

Christianity: the reality vs. the illusion

The current church situation

Many churchgoers today are merely play-acting at Christianity. They are part of a pantomime that pretends to be Christianity but in reality it is just a glorified social club and a festival of selfishness with religious overtones.

Hard words; yet I affirm that this is true.

Never has there been a time in history when true Christianity was more needed on the world stage, and yet never has there been a time when churches were more occupied fiddling while Rome burned.¹

The causes of this lie chiefly at the door of the Charismatic Movement and its offshoots, which have not only introduced pagan practices and occult doctrines but have centred upon selfishness in church life where everything is about me and my enjoyment of religion.

But the more recent church fragmentation, such as the Emerging Church movement, have continued this centring upon inward-looking social fellowship at the expense doing something in the world.

Almost every aspect of church life today is about self-centredness.

Yet Christianity, above all the world's religions, is about self-sacrifice and doing good to others. Children in old-fashioned churches used to be taught that the secret of joy was:

- **J**esus first
- **O**thers second
- **Y**ourself last.

Sadly, those days are gone.

'Self' doctrines

I do not intend to fully document these as I have done that elsewhere and the subject is commonly understood. I refer to those current teaching fads that are centred upon: self awareness, self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-healing, healing of memories, emotional healing, and so on.

Instead of this integrated focus upon me and the need to increase my self-esteem, the teaching of Jesus centred upon self-denial and self-sacrifice, which is the opposite of the current fads that have emerged from pagan mysticism, secular / occult psychology and New Age ideas.

Charismatic worship

Charismatic worship is about the individual being immersed in gloopy affections and feeling enthralled by pseudo-mystical emotionalism. Worship bands have more to do with

¹ A reference to the accusation that Nero played his violin while Rome burned because he was responsible for it in order to make way for his new planned rebuild. It refers to trivial selfishness and inactivity as a bad reaction to a pressing problem.

entertainment than worship. Worship leading, ambient lighting, leadership manipulation and mood music have more to do with inculcating suggestibility and hypnotic passivity.

All of this is centred on the feelings of the congregants, not the fear of God. The foundation of true worship is not emotionalism, not about feelings at all, but is about submission to a sovereign God.

Teaching

Church teaching is usually focused in a single person, week-by-week satisfying his pride by commanding an audience, with a congregation that learns nothing about doctrine (especially pure theology) and good works, but is made to feel empowered, or envisioned, or encouraged, or motivated to be something. Often the message concerns pure self-centredness, about enabling a person to be more positive or more fulfilled.

Biblical church teaching is about doctrinal instruction (especially the doctrine of God), exposition of Scripture and applying God's word to produce good works.

Gathering

Gathering together is not about sharing gifts with one another: teaching one another, strengthening one another, exhorting one another or admonishing one another, but is about being passive, unthinking, unquestioning sheep who do precisely nothing.

Mission

Mission is church-centred (in the main) where outsiders are brought into the church to hear some leader give a shallow Arminian presentation based on what God can do for you. Even the Gospel has become self-centred (*'God has a wonderful plan for your life and loves you'*); gone is the apostolic, 'God commands all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30) or, 'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out' (Acts 3:19). Those missions that are outside churches (such as Alpha Courses) are even more self-centred, being a love-bombing exercise based on social inclusion and centring evangelism on a mystical experience to be enjoyed followed by blessings to be had.

Prayer

Prayer meetings are often devoted to the needs of the church more than anything else.

Giving

Giving is very frequently dominated by the needs of the church building and the expenses of leaders. Some churches have multiple special gift days in a year demanding more money above a tithe to cover necessary expenses on things that God never commanded.

Summary

In many modern churches, in any given week the church members are totally fixated upon church events, meetings and social situations involving church members. It is common that this concentration on the church leads members to neglect close family members or communication with neighbours or opportunities in the work place. This is not only myopic, it is a form of selfishness; in some cases it becomes a form of cultic behaviour.

The life of individuals within these churches has become utterly concentrated upon looking inwards. The religion of the members is introspective, always looking within for some new blessing to be touched by,² while corporate life is also introspective, having nothing to do with the outside world, not even family members.

² Which explains the mystical fads, such as: the Toronto Blessing, Pensacola, Lakeland, and so on.

Never before has the term ‘holy huddle’ been more appropriate.

