom, not a democracy.* The laws of the kingdom are not up for vote. They cannot be changed by men. Jesus is the only King, and He is the only one who has a right to change the rules.
4. *Let us respect what we have in Scripture.* Let us call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways.
5. *Let us forget about pleasing the world (1 John 2:15-17).*
6. *Let us restore our respect for restoration!* Restoration is really repentance—repentance dealing with doctrine and practice. When we learn that a doctrine or practice is from men, we abandon that

practice or doctrine and turn back to the doctrine of Christ. Restoration as repentance is a noble effort, and those who have mocked it as unnecessary are actually saying to people, "You don't have to listen to God."

Some essential questions to the postmodern mindset:

- Can I presume upon the grace of God and never acknowledge any need to repent?
- Can I continue in my humanly constructed practice and have conviction that I am all right with God? (**Matt. 15:13-14**)
- Must I believe that God really doesn't mean (will not enforce) what He says? (**John 12:48**)
- If Jesus has all authority (and He does), how can I ever really dismiss that authority to permit everyone freedom to believe and do as he pleases? (**Matt. 28:18**)
- How can the Lord rule, if indeed there are no rules? (**1 Pet. 3:15**)
- How can believe that all truths are subjective or relative? (The statement that all truths are subjective and relative is self-contradictory. The phrase "all truths" points to an absolute, not a relative truth. If any truth is objective or absolute, then all truths cannot be subjective or relative.)

Conclusion: Let us recommit ourselves to the cause of Christ! Let us believe the truth, love the truth, fight for the truth, and even die for the truth. Nothing else can set men free.

The Fellowship of the Unashamed Revised:

I am part of the Fellowship of the Unashamed. I am strengthened in the Lord and the power of His might. The pattern has been fixed. I have made the decision to call Jesus Lord. I am a disciple and a soldier of Jesus Christ. I am His, body and soul, mind and spirit.

I won't look up, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. There is a world lost in sin, and only the one true gospel can make a difference.

I'm not all I ought to be, what I want to be, or what I am going to be; but, thank God that by His grace, I am not what I used to be. I have no desire to return.

I am finished with low living, sight walking, blind eyes, smooth knees, lazy preaching, deaf ears, compromised beliefs, politically correct talking, and dwarfed goals.

I am finished with giving in to human religion rather than embracing New Testament Christianity. I am weary of scoffers who believe they have something better than God's way or God's will.

I am finished with the notion that the Lord's church has to change its doctrine or it can't grow. I have seen with my eyes that the Gospel still works, the blood still cleanses, God still answers prayers, and the promises of God hold true.

I am finished with foolish ways. I will do more than listen to the Lord; I will carefully obey Him. I will do more than speak for what is right; I will speak against what is wrong. I will do more than hold private beliefs; I will preach the truth without fear to anyone and everyone.

I am finished with doubting. I will believe every word of every sentence of every verse of every chapter of every book is inspired—God breathed—and is utterly, utterly, utterly trustworthy. And my faith is without apology.

I am finished being wise in my own eyes, I know I do not have a better way. I will not lean on my understanding but will trust God, who knows what I do not know and can see what I cannot see.

I will stand against the compromising of doctrine, the tolerating of human traditions, the offering of false hope, and flirting with popular religion.

I know there is no way to heaven but the narrow way. I am unwilling to endorse any church but the Lord's church, any way the Lord's way, any gospel but the Lord's gospel, any baptism but the Lord's baptism, or any teaching but the Lord's teaching.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I have the love of Christ, the grace of God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

My pace is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, and my mission clear.

I must not be bought, compromised, deterred, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. There are too many souls at stake, and my Lord deserves better.

I will not flinch in the face of heresy, hesitate in the presence of error, negotiate at the table of the enemy, pander to the popular, or meander in the maze of the muddy.

I won't give up, back up, let up, or shut up until I have preached up, prayed up, stored up, and stayed up the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I must go until Heaven returns, serve until I drop, preach until everyone knows, and work until He comes. And when He comes to get His own, I pray He'll say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."