

Beware of Brian McLaren

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As one of the most prominent voices in the emerging church, Brian McLaren represents the philosophy of the movement. He claims that truth is a shifting thing, exalts doubt as highly as faith, and rejects the infallible inspiration of Scripture, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and the eternal punishment of hell fire.

McLaren grew up in a fundamentalist Plymouth Brethren home. His grandfather was a old-fashioned Brethren missionary who believed in a pre-Tribulational Rapture. In an interview in 2009, McLaren told me that he holds his forefathers in high regard, but the fact is that he has completely rejected his grandfather's Christianity and is doing everything he can to tear down the faith of anyone today who holds to that type of Christianity.

If McLaren's missionary grandfather was right about his belief in such things as a verbally-inspired Bible, the necessity of the blood atonement of Christ for salvation, and the imminency of the return of Christ and a literal fulfillment of prophecy, then Brian McLaren is an apostate and a heretic. McLaren doesn't like black and white type Christianity, but his grandfather did, and his grandfather was right.

A REVIEW OF “A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN”

McLaren’s book “A New Kind of Christian: a Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey” won a *Christianity Today* Award of Merit in 2002 and has found a wide and approving audience in “evangelical” circles.

“A New Kind of Christian” presents theological liberalism in the guise of a wiser, kinder, gentler type of Christianity called “Postmodern.” The semi-fictional account is about an evangelical pastor who has a crisis of faith and submits himself to the guidance of a liberal Episcopalian who is a graduate of Princeton Divinity School and a former Presbyterian pastor. This Postmodern guide, who is named “Dr. Neil Oliver,” is called “Neo” by his friends. Neo resigned the pastorate because he was too liberal for his denomination and is teaching high school when we meet him in McLaren’s book.

The book recounts the evangelical pastor’s journey from a position of faith in the Bible as the absolute standard for truth, a position in which doctrine is either right or wrong, scriptural or unscriptural, to a pliable position in which “faith is more about a way of life than a system of belief, where being authentically good is more important than being doctrinally right” (from the back cover of “A New Kind of Christian”).

Gary E. Gilly hit the nail on the head in his review of “A New Kind of Christian” by observing: “More specifically, McLaren rejects absolute truth, authority, theology, objectivity, certainty and clarity. He embraces relativism, inclusivism, deconstructionism, stories (to replace truth), creative interpretation of Scripture, neo-orthodoxy, and tolerance.”

As the evangelical pastor in “A New Kind of Christian” begins his sad journey into theological liberalism (which he wants to call “postmodern”) he describes himself in these words:

“I feel like a fundamentalist who’s losing his grip--whose fundamentals are cracking and fraying and falling apart and slipping through my fingers. It’s like I thought I was building my house on rock, but it turned out to be ice, and now global warming his hit, and the ice is melting and everything is crumbling” (p. 22).

When he first begins talking with “Neo,” the evangelical pastor admits that he is afraid that Neo’s ideas are corrupting him and turning him into a heretic (p. 26), but he quenches the fear and proceeds down the path of error.

Instead of opening his Bible and seeking the face of God alone and finding out what God has to say in His Word and re-orienting himself to the eternal Word of God, instead of confiding in a man of God who believes the Bible, this evangelical

pastor turns, in his hour of doubt, to a clever unbeliever and is led into the deepest error.

This is exactly what is happening to men and women throughout the evangelical world, because they have been brainwashed to think that separation from false doctrine is mean-spirited and that a “positive, non-judgmental” approach to Christianity is preferable. As a consequence, evangelicalism, over the past 50 years, has been infiltrated with every sort of heresy.

Brian McLaren’s “A New Kind of Christian” is a dangerous book that ridicules a staunchly biblical, fundamentalist position on every hand. It slanderously describes such a position as Phariseism and likens it to medieval Roman Catholicism. In the very beginning of the book, the Postmodern guide Neo says: “I don’t dislike fundamentalists, taken individually--they tend to be pretty nice folks. Get them together in a group though, and I get nervous. I start to twitch and break out in a rash” (p. 9).