The current need

More than any other time in history, the world is in a terrible mess. The globe is suffering a major catastrophe in every aspect of political, social and cultural life as the devil’s final plans are permitted by God to come to fruition. This should be a time of intense Christian activity, both in terms of action to help the needy but also of social comment affirming the law of God and denouncing the sins of man.

Yet, largely, the churches are silent and inactive.

Now I know that some churches are doing some work (such as soup kitchens), but these are the exceptions to the rule; they are also a very thin end of a very large wedge.

Do I have to list what is going on in the world?

I will offer just a few examples of situations that are active at the current time.

Paedophilia

The terrible extent of state-run sexual abuse of children is gradually being exposed by: victims empowered by the Jimmy Saville exposé;³ social workers that have now retired and can speak out; police officers now retired that are also speaking out; and the exposures on the Internet. In addition we have organisations set up recently to expose and counter this wickedness with the support of a few Parliamentary MPs.

Where are the Christian churches working to crusade for the needs of children and victims?

The poor

Never has there been a time in modern history where the poor were so disadvantaged. We have situations in modern western countries where there are people living in pitiful conditions worse than during the Industrial Revolution.

For example, there are children refugees living rough in European nations with no food, water, sanitation or medical help. We have people working like slaves on incredible low wages living in houses built for three or four people but maintaining a population of 25. Even beds (i.e. floor space) are being shared day and night (‘hot-bedding’). Child poverty has skyrocketed to record levels. Many late middle-aged people are going hungry. Food banks continue to serve over a million Britons a year despite Britain being the 5th biggest economy in the world.

Where is the evangelical church activity helping such people⁴ or criticising the government for its failings?⁵

³ Even as I write the BBC reports that a Police operation in Scotland has identified 500 sexual abuse victims alone.

⁴ I acknowledge that some less evangelical churches are active in providing food banks and other works. See later.

⁵ Many people, whose situations have worsened in recent years, are in this situation due to government policy, commonly known as ‘austerity measures’. For example: those suffering from disability cuts, loss of council services due to cuts, the bedroom tax, benefit sanctions and so on. These cost cutting policies have actually led to scores of billions of additional hidden costs to the nation (which is why the national debt increased).

The economic squeeze

This regards a major section of society that may not be considered as abject poor, but has experienced depressed wages for 6 years and is struggling. In many cases wages are so depressed that they are at 1980s levels. Economists have also shown that Britain has experienced the worst wages suppression out of all the major economies.

For example, these are families where one or both parents are in low-paid work and yet they are struggling to pay the rent and pay for necessary expenses. These are the families that, despite their best efforts, are sending the kids to school so hungry that teachers across the country are bringing in food for their students. These are families that get into rent arrears and then get evicted. These are families that cannot afford heating in the winter. These are families that have children with holes in their shoes.

Where are the Biblical Christian outreach groups? While there are some liberal denominations that have programmes for the poor and vulnerable (such as Salvation Army hostels or Anglican homeless centres), where are the ordinary evangelical churches?

The vulnerable

We have more old people alive today than in recent history and they are being treated abominably. Austerity measures have cut vital services and many 90+-year olds are living alone with no support. Even meals-on-wheels have been cut for these folk. There are 90+-year olds in some places (like Norfolk) that have no doctor within 30 miles. Mental health patients have no dedicated beds within 200 miles. People are routinely dying completely unnecessarily. But above that, many old people, distressed people, abused people, teenagers, and out-of-work people are incredibly lonely and clinically depressed. Unsurprisingly the suicide rate has shot up in recent years and now even includes older people (it used to predominantly be younger people); similarly the death rate has also increased when it should be going down.

Where is the combined church activity attempting to mitigate this or the prophetic criticism of the government that has caused this?

The sick and disabled

While the bankers and rich caused the economic crash of 2008, it has been the poorest and the weakest in society that have paid the price. As well as vital services for the sick being cut by councils, their disability benefit has also been cut. Some policies (such as the 'bedroom tax') have hit families with chronically disabled children severely. Many of these government policies that are to blame don't even save money but actually cause the overall cost to the nation to increase. I have explained this many times before.

Apart from those churches providing food banks (which I commend and support) where are the actions of local evangelical churches operating within the community? Where is the prophetic criticism of the government?

Political wickedness

Many of the burdens in our current society are caused by the flawed policies of governments, such as austerity measures or failing to control immigration which leads to depressed wages for the poorest workers and failed local council services. These not only fail (under Osborne the National Debt has more than doubled) but they are wicked and contrary to God's law.

