

The Need for Evangelical Reformation

Selected Scriptures

September 24, 2021

Well, this opening session, it's my task to show you the need for Evangelical Reformation. The need for Evangelical Reformation. And I want you to know that when I say I'm here to show you the need for Evangelical Reformation, that means that you're going to hear some stuff that's just not very pretty. It's not a pretty picture; if it needs to be reformed, it means that there's going to be some measure of critique. I don't do that with delight in my heart. I don't do that to dogpile on what's going wrong, but you do need to know. And I think sometimes, just being busy with life, and family, and ministry, and church, and everything that we have going, sometimes we're just not aware.

So, I want to show you the need for Evangelical Reformation, and I hope to show you that in two ways tonight. So, this will be like a two-parter. First part, I want to trace some evidences of Evangelical drift, and show the, the pattern of decline that we

see in the culture around us. And then, secondly, in the second half of the message, I want to issue a biblical warning to Evangelicals in hopes of repentance, and a sincere hope for repentance. So, evidence of drift and decline, and a warning to repent.

If we were to ask a typical Evangelical in a typical Evangelical church, What is an Evangelical, we're likely to get some kind of a self-referential answer, an Evangelical is what I am. Not helpful, really. Or, I attend an Evangelical church, so my church is Evangelical. Come and see what it's like. But, there's no real idea of what that term Evangelical means, other than boiling it down to a Greek term, that means evangel, *euangelion*, it means the Gospel. There's no understanding, really, besides that, what the history is, what the doctrinal convictions are among many Evangelicals. There's no, really, an understanding of what defines, or what regulates the movement, what puts boundaries around it, what keeps it accountable.

Many are ignorant of definitional, historical, theological, and organizational matters in today's Evangelicalism. And I feel

sympathy for the average Evangelical churchgoer. I was an Evangelical churchgoer myself, a lot of my life as a non-Christian, and then as a Christian when I was converted. I was one of those. And so, I share that perplexity about defining Evangelical church and the Evangelical movement.

You may not know it now, looking around today, but Evangelicalism was set once on a very strong doctrinal foundation, going all the way back to the early years of the Protestant Reformation. They used the word Evangelical to distinguish themselves as the Gospel preachers, the Gospel people. As Ian Murray says, though, by the 18th century, several centuries after the Reformation, quote, "While the profession of the national churches in England and Scotland remained orthodox, there were many pulpits from which no Gospel was heard, and when the evangel was recovered, a term was necessary to distinguish its preachers from others, and they were the Evangelicals." End quote.

So, Evangelicals continued from those centuries, England, Scotland, other places, continued to fellowship with one another

through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And by the end of the nineteenth century, there was an encroaching liberalism coming into the Evangelical/protestant mainline churches. Protestant mainline denominations were facing an anti-supernatural, evolutionary presuppositions coming out of the Enlightenment. So, the denial of miracles, denial of the virgin birth, denial of the supernatural, denial of the resurrection, all those are supernatural things that they didn't have any room for in the rational mind. Denial, also, then, of substitutionary atonement, a despising of the doctrine, the very doctrine that makes us Christians. The denial of the authority itself, the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

So, the Evangelical reaction to this encroachment of liberal ideas, known as modernism in the protestant mainline churches, it was called, this reaction to that was called fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is a bad word that people use today. They accuse you of being a fundamentalist. In fact, all of the terrorists that took down the twin towers were called fundamentalists. And we hold to biblical fundamentals, Gospel fundamentals that make us orthodox Christians. Those fundamentalists rose up to oppose



that encroaching liberalism, and they reasserted fundamental truths of Christianity.

Liberal fundamentalist conflict took center stage in the 1925 Scopes trials. Led to an exodus of Christians coming out of liberalized institutions, like, just think of the example of J. Gresham Machen coming out of Princeton Cemetery, uh, cemetery. That truly was a slip, but, but it's very accurate. Princeton Seminary, and in 1929, started Westminster Theological Seminary. Christians left the protestant mainline churches in droves to form new denominations or become independent churches altogether. And that liberal fundamentalist conflict could be quite acerbic at times. It could be feisty. Many grew weary of the fight over the years.