That is the best thing the book has to say about those who hold a strict Biblicist stance, whereas theological liberals and Romanists are depicted in a much more sympathetic light.

Though purporting to represent a more intellectual approach to Christianity, the book is filled with strawman arguments, shallow reasoning, and Scripture taken wildly out of context.

It teaches that the Bible is not the infallible Word of God and that all doctrines and theologies are non-absolute, that we need to approach the Bible “on less defined terms” (p. 56). It teaches that the Bible alone should not be our authority, but that the Bible should be one of many authorities, such as tradition, reason, exemplary people and institutions one has come to trust, and spiritual experience (pp. 54, 55). It teaches that it is wrong and Pharisaical to look upon the Bible as “God’s encyclopedia, God’s rule book, God’s answer book” (p. 52). It teaches that the authority of the Bible is not in the text itself but in a mystical level above and beyond the text (p. 51).

It teaches that Christians should not try to judge right from wrong in an absolute sense because all of our understanding of the Bible is colored and conditioned by extra-biblical things such as one’s time and culture. It teaches that the postmodern Christian is one who “relativizes your own modern viewpoint,” thus understanding that everything he believes about the Bible and Christianity is only relative and uncertain (p. 35). It teaches that there is no such thing as “the Christian worldview,” that every doctrinal position, “no matter how resplendent with biblical quotations--can claim to be the ultimate Christian worldview, because every model is at the least limited by the limitations of the contemporary human mind, not to mention the ‘taste in universes’ of that particular age” (pp. 36, 37).

It teaches that ecumenism is good and that all “denominations,” including

Roman Catholicism, can contribute to a proper form of Christianity. We are informed that “there are good Catholics, good Greek Orthodox, good Pentecostals, and good Episcopalians” (p. 73). It teaches that labels such as Catholic, Protestant, liberal, and evangelical “are about to become inconsequential” in a postmodern Christianity (p. 41). It teaches that mystical Catholic practices are authentic and desirable (p. 58).

It teaches that people should not ask pastors questions such as, “Do you believe in inerrancy?” or “What’s your position on homosexuality?” because to make them answer such questions is to “cheapen” them and to make them sell themselves (p. 61).

It teaches that the real issue for Jesus is “goodness, not just rightness” (p. 61), as if goodness and righteousness and truth are in some sort of conflict.

“A New Kind of Christian” teaches that Jesus’ objective was “holistic reconciliation.”

“I think what Jesus was about ... was a global, public movement or revolution to bring holistic reconciliation, a reconnection with God, with others, with ourselves, with our environment” (p. 73).

Here the author is not referring to what Jesus will do when He returns to establish His kingdom but what he is allegedly doing today. He claims the proper objective of churches is not merely the salvation of souls but the renewal of the world and saving the planet from destruction (p. 83).

It teaches that it is right for Christians to use pagan practices such as the Native American sweat lodge, peace pipe, dance, dream catcher, and smoke (pp. 26, 74-78). Apparently McLaren thinks that God’s warning, “*Learn not the way of the heathen,*” (Jer. 10:2), is no longer in effect.

It teaches that unbelievers and pagans can possibly be saved without personal faith in Christ (p. 92).

QUOTES FROM OTHER BOOKS AND ARTICLES BY MCLAREN

In *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren says the Bible is “not a look-it-up encyclopedia of timeless moral truths, but the unfolding narrative of God at work...” (p. 190). He compliments the Anglicans because to them the Bible is *a factor* in their thinking “but it is never *sola*--never the only factor. Rather Scripture is always in dialogue with tradition, reason, and experience” (p. 235).

