

# Fighting for Truth in a Postmodern Age

## (2) The Emergent Church Movement

In the past article, we examined the timely and important subject of postmodernism. Many in our postmodern age are teaching that truth is not really knowable. Last time, we considered how many professors in colleges and universities have been swept up by the postmodern tide and how this is so dangerous, especially for students not firmly grounded in the faith.

This time we consider the Emergent Church Movement. If the last article was directed toward the young people, this one is perhaps even *more* urgently directed toward the young people. Emergent churches, just like many universities and colleges, have surrendered and given way to the popular and widespread ideas coming from postmodernism. I trust that we are all at least a bit familiar with Emergent churches. Emergent churches tend to attract thousands of people because of their ramped-up worship style and watered-down truth designed not to offend anyone. These churches are more like big corporations with complex marketing strategies aimed at giving young people and adults a more flexible and casual worship atmosphere. Leaders in this movement strive to alter, shape, and mold the gospel to fit today's needs for today's people.

Why should our young people be concerned about what seems to be such a distant reality? Emergent churches continue to draw in great numbers of people. They beckon young people; young people from *conservative* denominations; young people who are dissatisfied with the old paths and who seek the new, the hip, the revolutionizing. Perhaps you are more familiar with this movement than you even know. This past spring, Rob Bell, church leader at Mars Hill in Grandville, Michigan, came out with a new book called *Love Wins*. The book, to say the least, sent shockwaves through the church world. Bell twisted the Bible to such a degree that a wide array of church leaders found problems with the book. Bell has been in the news, and his postmodern colors have shown brightly for the whole world to see.

In order to drive to the center of postmodernism in Emergent churches, I want to give you an excerpt from an interview with Rob Bell and his wife Kristen from *Christianity Today* a few years back:

The Bells found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with church. "Life in the church had become so small," Kristen says. "It had worked for me for a long time. Then it stopped working." The Bells started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself—"discovering the Bible as a human product," as Rob puts it, rather than

the product of divine fiat. “The Bible is still in the center for us,” Rob says, “but it’s a different kind of center. We want to embrace mystery, rather than conquer it.” “I grew up thinking that we’ve figured out the Bible,” Kristen says, “that we knew what it means. *Now I have no idea what most of it means.* And yet I feel like life is big again—like life used to be black and white, and now it’s in color.”<sup>11</sup> (emphasis mine, rb)

Postmodern ideas *fill* the Bell’s language here. Notice a few things from this brief excerpt, drawing upon what you already know about postmodernism in the last article and its attack on truth. First, notice already in the Bell’s first statements how the authority in the Bible is undercut and how human experience is trumped over the Word of God. Secondly, study the tricky language that Rob Bell uses to describe his position on the authority of the Bible—it is a different kind of center. Bell does not throw the Bible away, nor does he call it useless; he confusingly says it is a different kind of center. But, lest you become too suspicious of his language here, he positively says that he and his wife want to embrace mystery rather than lay a definite claim on what they think is the truth. This is the language of postmodernists in the church world today. It is intentionally deceiving and thousands are fooled.

The interview also highlights the importance of tolerance in the school of postmodernism. Postmodernism preaches tolerance, and one of the ways it does this is by rejecting any definite claims on truth, and denying the ability of anyone to draw any definite conclusions. Rob Bell wants to embrace the mystery of the Bible rather than conquer it. To leaders in the Emergent churches like Bell, claiming that you have the truth is the peak of arrogance. To claim that you *know* and *understand* what God says in his Word is a most proud statement. How can *you*, they argue, claim to know what God says? You are entitled to your own opinion about the truth, but you better be open to other opinions, they say! Young people, do you see the extreme danger here? Do you see the arguments that church leaders today will make? Dangerously deceitful! Bell and other church leaders take the focus off themselves by making such statements. They paint themselves to be very *humble* men by confessing their inability to come to conclusions about the truth.

If postmodernism’s reach into the emergent church is not bad enough, it is also spreading its ideas into many other churches today. While it must be noted that not every problem and error today arises directly from postmodernism, we *can* say that postmodernism makes old errors and problems that have nagged the church for years even worse. I want to give one example. How many ministers today preach Genesis 1 as a literal six-day creation? How many Christian schools today unashamedly teach their students that the literal account is the only way Genesis 1 may be interpreted? Recently, I had the opportunity to talk with those who wanted to make the days in Genesis 1 thousands of years. “My opinion,” they would say, “is that we cannot take

this account literally, but that is just my feeling about it. Other people may differ from me, and that is OK. And, besides, Genesis 1 is not a salvation issue, and whatever way we take the meaning does not matter. At the end of the day, what is most important is that God created the earth—not how long it took him.” Do you see the postmodern elements? Inability to draw conclusions; tolerance for different interpretations on a *very* clear passage; twisting and stretching the language of Genesis 1. Notice, like Bell’s view of Scripture, how the lie of theistic evolution is part-way dressed in truth: all that is important is that God created the earth, not how long it took him. How many times do we not read and hear similar language to this? As he has done throughout all of history, the devil uses such language to dress the lie in truth-colored camouflage. Satan loves to see the church world in such a confused state.

Satan knows what he is doing; he does not knock at the front of the house, but rather quietly slips in through the back door. Especially in the West, he is watching gleefully as this postmodern philosophy gently lifts the church world from its moorings. Well-known emergent church leaders, and even some supposedly conservative ministers and professors, are leading churches all across the world down the road of apostasy in the name of tolerance and compromise.

Not convinced yet of the danger? Postmodernism, as pushed especially by Emergent churches, creates a warm, fuzzy, feel-good atmosphere. This is appealing to people. Everyone wants to be approved; everyone wants to be accepted. Such worship, however, is man-centered, not God-centered. When this warm and fuzzy feeling is combined with the deceitful and confusing language, a deadly mix is created. As Rob Bell would put it, the Bible is still the center, just a different kind of center. As a theistic evolutionist would argue, Genesis 1 does not have to be taken in a literal sense; what is most important is that God created the world. If I am not grounded firmly in Scripture, I might think that such statements sound pretty good. And the people who say these things are not going to shove them down my throat or force me to believe them—they are open and tolerant of my thoughts too! A church, therefore, where basically anything goes, yet where shreds of the truth are still present, is a place that attracts many people, especially young people.

In a church world where truth is forsaken and replaced by endless debate about key concepts in Scripture, such as the literal creation account (among many other key concepts in the Bible!), it is we, young people, who will stand out. Do not be ashamed for your bold stand for truth. Even if you defend it virtually alone, remember that you stand on the inspired, infallible word of God. What a rock! No matter how fierce the pressure, never yield to the opinions and feelings of men about God’s word. The Bible is not subject to our feelings or their feelings about it. Scripture is logical, clear, and knowable. We read in John 8: 31b-32, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my

disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Do not let others try to persuade you otherwise.

Such talk of postmodernism can easily strike fear and anxiousness in our hearts for the future church. To be sure, the spirit of our age is no surprise to us. In Matthew 24:11, Jesus said, “many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.” II Peter 2:1 states, “...there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them...” Nevertheless, we might be anxious about the future. Grandparents, do you worry about your grandchildren in today’s world? Young people, do you as those who love the truth fear your future in a world which hates truth? In the next and final article in this brief series we will look at God’s preservation of his church. We have no need to fear; God is with us and for us! This, Lord willing, we will consider next time.