

Series: *What Does It Mean To Be A Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "The Greatest Story Never Read" (2nd Timothy 3:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 1/13/2013

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2nd Timothy 3:16-17 tells that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," and the Apostle Paul tells us why this is true. All Scripture is profitable for four things. It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. And the reason, Paul tells us, is "that the man of God" – and thus the church of Christ – "may be perfect" – complete – "thoroughly equipped for every good work."

In 1st Corinthians 2:13 we read that the Christian's sole authority is found "not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches." "All Scripture is profitable...for doctrine." Sound doctrine must govern the individual Christian's thinking. Sound doctrine must determine the church's purpose. Sound doctrine must direct every one of our actions. "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner [in the original, a *critic*] of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

In our time, these truths are frequently neglected in many Evangelical churches. And the results are disastrous.

The first result is diminished regard for the inspired, inerrant, uniquely authoritative Word of God. And the inevitable fallout from a diminished view of Scripture is too little teaching of sound doctrine.

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And as a result of the neglect of sound doctrine, Jesus' indictment of church leaders during His days on earth often applies to the church in our time: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9).

### **The Church's Spiritual Vacuum**

When the church neglects the Bible, it creates a spiritual vacuum. And what is true in physics is also true in the church: Nature abhors a vacuum. The natural world will do everything it can to fill a physical vacuum. And in the spiritual realm, Satan will do everything he can to fill a spiritual vacuum in the life of the church. The secular mindset fills that vacuum. Man, not God, becomes the source of authority. As a result, man's word, not God's, shapes our thinking and conduct. If the church doesn't teach the Word of God, it teaches the thinking of the world. There is no third alternative.

We hear much today about the "purpose-driven church." Often today's Evangelical church is driven by purposes that have little or nothing to do with God's Word. The spiritual vacuum created by neglecting Bible doctrine is being filled by worldly philosophies, man-centered authority structures, and consensus approaches to "truth." The church is losing its spiritual power because very often it has unplugged itself from the Source, the Word of God.

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To regain its lost spiritual power, Christ's church must once again become *the Scripture-driven church*. The Bible must be its sole source of doctrine. The Bible alone must be its infallible critic in all things. And Christ must be the undisputed Head of the church.

Today, I want to focus our attention on the crisis state of the Evangelical church.

But I also want to focus our attention on God's answer to the crisis – what God's Word says we must do in response to the present situation.

### **The Evil Influence of Postmodernism**

In order to understand the crisis state of the church today, we need to understand the major influence on the church – even on Bible-believing churches – in the 20th and 21st centuries. And that influence is postmodernism.

Postmodernism is not new. This is a philosophy that has been developing for over 200 years. Let me just mention a handful of the major figures in the development of postmodernism over the past two centuries.

Let me first mention three names from secular philosophy. Soren Kierkegaard, who lived from 1813 to 1855, promoted the notion that there is no such thing as objective truth. All truth is subjective, he said.

Friedrich Nietzsche, who lived from 1844 to 1900, promoted the idea that there are no such things as facts. There are only varying interpretations of data.

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Hans-Georg Gadamer, who lived from 1900 to 2002, promoted the idea that groups and communities of people each arrive at their own version of "truth" by consensus, by what he termed "a fusion of horizons."

In religion, I will mention just two names among many. First, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who lived from 1768 to 1834. Schleiermacher was the father of higher criticism, the notion that we need to look at the Bible not as the inspired Word of God but as the words of men written for their own motives.

Rudolf Bultmann, who lived from 1884 to 1976, carried Schleiermacher's ideas much further, promoting such ideas as "form criticism" of the text of the Bible, and promoting the idea that the Bible needed to be, as he put it, "de-mythologized"

Now out of the influences of such men as these have come the postmodern ideas that influence all of society today. These ideas influence the Evangelical church today. And these ideas even creep into the most conservative of Bible-believing churches today.

What are the major tenets of postmodernism? In the interest of time, let me give you a very shorthand version.

Postmodernism holds that there is only one fixed principle – and that is that there are no absolute, certain, or fixed principles.

And for that reason, postmodernism teaches that "truth" is not absolute or transcendent, but that man arrives at his own "truth." *Feelings* are more important

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than *facts*. *Feelings* take precedence over facts. We live in an age when the saying, "How can it be wrong when it feels so good?" has become the order of the day, even in the church.

In the postmodern environment, man arrives at his own subjective truth. What is truth for one person or group may not be truth at all for another person or group. This is the concept of diversity. Diversity – a perverted kind of diversity – has become the highest good.