McLaren’s doctrine of salvation is as murky as any I have ever read. He says:

“I DON’T THINK WE’VE GOT THE GOSPEL RIGHT YET. What does it mean to

be 'saved'? When I read the Bible, I don't see it meaning, 'I'm going to heaven after I die.' Before modern evangelicalism nobody accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, or walked down an aisle, or said the sinner's prayer. I don't think the liberals have it right. But I don't think we have it right either. None of us has arrived at orthodoxy" ("The Emergent Mystique," *Christianity Today*, Nov. 2004, p. 40).

McLaren doesn't think we have the gospel right yet, but two thousand years ago the Lord Jesus commanded, "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). It is a little late to be trying to get the gospel right, isn't it!

In *A New Kind of Christian*, McLaren has his postmodern hero say that he rejects the idea that the gospel is about getting individual souls into heaven because this "smacked of selfishness" and was unacceptable to postmodern thinking (pp. 82, 83).

McLaren identifies with Anabaptists because they (allegedly) teach that "one becomes a Christian through an event, process, or both, in which one identifies with Jesus, his mission, and his followers" (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 229). Though Christ described salvation as a birth (John 3), McLaren thinks it might be more a process than an event.

McLaren has "a strong conviction that THE EXCLUSIVE, HELL-ORIENTED GOSPEL IS NOT THE WAY FORWARD" (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 120, f. 48).

McLaren says the emerging approach is "less rigid, more generous" (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 190), and it is "conversational, never attempting to be the last word, and thus silence other voices" (p. 169). He says it "doesn't claim too much; it admits it walks with a limp" (p. 171). He says, "To be a Christian in a generously orthodox way is not to claim to have the truth captured, stuffed, and mounted on the wall" (p. 293). He likens doctrinal dogmatism to smoking cigarettes, saying that "it is a hard-to-break Protestant habit that is hazardous to spiritual health" (p. 217).

In his books *The Secret Message of Jesus* and *Everything Must Change*, McLaren says that "the essential message of Jesus" is the kingdom of God, and this is "not just a message *about* Jesus that focused on the afterlife, but rather the core message *of* Jesus that focused on personal, SOCIAL, AND GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION IN THIS LIFE" (*Everything Must Change*, p. 22). He says that THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS "ABOUT CHANGING THIS WORLD" (p. 23).

McLaren mocks the "fundamentalist expectations" of a literal second coming of Christ with its attendant judgments on the world and assumes that the world will go on like it is for hundreds of thousands of years (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 305). He calls the literal, imminent return of Christ "pop-Evangelical eschatology" (*Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 267) and the "eschatology of

abandonment” (interview with Planet Preterist, Jan. 30, 2005, <http://planetpreterist.com/news-2774.html>).

McLaren says that the book of Revelation is not a “book about the distant future” but is “a way of talking about the challenges of the immediate present” (*The Secret Message of Jesus*, 2007, p. 176). He says that phrases such as “the moon will turn to blood” “are no more to be taken literally than phrases we might read in the paper today” (*The Secret Message*, p. 178).

McLaren epitomizes the emerging church’s radical ecumenism by calling himself “evangelical, post-protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/Calvinist, anabaptist/anglican, Methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, emergent” (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, subtitle to the book).

The fact that these various doctrinal positions are contradictory and non-reconcilable does not bother the man one iota. He is fully committed to “orthoparadoxy,” being convinced that he can hold contradictions in harmony.

In June 2006 McLaren joined the blasphemous Marcus Borg of the Jesus Seminar, who boldly denies the Jesus of the Bible, at the Center for Spiritual Development in Portland, Oregon. The center promotes New Age and occultic practices such as Yoga, Sufism, Tai Chi, Enneagram, and Reiki. The Episcopalian heretic John Shelby Spong has also spoken at this Center.