Not only are there few outspoken Christian voices condemning this (which is actually a prophetic duty), there are some Charismatic Christian leaders actively working with the government to advance austerity measures.

Threats of war and unethical military actions

Never have there been so many sinister and illegal actions by western governments to engage in pre-emptive wars, initiate coups or destabilise entire nations. My readers will have seen many exposés of this in recent years. To mention a few:

- The illegal and unnecessary war in Iraq based on lies in order to fulfil a Jewish plan⁶ led by Zionist American Neo-Cons. This resulted in the death of over a million innocent Iraqi citizens, a devastated country, the destabilisation of the Middle East and the rise of Islamic jihadi radicals (to say nothing of thousands of murdered Christians).
- The failed war in Afghanistan that was not only illegal but against the interests of the west. This was done to secure the heroin supply, which the Taliban had crashed and which is a major source of income for elite activities (being run by the CIA).
- The civil war in Syria is another part of the Yinon Plan and was facilitated by American-led, NATO Gladio B operation activity which started the uprising in order to oust Assad (who had resisted crucial elite strategies)⁷ and carve up Syria in the interests of Israel. Many Christians have also died in Syria as a result, with Assad being their only defender.
- It is now proven that the recent coup attempt in Turkey was a NATO Gladio operation. Internet communications reveal that three of the five regiments initiating the coup were NATO fast deployable corps and their What'sApp thread title was the NATO mission slogan. [See NewsBud report on You Tube.]
- Libya was another American / NATO disaster, which has ruined a prosperous and rich nation, resulting in a failed state and a breeding ground for Islamic radicalism.

We could also talk about the staged coup in Ukraine, led by NATO Gladio B / CIA agents seeking to provoke war with Russia. Or the vast military build up in the China Sea area in order to provoke war with China. Or the threats of Hillary Clinton to 'nuke' Iran; and so much more.

The irony that 'democratic' nations have been actively destabilising democratic sovereign states seems to be lost on mainstream commentators and certainly the church.⁸ This is ironic since a key part of the elite plan is to destroy Christianity and replace it with Luciferianism. Some of the recent elite wars (Iraq), terrorist attacks (IS) and destabilised countries (Syria) were partly to target Christians as part of a bigger plan. Christians had been living peacefully in Iraq and Syria under secular but Muslim Presidents. Iraq has seen thousands of Christians killed and many more forced to flee the country; churches are destroyed. The same is going on in Syria, despite Assad's attempt to protect them.⁹ IS is

⁶ The Yinon Plan.

⁷ Such as rejecting an oil pipeline through Syria and refusing to have a Rothschild central bank.

⁸ For example, Bashar al Assad is a democratically elected president that is very popular with the people who continue to support him. What right has the west to start a civil war, kill thousands and create a refugee crisis in order to oust him? What right had NATO to start an illegal war in Iraq based on lies when the nation was the most progressive Arab country in the world that even had women MPs. In addition Saddam hated Osama bin Laden and was active against his terrorism.

⁹ Note the irony; most western Christians support national governments in league with the global elite that control all these things, and thus supported the war against Saddam Hussein, which resulted in wiping out Christians, and the civil war against Assad, which is currently trying to wipe out Christians, as well as supporting Israel, which persecutes Palestinian Christians.

now targeting Christian centres in the west (Germany, France) and has threatened churches in the UK. In all of these evangelical churches are silent (apart from platitudes).

This is just a short arbitrary list that could have been greatly extended. The prevalence of need in this world is huge. Never has there been greater need.

Where are the voices of Biblical Christians and churches in condemning all this wickedness? Why are all the opposers secular thinkers and activists (plus also some leaders of other faiths)? Why are Christians so ignorant when atheists, Shi'ite Muslims, renegade Jews, anarchists and alternative media commentators see what is going on?¹⁰

Worse than this, very many modern churches have been very active in supporting the very wicked government proposals that led to these awful atrocities, especially in America. God will hold people accountable for this.

While the members of Christian churches are largely naval gazing and satisfying themselves, the world is heading for a major conflagration and even a third world war. Churches just keep sleepwalking into oblivion. How will they answer God on the Day of Judgment?

The Biblical command

The precedent set by the Lord Jesus Christ

Christianity is active because it is simply following Christ.