And because of the worship of diversity, the only intolerable thing these days is intolerance. How dare we, as Christians, say that we have in the Bible the only body of absolute and infallible truth, and the only way to eternal life? And so as we see in Europe and in Canada today, people who hold such a position and point out the errors of other positions, are being found guilty of what is called a hate crime. Bible-believing Christians, the postmodern philosophy says, are intolerant, and therefore, they must be silenced.

Postmodernism has had a saturation impact on society, now for more than four generations.

Public education and academia are the *instillers* of postmodernism, from pre-kindergarten all the way through graduate school. For example, these days, four- and five-year-old children are taught that homosexuality is merely a lifestyle choice, and not a perversion.

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The mass media are the *promoters* and *popularizers* of postmodernism – through books, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and motion pictures.

And government – the executive, the legislatures, and especially the courts, have become the *enforcers* of postmodernism. They are enforcing what they refer to as diversity. But more often than not, government's enforcement of diversity means silencing Christians and the Gospel.

### **The Church Unplugged**

And what of the church? Sad to say, the church, for its part, has been largely out to lunch – unplugged, and uncertain in the face of all of this.

The Evangelical church is largely unplugged from its source of authority, the Word of God. Let me give you some statistics. These are from surveys taken by reliable polling organizations.

Among the people who call themselves Bible-believing Christians in America today, less than one adult in six reads the Bible regularly. Less than one in six. 35% of the adults in Bible-believing churches never read the Bible at all.

In a recent interview, one of the leading researchers on the state of the Evangelical church said that when they are asked to do so, most Evangelicals cannot articulate or defend even the most basic Christian doctrines *from the Bible* — essentials like the authority of Scripture and the rudiments of the Christian Gospel. And, he said, most Evangelicals cannot defend Christian moral positions on abortion, homosexuality,

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euthanasia, sex outside of marriage, etc., *from Scripture*. Most Evangelicals, he said, know in a vague way that the Bible says these things are wrong. But they cannot tell you exactly *what* the Bible says on these vital issues, or *where* it says it. When asked why this is the case, he replied with this chilling observation – and I’m quoting him now:

Among Evangelicals there’s been this shift over time — from Bible reading to *feeling* — from knowing what Jesus actually had to say to having a "relationship" with a "Jesus" that they know little or nothing about — from actually *reading* the Bible to merely *revering* the Bible...

A leading magazine recently put it this way: “Among Evangelicals today, the Bible has become ‘The Greatest Story Never Read.’”

### **The Church Uncertain**

And what is the result today? The result is that in the face of the onslaughts of resurgent Roman Catholicism, missionary atheism, and aggressive Islam, the Evangelical church is uncertain about what it believes. Listen to these shocking statistics:

- 37% of adults in Evangelical churches do not believe the Bible is totally accurate.
- 45% of adults in Evangelical churches do not believe Christ was sinless.
- 52% of adults in Evangelical churches do not believe Satan is real.

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- 57% of adults in Evangelical churches believe good works gain eternal life.
- Less than 10% of adults in Evangelical churches cite the Bible as the primary basis of their worldview & behavior.
- Over 50% of adults in Evangelical churches think other religions are valid.
- 70% of Evangelical young people leave the church when they reach adulthood. Their main stated reason is that they no longer believe the Bible is true, and the church has done little or nothing to answer their doubts.
- 19% of those who are living with a partner outside of marriage, are members of Evangelical churches.

We also see the decline of the Evangelical church manifesting itself in the changing attitude of many prominent Evangelical leaders toward false religions such as Mormonism. For the last several years, prominent Evangelical leaders have been exhibiting what I can only describe as an enormous lack of discernment, a tragic lack of discernment, regarding the dangers of Mormonism.

Let me remind you of the truth about Mormonism. Mormonism is an un-Biblical, anti-Christian cult. Mormonism teaches that its "God" was once a man. Mormonism teaches that that this "God" is married to a goddess wife. Mormonism teaches that Jesus and Satan are both the "spirit children" of this so-called "God." Mormonism denies salvation through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Mormonism denies the virgin birth of Christ. Mormonism denies that Christ is God

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from all eternity. Mormonism's authority for these horrible teachings is the word of men, and not the Word of God.

And yet in an interview on Fox News, Joel Osteen, who is pastor of the 50,000 member Lakewood Church in Houston Texas, the largest nominally Evangelical church in the United States, said this: "In my mind" Mormons are Christians. This is postmodernist thinking. Mr. Osteen's authority is his own mind, his own feelings, and not the Word of God. Mr. Osteen simply ignored the fact that Jesus said that there will be many at the Last Judgment who will profess a false Jesus – many who will say “Lord, Lord” – but Jesus, according to Matthew 7:23, will say to them, “I never knew you. Depart from Me.”