McLaren wrote a glowing recommendation of Alan Jones’ book *Reimagining Christianity*. Jones calls the gospel of the cross a vile doctrine, claims that there is no objective authority, and says that Hindus and Buddhists are God’s people:

“But another ancient strand of Christianity teaches that we are all caught up in the Divine Mystery we call God, that the Spirit is in everyone, and that there are depths of interpretation yet to be plumbed. ... At the cathedral [Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco] we ‘break the bread’ for those who follow the path of the Buddha and walk the way of the Hindus” (*Reimagining Christianity*, 2005, p. 89).

Of this book McLaren says:

“It used to be that Christian institutions and systems of dogma sustained the spiritual life of Christians. Increasingly, spirituality itself is what sustains everything else. Alan Jones is a pioneer in reimagining a Christian faith that emerges from authentic spirituality. His work stimulates and encourages me deeply” (endorsement on back cover).

McLaren says, “I DON’T THINK IT’S OUR BUSINESS TO PROGNOSTICATE THE ETERNAL DESTINIES OF ANYONE ELSE” (p. 92) and offers a quote from a C.S. Lewis novel as his authority. In this novel Lewis’s character was a soldier

who served a false god named Tash all his life, but he was accepted nonetheless by Aslan, who represents Christ.

“Alas, Lord, I am no son of Thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou has done to Tash, I account as service done to me. ... Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath’s sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him.”

According to C.S. Lewis, who is deeply loved by all branches of the emerging church, an individual might be saved even if he follows a false religion in this life and makes no personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

McLaren said that the Indian Hindu leader Gandhi “sought to follow the way of Christ without identifying himself as a Christian” (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 189).

McLaren teaches that there is much good in pagan religions, that they have been a good thing for the world.

“My knowledge of Buddhism is rudimentary, but I have to tell you that much of what I understand strikes me as wonderful and insightful, and the same can be said of the teachings of Muhammad, though of course I have my disagreements. ... I’d have to say that the world is better off for having these religions than having no religions at all, or just one, even if it were ours. ... They aren’t the enemy of the gospel, in my mind...” (pp. 62, 63).

The man needs to spend a few years living in India or Nepal to see how the Hindu religion has corrupted and debased the people, how it has turned women into chattel, cows and snakes into gods, certain classes of people into untouchables, and human life in general into something of little value, how it has encouraged pride and self-centeredness and corruption at every level of society and has discouraged humility and compassion. Or maybe he should spend a few years in an Islamic country such as Saudi Arabia or Pakistan to see what the Muslim religion has done to people. Are they better off because they can change their religion only on the pain of death and because a woman has no real rights and because she can be killed just because she does something that the male members of the family consider unacceptable?

McLaren says that Buddhism is not the enemy of the gospel, but how can a religion that teaches that Jesus Christ is not God and not the only Saviour of the world NOT be an enemy of the gospel? He says the Muslim religion is not the enemy of the gospel, but how can a religion that teaches that Jesus was not God and did not die for our sins and that forbids its members to convert to the Christ of the Bible NOT be an enemy of the gospel?

In a podcast interview in January 2006 with Leif Hansen, McLaren said that if the doctrine of hell is true then the Christ’s message and cross is “false

advertising.” He said that since Christ taught that God’s kingdom doesn’t come through violence and coercion, this would be contrary to the judgment of hell. He also said if hell is true then people can legitimately question God’s goodness.

This interview is truly amazing in a fearful way. Hansen says that he doubts God’s very existence and even casts a profanity at Jesus. And yet the two of them ramble on in a very knowing sort of way, mocking fundamentalists and Calvinists and anyone else who won’t accept the emerging church’s unbelief. It is a great warning that if you reject the truth you are walking in utter darkness.

McLaren says:

“Does it make sense for a good being to create creatures who will experience infinite torture, infinite time, infinite--you know, never be numbed in their consciousness? I mean, how would you even create a universe where that sort of thing could happen? It just sounds--It really raises some questions about the goodness of God. ...