As our great example, when he was on earth Jesus went about everywhere doing good,¹¹ and so should we.

Jesus was concerned with people more than his own well being, let alone his own pleasure. When desperately thirsty, after one trek, he was more concerned to preach the Gospel to an adulterous woman than satisfy his own thirst immediately (Jn 4).

Jesus was constantly reaching out to the weakest people in society. He healed the sick, the lame, the blind, and the deaf. He cast out demons from those afflicted. He raised the dead.

He walked many miles from place to place to bring the good news of God's kingdom. Jesus did not set up some conference centre or rabbinical school and get people to come to him and pay him to teach them; he went to poor cities and towns and preached for nothing.

Jesus was constantly reaching out to all sections of society. While he did speak to rich people, he was mostly centred on reaching out to the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the sick, the frail and the outcasts.

The command of God in the Old Testament

Help the poor

Jesus did this because he understood God's ways in the Old Testament where God stated that these were the very people he would minister to.

¹⁰ In the USA polls show that only 6% of people trust the mainstream media now. True information is now underground via the Internet. Christians, by nature conservative, still trust the mainstream media.

¹¹ Acts 10:38, 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good'.

Everywhere in poetry, historical narrative, teaching and apocalyptic literature, we see God's concern for the weak, the poor, and the needy. Over and over God commands that his people care for the underdogs in society.

He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honours Him has mercy on the needy. **Prov 14:31**

He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. **Prov 17:5**

He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given. **Prov 19:17**

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard. **Prov 21:13**

He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor. **Prov 22:9**

We do not need to further multiply proof texts.

Condemn and denounce wickedness in high places

God's leaders are also called to publicly denounce those that rule who work against the poor and needy. Over and over God's prophets denounced and condemned kings that trod on the poor or oppressed the weak. Sometimes a prophet was persecuted or even killed for this brave calling out.¹² Occasionally God raised up a prophet specifically to publicly condemn a king for oppressing the poor as part of his idolatry, the classic case is Amos.

Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron'. **Amos 1:3**

Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth *which is* on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble'. **Amos 2:6-7**

Because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just *and* taking bribes; diverting the poor *from justice* at the gate. **Amos 5:11-12**

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said: "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive from their own land"'. **Amos 7:10-11**

The teaching and practice of the apostles

In obedience to the teaching of their master, the apostles continued God's focus upon doing good to the poor and needy. They not only taught their churches the necessity of doing this but the NT gives us examples of how they put it into practice. In fact, the focus of the giving of NT churches was alms, more than anything else.

Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judaea [in famine]. **Acts 11:29**

¹² Such as Jeremiah, imprisoned in a wet pit and later kidnapped and killed.

Now after many years I [Paul] came to bring alms and offerings to my nation. **Acts 24:17**

Now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. **Rm 15:25-26**

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also. **1 Cor 16:1**

They [the apostles in Jerusalem] desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do. **Gal 2:10**

Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. **Heb 13:16**

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled', but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? **Jm 2:15-16**

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? **1 Jn 3:17**

True religion

Proper teaching first

Have you noticed that Paul often divides his letter in two? The first part is devoted to doctrine, the second to practical matters arising from the doctrine. For example, Ephesians c1-3 is theological; Ephesians c4-6 is practical, beginning with 'Therefore .. walk...'. Colossians 1-2:5 is doctrinal; Colossians 2:6-4:18 is practical, beginning with 'So walk in Him'.

Even in apostolic writings where this division is not so pronounced, the apostles were at pains to constantly interject their teaching with practical application and commands regarding behaviour. It would be tedious to list examples of this, there are so many and the point is obvious.

Thus we have this twofold precedent in apostolic teaching of the flock: first explain doctrine and theology so that people are properly grounded in the faith and are growing in the knowledge of God and his eternal plan. Secondly, drive home the importance of ethics and Christian behaviour in very practical terms, such as: slaves obey your masters even if they are cruel; wives submit to husbands; husbands love you wives, children obey your parents, repay evil with good, and so on.

One reason why the Puritans were so successful in their testimony to Jesus Christ was this practice in church life: teaching thorough doctrine and exposition, followed by exhortations to practically apply the teaching. You can still see evidence of this in Puritan commentaries where the custom was to expound the text, understand the doctrine contained and then practically apply the doctrine.