Also we also have a shocking statement about Mormonism from Dr. Richard Mouw, who is the president of Fuller Theological Seminary in California. And I think it is worth noting that Fuller Seminary is also the spiritual birthplace of the Purpose-Driven Church movement. Dr. Mouw has written an essay titled “Mormonism Is Not A Cult” in which he said this – and I’m quoting him. He said, “I...accept many of my Mormon friends as genuine followers of the Jesus whom I worship as the divine Savior.” Well, that makes me wonder what kind of a “Jesus” Dr. Mouw worships. It doesn’t sound like the Jesus of the Bible.

Dr. Mouw also said that even though there are theological differences between Mormons and Evangelicals, he said that these differences can be patched over through what he called a process of “give and take conversations.” This again is the

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clear influence of postmodernism. You have your truth, and I have my truth, so let's get together and synthesize the two.

Now, I think it is reasonable to ask: Just what does Dr. Mouw propose that Evangelicals should give up to Mormons in such conversations? And just what does he propose that true Christians should take from the false Mormon religion, and incorporate into the church? Well, he did not give an answer, but I cannot imagine any answer that would be acceptable to the God of the Bible.

And we have yet another example, more recently, in October 2012. Dr. Billy Graham and Dr. Franklin Graham met with Mormon presidential candidate Mitt Romney. The Grahams prayed with Mr. Romney, and they offered their support of his efforts to convince skeptical Evangelicals to vote for a Mormon. As part of that effort, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association immediately removed references to Mormonism as a non-Christian cult from their website. They suppressed and denied the truth about Mormonism.

But dear friends, this should not surprise us. This kind of un-Biblical compromise has been the history of the Billy Graham and Franklin Graham ministries. Both Billy Graham and Franklin Graham have a long record of extensive compromise with the Roman Catholic Church. Let me remind you that Roman Catholicism teaches salvation through water baptism and good works and partaking of the Mass, and not by faith in Christ alone. But for over fifty years the Billy and Franklin Graham ministries have included Catholic priests as counselors for people

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who come forward in their so-called evangelistic campaigns. And then they refer those people back to Roman Catholic parishes for follow-up. These people become converts to Roman Catholicism, not authentic Biblical Christianity. Since these things have long been true of the Graham ministry, their current entry into the Evangelical romance with Mormonism should not surprise us. But it certainly should grieve us.

Growing acceptance of the abomination of homosexuality in the nominally Evangelical church is another example of the horrors we are seeing in our time. We could say much on that subject, but for the sake of time I must move on.

### **We Must Wake Up and Face the Crisis**

Dear friends, we need to wake up and face the crisis in what is called the Evangelical church. We need to ask the question, "Whatever happened to the Scripture-driven church?"

Clearly, postmodernism has cultivated the ground for the weakness of the Evangelical church today. Postmodernism has cultivated the ground for the rise of Missionary Atheism in our time. 16% of Americans today hold no religious belief at all. That number has tripled in the last 20 years, and most of the growth has been among young adults ages 18 to 29.

Postmodernism has also cultivated the ground for the resurgence of Roman Catholicism. Today, Roman Catholicism is making more converts in America than

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just about any other religious group, and according to *Time* magazine, many of them are young married men and women who grew up in Evangelical churches.

Postmodernism has also cultivated the ground for the aggressive growth of Islam in this country. In more and more cities and towns in the United States, you will find Muslim mosques springing up. Islamic missionaries are coming here from the Middle East. They are well-financed. And their stated goal is to turn the United States of America into an Islamic state.

I believe the present situation is a judgment upon the Evangelical church in America today. In many ways, we are no longer the Scripture-driven church.

### **A Crucial Question**

In all of our churches, and in all of our ministries, we need to ask this question: Has there been a takeover in your church? Is the Bible your supreme authority, or have other things taken first place? We cannot lightly brush aside this question. Too much is at stake if our answer is the wrong one.

Often our conditioned response goes like this: "Of course the Bible is our authority. We're a Bible-believing church." And often, that's the end of the discussion. But Lord of the church doesn't let us off so easily. The authority question persists in the pages of God's Word.

Do the leadership and people of your church really understand what the Bible has to say about its authority? Does your church continually compare everything it says

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and does against the Biblical standard? Does your church understand how easily, how insinuatingly, other things can supplant the Bible's authority? Does your church understand how easily these other things can take the church off-message and off-mission? Does your church understand how easily these other things can put the people of the church in spiritual danger? Does your church understand how easily these other things can neutralize its testimony to the unbelieving world?

These are not idle questions. The evidence tells us that these are very valid questions. The Word of God has been pushed aside. We must give God's Word its rightful place once again. We must become the Scripture-driven church once again.

#### **About the Broadcast**

**The Scripture-Driven Church** airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is that of the Great Commission: to preach the Gospel to the world, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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