“The traditional understanding says that God asks of us something that God is incapable of Himself. God asks us to forgive people. But God is incapable of forgiving. God can’t forgive unless He punishes somebody in place of the person He was going to forgive. God doesn’t say things to you--Forgive your wife, and then go kick the dog to vent your anger. God asks you to actually forgive. And there’s a certain sense that, **A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF THE ATONEMENT PRESENTS A GOD WHO IS INCAPABLE OF FORGIVING. UNLESS HE KICKS SOMEBODY ELSE. ...**

“... one of the huge problems is the traditional understanding of hell. Because if the cross is in line with Jesus’ teaching then--I won’t say, the only, and I certainly won’t say even the primary--but a primary meaning of the cross is that the kingdom of God doesn’t come like the kingdoms of the this world, by inflicting violence and coercing people. But that the kingdom of God comes through suffering and willing, voluntary sacrifice. But in an ironic way, **THE DOCTRINE OF HELL BASICALLY SAYS, NO, THAT THAT’S NOT REALLY TRUE. THAT IN THE END, GOD GETS HIS WAY THROUGH COERCION AND VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION AND DOMINATION**, just like every other kingdom does. The cross isn’t the center then. The cross is almost a distraction and false advertising for God” (McLaren, <http://www.understandthetimes.org/mclarentrans.shtml> and http://str.typepad.com/weblog/2006/01/brian_mclaren_p.html).

Hansen replies as follows:

“Oh, Brian, that was just so beautifully said. I was tempted to get on my soap box there and you know--Because as you and I know there are so many illustrations and examples that you could give that show why **THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF HELL COMPLETELY FALLS IN THE FACE OF--IT’S JUST ANTITHETICAL TO THE CROSS**. But the way you put it there, I love that. It’s false advertising. And

here, Jesus is saying, turn the other cheek. Love your enemy. Forgive seven times seventy. Return violence with self-sacrificial love. But if we believe the traditional view of hell, it's like, well, do that for a short amount of time. Because eventually, God's going to get them."

McLaren also said:

"The church has been preoccupied with the question, 'What happens to your soul after you die?' AS IF THE REASON FOR JESUS COMING CAN BE SUMMED UP IN, 'JESUS IS TRYING TO HELP GET MORE SOULS INTO HEAVEN, AS OPPOSED TO HELL, AFTER THEY DIE.' I JUST THINK A FAIR READING OF THE GOSPELS BLOWS THAT OUT OF THE WATER. I don't think that the entire message and life of Jesus can be boiled down to that bottom line" ("The Emerging Church," Part Two, *Religion & Ethics*, July 15, 2005, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week846/cover.html>).

In the same interview McLaren said that the traditional doctrine of substitutionary atonement makes God into a strange monster that wants to kill his own son and needs to be restrained. He also says the substitutionary atonement detracts from social justice issues. He even blasphemously mocks the atonement by saying that if it is true it would mean that God can't forgive one person unless he "kicks someone else." Consider this very foolish statement.

"What's so bad about sin? Now, I can just imagine some people quoting--See, McLaren doesn't think sin is a problem. I take sin really, seriously. But here's the problem, if I were to make this sort of analogy or parable. When I had little children, if one of my little children--Let's say my son Brett, was beating up on his little brother, Trevor. Now, Trevor is bigger. But back then--What was the problem? Was the problem that I don't want my younger son to get hurt and I don't want my older son to be a bully. I want my older son to be a good person. I want my younger son to be a good person. I want them to have a great relationship. Then the problem of sin is what it does to my family and what it does to my boys, you know. That's the problem with sin.

"But what we've created is, the problem of sin is that I am so angry at my son Brett for beating up his younger brother, I'm going to kill him. So now the problem we've got to solve is how to keep me from killing my son. Does that make sense?

"And so now it seems to me the entire Christian theology has shifted so now the problem is, how can we keep me from killing Brett? And I don't think that's the kind of God that we serve. I think the problem is God wants His children to get along with each other. He wants them to be good people. Because He's good. And His vision for creation is that they'll love each other and be good to each other and enjoy each other and have a lot of fun together. ...