This is the Biblical formula for edifying saints:

- Truth explained.
- Truth understood.
- Truth applied to the conscience.
- Truth outworked in the practical walk.

Now I doubt that most churches observe this precedent in teaching. In fact most church leaders don't teach at all but preach at their flock (something that is actually unbiblical).¹³ This is often: vague thoughts strung together; devotional platitudes; haranguing the congregation; affirming some prior agenda (such as demanding money); or, at best, a Biblical based exhortation of some kind with little explanatory and doctrinal content.

It is rare to find churches where proper doctrinal instruction is carried out, followed by practical application that demands ethical purity; though I accept that there are some.

Unless Christians are properly instructed in doctrine, and especially the knowledge of God and his plan, they will not grow in grace and will not walk right.

Demand for a righteous walk second

Where Christians have been properly taught and have a decent fundamental knowledge of theology, then there is the demand to walk right.

This is eminently practical. There is nothing vague or confusing about this; Christians must walk right or they cannot be Christians at all.

Notice how the apostles strongly affirm this principle:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world. **Jm 1:26**

This is a definition of true religion, true Christianity is demonstrated by personal ethics to ensure righteous living and the manifestation of godliness in the world by doing good works maintaining a good testimony.

Such religion has been spoken of throughout the whole Bible:

Because I delivered the poor who cried out, the fatherless and *the one who* had no helper. The blessing of a perishing *man* came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice *was* like a robe and a turban. I *was* eyes to the blind, and I *was* feet to the lame. I *was* a father to the poor, and I searched out the case *that* I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked, and plucked the victim from his teeth. **Job 29:12-17**

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! **Ps 119:1**

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. **Isa 1:16-17**

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? *Is it* not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? **Isa 58:6-7**

Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. **Ezek 11:19-20**

¹³ Preaching in the NT is for outsiders; it is the proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers. Sermonic preaching is not exemplified by the apostles as a means of teaching the flock. Teaching in church is all about dialogue, discussion, explanation, instruction, discipling and interaction. Sometimes the word 'preach' when used in a church context (like Acts 20:7 KJV) is a mistranslation where the proper word is dialogue or discussion.

Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed *are* the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed *are* the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **Matt 5:7-10**

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' **Matt 25:34-36**

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. **Lk 1:6**

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. **1 Thess 4:1-2**

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith. **1 Tim 1:5**

We could extend these texts by many thousands. The Mosaic Law demanded personal righteousness and doing good to others, including the aliens in the land. The poetic books, especially Psalms and Proverbs, speak many times of being holy and doing good to others. The prophets demanded repenting from iniquity and doing good. John the Baptist then reaffirmed such things as preparation for the Messiah; then Jesus came and also demanded such behaviour, finally the apostles constantly demanded holy actions derived from personal holiness.

Personal ethics

Now I don't need to explain this in great detail, as my readers will probably already understand this principle. In brief:

Doctrine must result in personal holiness and righteous behaviour. All the apostles were at great pains to demand a righteous walk, even though they use different terminology, figures, applications and explanations.

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. **2 Cor 7:1**

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. **Phil 1:27**

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age. **Titus 2:11-12**

Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. **Heb 12:14**

As He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'. **1 Pt 1:15-16**

This is sufficient for our purpose here; the apostles demanded personal holiness that resulted from knowing the truth. The Gospel must result in good character or there is no Gospel present.

Our testimony

Christians must be more than their words; they must bear fruit for God and do good, walking righteously. The outward manifestation of a believer's walk is his principle testimony.¹⁴ This is how we evaluate fruit; it is the practical outward evidence of what is going on inside the believer.

A great part of the fruit of a believer will be how he interacts with other people, both one-to-one and also to the world at large. Thus doing good to the poor and needy ought to be a significant part of the Christian's testimony.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. **Gal 6:10**

Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works. **Titus 2: 13-14**

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. **Titus 3:8**

Let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. **Titus 3:14**

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? **1 Jn 3:17**

Summary: love your neighbour

Who is my neighbour?

My neighbour is everyone within my sphere of influence; it is not just someone that lives next-door. Thus my Biblical neighbour includes: my family, my relatives, my work mates, my local neighbours, my social acquaintances, those I meet travelling, those I correspond with, those I speak to, and those nations adjacent to mine.

When Jesus answered a question as to who was my neighbour, he answered with the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' (Lk 10:29ff). In this case the neighbour was the questioner's enemy in need on the road.