"We have a vision that the real problem is God wants to kill us all. And we've got

to somehow solve that problem. And what that does to me, Leif, that is so significant, is that it then minimizes the concern about injustice between human beings. That becomes a peripheral concern. But what if that's God's real concern, from beginning to end, see? ...

“The traditional understanding says that God asks of us something that God is incapable of Himself. God asks us to forgive people. But God is incapable of forgiving. God can't forgive unless He punishes somebody in place of the person He was going to forgive. God doesn't say things to you--Forgive your wife, and then go kick the dog to vent your anger. God asks you to actually forgive. And there's a certain sense that, a common understanding of the atonement presents a God who is incapable of forgiving. Unless He kicks somebody else” (McLaren, <http://www.understandthetimes.org/mclarentrans.shtml> and http://str.typepad.com/weblog/2006/01/brian_mclaren_p.html).

What McLaren ignores is God's holiness and justice. God is not just a father like a human father. He is a holy and just God who has given man His righteous Law. That Law, having been broken, must be satisfied. The wages of sin is death. Without the shedding of blood is no remission. And to provide the atonement, God hasn't “kicked” anyone but Himself!

On the issue of homosexuality, McLaren says:

“Frankly, many of us don't know what we should think about homosexuality. ... We aren't sure if or where lines are to be drawn, nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn. ... Perhaps we need a five-year moratorium on making pronouncements” (“Brian McLaren on the Homosexual Question,” Jan. 23, 2006, http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/01/brian_mclaren_o.html).

In December 2006, McLaren spoke at the Open Door Community Church in Sherwood, Arkansas. The church's web site says:

“The leadership at Open Door Community Churches are excited to see gay and non-gay Christians worshiping together as one. We believe that gay and non-gay Christians can and should come to the table of the Lord together, side by side, without labels. We believe that as these two historically separate communities join together at the cross of Jesus Christ a healing and a new understanding of oneness in Christ occurs in both groups. We are part of a growing revival of grace-filled Christians transcending either the terms ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal.’ Above all things, we are a GRACE CHURCH! We are a family embracing the full spectrum of race, age, gender, family status, sexual orientation, economic status and denominational background.”

[In September 2012, McLaren's son Trevor “married” Owen Ryan in a civil ceremony led by Brian at Woodend Sanctuary of the Audubon Naturalist Society](#)

in Chevy Chase, Maryland (“Weddings/Celebrations,” *New York Times*, Sept. 23, 2012).

On his own web site McLaren even recommends the writings of New Ager Ken Wilber.

Roger Oakland remarks:

“Ken Wilber was raised in a conservative Christian church, but at some point he left that faith and is now a major proponent of Buddhist mysticism. His book that Bell recommends, *A Brief History of Everything*, is published by Shambhala Publications, named after the term, which in Buddhism means the mystical abode of spirit beings. ... Wilber is perhaps best known for what he calls integral theory. On his website, he has a chart called the Integral Life Practice Matrix, which lists several activities one can practice ‘to authentically exercise all aspects or dimensions of your own being-in-the-world’ Here are a few of these spiritual activities that Wilber promotes: yoga, Zen, centering prayer, kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), TM, tantra (Hindu-based sexuality), and kundalini yoga. ... *A Brief History of Everything* discusses these practices (in a favorable light) as well. For Rob Bell to say that Wilber’s book is ‘mind-blowing’ and readers should spend three months in it leaves no room for doubt regarding Rob Bell’s spiritual sympathies. What is alarming is that so many Christian venues, such as Christian junior high and high schools, are using *Velvet Elvis* and the *Noomas*” (*Faith Undone*, p. 110).

In *Up from Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution* (1981, 2004), Ken Wilber calls the Garden of Eden a fable” and the biblical view of history “amusing” (pp. xix, 3). He describes his “perennial philosophy” as follows:

“... it is true that there is some sort of Infinite, some type of Absolute Godhead, but it cannot properly be conceived as a colossal Being, a great Daddy, or a big Creator set apart from its creations, from things and events and human beings themselves. Rather, it is best conceived (metaphorically) as the ground or suchness or condition of all things and events. It is not a Big Thing set apart from finite things, but rather the reality or suchness or ground of all things. ... the perennial philosophy declares that the absolute is One, Whole, and Undivided” (p. 6).

CONCLUSION

Beware of Brian McLaren and the emerging church!

A good test is to ask Christian leaders what they think of this man. Assuming they are familiar with his writings, if they fudge and hedge, refusing to come right out and mark him as a dangerous heretic, they are heretics themselves or at least well down the road of serious compromise!

WHAT CHARLES SPURGEON SAID ABOUT THE EMERGING CHURCH

The emerging church represented by Brian McLaren is not as new as it appears to be. It was already raising its ugly head in the late 19th century, because Charles Spurgeon described it perfectly in his comments on James 5:19-20. He called it “modern thought.” He also described the tolerant attitude of modern evangelicalism that puts up with emerging church type heresies. Spurgeon called this “latitudinarianism.”

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

“It was not merely that he fell into a mistake upon some lesser matter which might be compared to the fringe of the gospel, but he erred in some vital doctrine--he departed from the faith in its fundamentals. There are some truths which must be believed, they are essential to salvation, and if not heartily accepted the soul will be ruined. This man had been professedly orthodox, but he turned aside from the truth on an essential point Now, in those days the saints did not say: ‘We must be largely charitable, and leave this brother to his own opinion; he sees truth from a different standpoint, and has a rather different way of putting it, but his opinions are as good as our own, and we must not say that he is in error.’

“That is at present the fashionable way of trifling with divine truth, and making things pleasant all round. Thus the gospel is debased and another gospel propagated. I should like to ask modern broad churchmen whether there is any doctrine of any sort for which it would be worth a man’s while to burn or to lie in prison. I do not believe they could give me an answer, for if their latitudinarianism be correct, the martyrs were fools of the first magnitude.

“From what I see of their writings and their teachings, it appears to me that the modern thinkers treat the whole compass of revealed truth with entire indifference; and, though perhaps they may feel sorry that wilder spirits should go too far in free-thinking, and though they had rather they would be more moderate, yet, upon the whole, so large is their liberality, that they are not sure enough of anything to be able to condemn the reverse of it as a deadly error. To them black and white are terms which may be applied to the same colour, as you view it from different standpoints. Yea and nay are equally true in their esteem. Their theology shifts like the Goodwin Sands, and they regard all firmness as so much bigotry. Errors and truths are equally comprehensible within the circle of their charity.

“It was not in this way that the apostles regarded error. They did not prescribe large-hearted charity towards falsehood, or hold up the errorist as a man of deep thought, whose views were ‘refreshingly original’; far less did they utter some

wicked nonsense about the probability of their having more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds. They did not believe in justification by doubting, as our Neologians do; they set about the conversion of the erring brother; they treated him as a person who needed conversion: and viewed him as a man who, if he were not converted, would suffer the death of his soul, and be covered with a multitude of sins. They were not such easy-going people as our cultured friends of the school of 'modern thought,' who have learned at last that the deity of Christ may be denied, the work of the Holy Spirit ignored, the inspiration of scripture rejected, the atonement disbelieved, and regeneration dispensed with, and yet the man who does all this may be as good a Christian as the most devout believer!

“O God, deliver us from this deceitful infidelity, which while it does damage to the erring man, and often prevents his being reclaimed, does yet more mischief to our own hearts by teaching us that truth is unimportant, and falsehood a trifle, and so destroys our allegiance to the God of truth, and makes us traitors instead of loyal subjects to the King of kings” (C.H. Spurgeon, “Restoring Those Who Have Erred,” *Words of Counsel for Christian Workers*, pp. 139-142).