Basically, we are commanded to love everyone we meet or can practically help from a distance.

Now the love we give is not human love; which is conditional, transient, weak and self-centred (seeking reciprocation); it is divine love. We must love as God loves. That is a love that is self-sacrificing, full, considers everything, offers everything, doesn't fail and is not offended by rejection.

This type of love covers everything. It is not just about helping, giving money, giving time and being nice. It is also about giving sound advice that may not be sought; necessary admonishment, challenging thought patterns or passing on vital information and so on.

¹⁴ There are also the witness of our inner thoughts and aspirations, plus the testimony of what we do in private, all of which are noted by angels.

You shall love your neighbour as yourself. **Lev 19:18**

Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbour. **Zech 8:17**

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. **Matt 5:43-45**

'Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind". This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.' **Matt 22:36-40**

Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments *is*: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength'. This *is* the first commandment. And the second, like *it*, *is* this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these. **Mk 12:29-31**

So he answered and said, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbour as yourself'. **Lk 10:27**

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery', 'You shall not murder', 'You shall not steal', 'You shall not bear false witness', 'You shall not covet', and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love *is* the fulfilment of the law. **Rm 13:8-10**

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. **Gal 5:14**

If you really fulfil *the* royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', you do well. **Jm 2:8**

The problems in churches

The problems found in churches that prevent what I am teaching here vary from church type to church type.

Sovereign grace churches

In sovereign grace churches¹⁵ there is always the danger that there is such a focus on good doctrine and the teaching of God's grace in the Gospel that there can be a dereliction of emphasis upon our duty to do good works. Leaders so emphasise justification by faith that any hint of demand for good works leads to fears of meritorious salvation or Arminianism. This, of course, is nonsense.

The Bible itself affirms this balance between faith and works, with great emphasis placed upon the necessity of good works. There is even a NT book mainly devoted to teaching the necessity of good works to prove that faith is genuine (James) and another repeatedly

¹⁵ Such as Particular Baptists, Strict Baptists, sound Presbyterian Reformed churches and some independents.

demanding that disciples do them (Titus), while Paul affirms that God's purposes in election was to prepare us for good works.¹⁶

Charismatic churches

Many of these tend to focus upon the self, which is in fact selfishness. Everything is about me and my experience. In fact, even becoming a Charismatic is based upon a personal 'spiritual' (i.e. mystical) experience that I have that lesser Christians don't (a seriously un-biblical doctrine).¹⁷

Teaching is often based upon training people to experience something, release something, be something or gain more power. We have explained much of this earlier in this paper. Furthermore the church experience is also self-centred and not outward looking.

I have explained before that the teaching and practice of Charismatic churches often leads to licentiousness. This is caused by shockingly bad teaching and a misunderstanding of grace, coupled with a lack of fear for God and a failure to explain that God disciplines his children. This leads to appalling statements, such as that Christians can never be guilty of anything.¹⁸ Such heretics have simply failed to read their Bible, such as: Rm 14:23; 1 Cor 9:27; 1 Tim 3:6; 1 Tim 5:11-12; Jm 2:10-12; Jm 3:1-2; Jm 5:9 or 1 Jn 1:8.

Such teaching is Antinomianism and it is common in Charismatic churches. This results in a lack of personal holiness and often no inclination to help outsiders, or even other believers. It is shameful.

I have witnessed many types of Charismatic churches, both from within and without, and my experience is that Charismatic leaders, in the main, have no desire for programmes to help the poor and needy, often because they deplete money that can go to their coffers.

In one case, decades ago, I was in leadership of what is now the largest radical Charismatic church denomination in the UK. I was there at the beginning with six other men in the 'apostle's' front room when it began. After a few years I put together a dossier on the need for a programme to reach out to the poor, and even liaised with local Social Services. I suggested an initial food donation to the many needy families in the direct locality of our main congregations. There was much talking and thanks for my work – nothing happened!

It seems that any charitable work to the poor, such as soup kitchens, that emanates from such churches begins as a personal initiative that eventually gets a belated leadership sanction.

So, many Charismatic churches manifest both a lack of personal holiness in the membership and a lack of good works to neighbours.

Pentecostal Churches, Wesleyan influenced churches, Higher Life influenced churches

Many of these are affected by a similar Antinomianism to Charismatic churches to a greater or lesser degree.

¹⁶ Eph 2:10, 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them'.

¹⁷ It denies that doctrine that God gives all believers the same blessings of salvation equally as brothers: Heb 2:3, 'so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him'. Heb 5:9, 'He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him'. Heb 7:25, 'He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him'. There is no teaching of a two-tier salvation.

¹⁸ See my paper, 'Are Christians ever guilty before God? : The problem of Charismatic Antinomianism'.

For instance it is common to see a complete denial of any form of God's law for the Christian at all, misunderstanding Paul's teaching that Christians are dead to the Mosaic Law. Such folk have not read texts that speak of us being under the Law of Christ or have noticed the repetitions of the moral law in apostolic writings. All such heresy leads to a lack of personal holiness.

In some of these churches this Antinomianism has gone further into full-blown perfectionism, especially those most influenced by Wesley's errors. This is a denial of 1 Jn 1:8 (and many other verses) and it leads to complacency about the facts of sin, personal ethics and a social testimony. The same applies to many aspects of Higher Life teaching and America Holiness Movement doctrines.

I have to accept that some classical Pentecostal churches have a history of social activity, such as providing soup kitchens or work amongst the homeless and such like; but in many cases personal holiness is compromised, as evidenced by the flagrant sins of many Pentecostal leaders.

In the more radical churches there is a constant focus upon money to be directed to the leadership, resulting in avarice beyond words in the top echelons.¹⁹ It seems that none of this money goes into programmes to bring relief to the poor, even the poor within their own communities.

Independent evangelical churches

A few of these have engaged in social work of some kind but the majority that I have experienced do not.

Again such churches tend to be inward-looking, apart from their connections to regional team co-operatives (e.g. 'Churches Together'). Many of these are ecumenical and doctrinally compromised.

A high proportion is very influenced by the Charismatic Movement and could be called 'Charismatic Light'; thus the criticisms of Charismatic churches apply here also. Some are more Biblical, and the criticism of sovereign grace churches apply here. A smaller proportion is very influenced by Jewish Root theology and thus their resources are directed at Jewish concerns instead of their neighbour. Very many small evangelical churches are very doctrinally confused and even their Gospel is riddled with errors.²⁰

In these churches I do not see any awareness of what is really going on in this world and how desperate the needs of the vulnerable are, even in their locality. I do not see a testimony of good works. Many are focused upon continuing or increasing their dwindling membership, which adds to their introspection. Because of this concentration upon trying to maintain membership levels, there is little focus upon testimony, and especially upon good works to outsiders.

The welfare state

In the UK the welfare state has occupied the place that used to be the province of the church and philanthropists. Now the NHS, free education, council housing, and the benefits system are not bad things, but they must not prohibit Christians and churches from doing good works.

¹⁹ Such as Pentecostal leaders with multiple mansions, boats, aeroplanes and tax havens.

²⁰ It is common for supposedly Calvinistic FIEC churches to be utterly Arminian in their Gospel presentation while some actually preach against aspects of the Five Points, such as election. Very many reject Limited Atonement.

However, what happens in practice is that the church and believers see the welfare state as the default system for the needs of the population and do nothing. What is worse, they even leave the education of their children to the state instead of being actively involved; thus the children are filled with propaganda from a young age and many leave the faith after finishing full-time education.

We should be grateful for the welfare state, itself a product of the faith and example of former ancestors,²¹ but it is not an excuse to ignore our local requirement to do good to all. There is so much need in the nation, at a time when the welfare state is in decline due to government cuts, that there are plenty of opportunities for churches to take up the slack.

That churches are not doing this either means that they are ignorant of needs, ignorant of the command or just disobedient.

Conclusion

Since the instruction of Jesus applies to all, ‘By their fruit you shall know them’,²² and since every Christian will stand before God and give an account of their faithfulness in this life,²³ woe betides all those Christians that did nothing to help the poor, alleviate the needs of the vulnerable, minister to their neighbours, succour the weak, denounce governmental wickedness – in short, fail to have a good testimony.

Christianity is not about going to church for fun; it is about being the church in the world, the called-out ones. We are ambassadors for God and thus we must manifest the attributes of God in doing good.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2016
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>

²¹ Schools, universities, orphanages, almshouses and hospitals were first pioneered by Christians.

²² Matt 7:16, 20. This is initially directed to church leaders.

²³ Matt 12:36; Rm 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 4:13, 13:17