And when we come to, we go through two world wars, people come home from the battlefield, and they are tired of fighting. And so, the post-World War II generation, there's a new Evangelicalism forming up, finding a middle way, really, between the doctrinal concerns of the fundamentalists and the social

sympathies of the liberals. Sounds familiar. Sounds like history's repeating itself today.

On the one hand, the new Evangelicals wanted to protect the fundamental tenants of orthodoxy, things like the inspiration, inerrancy, authority of Scripture; the supernatural nature of the Christian religion, the Bible, the new birth; centrality of the Gospel, the exclusivity of salvation in Jesus Christ, Christ's mandate to evangelize and disciple, to build the church. And, on the other hand, those new Evangelicals did not want to appear intolerant any longer. They did not want to appear pugnacious, like they were fighters. Seems like, maybe, it could seem like a noble enterprise.

Which side of the, that tension prevailed, do you think? What is the fruit of the new Evangelicalism? What does the word Evangelical mean today, by most people who self-identify as Evangelicals? The word Evangelical now, it refers to, it seems to me as an observer, any non-Roman Catholic, non-mainline protestant religious group, or person who adheres to a protestant religious group, like a church. They see the Bible



and Jesus as important, centrally important, even. They follow a formulaic pattern of a message that they call Gospel. And there is an impulse to influence people to join their cause, their church, their movement, or whatever they're propagating. So, that's the evangelistic side of it, the evangelistic impulse.

With that brief description, and it, hopefully it seems vague to you, cause it is vague. I trust you see the problem, because by defining Evangelicalism in such broad terms, that means it can embrace everyone from Joel Osteen to John MacArthur, everyone from Beth Moore to Phil Johnson, everyone from Steven Furtick to Don Green, and us.

So, while seeing the Bible and Jesus as centrally important is a, is a good thing, (I mean, what true Christian doesn't see those things as important?); it's just not narrow enough.

Mormons can say the same thing. The Bible's important. Jesus is important. Same thing with Roman Catholics. There are no standards, no accountability for any Evangelical with regard to how they handle Scripture, how they handle the Bible that they call centrally important, how they interpret Jesus, who they say

he is, what he came to do. Just as long as those matters are centrally important, then they are Evangelicals.

The formulaic pattern of the Gospel that you hear in many Evangelical churches goes something like this: Something is wrong and needs to be fixed in your life. Salvation, or Jesus, is the answer to your problem. Jesus is the key to salvation. Salvation means happiness. Want to come to Jesus for a happy life, now and forever? Some version of that pattern of Gospel message comes from the basic palette of paints on the Evangelical palette. Allows for quite a bit of creativity, doesn't it? Quite a bit of adaptation and innovation. So long as you can find a Bible verse to attach to it, and clap very loudly for Jesus in church.

The Evangelical evangelistic impulse mandated by Christ in his Great Commission, that impulse has provided pious cover to religious frauds with very nice smiles and very white teeth, as they smile at you and bilk you of your money. Whoever has like a clever shtick and a magnetic personality, all those who are seeking fame, influence, big paychecks, driven by pride and

ambition, if they fly the banner of: I'm being evangelistic, all things to all people, they target unchurched Harry and Mary, all those who live in dual income homes in the suburbs, they target those people. They say it's all under the rubric of: we're being evangelistic, we want to see those people saved.

I'd like us to look at Evangelicalism from maybe the eyes of the uninformed, maybe the eyes of the world as they look in and turn on the news, and look on the internet, and see what stories and headlines are floating past. What does it look like to them? How do they see this thing called Evangelicalism? We want to start with the obvious, public-facing evidence of the drift that we see in Evangelicalism and then we want to move a little bit deeper and see if we can trace not only what happened, but why it happened and expose it, bring it to the fore.

We'll start with the unpleasant, the moral, public scandals that run like sewage and stain the Evangelical reputation and profile. Immoral behavior among very high-profile Evangelicals. I'll just name names and you'll see, you can probably see in your mind the story, the headline that came out: Ted Haggard,

GRACE CHURCH



Tullian Tchividjian, Bill Hybels, Jerry Falwell, Jr., Carl Lentz, Ravi Zacharias.

It's terrible when you think that Ted Haggard was the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and to know that he was caught up in severe drug use, and abuse, and prostitution with, male prostitute. Tullian Tchividjian, that name, again, sexual, sexually immoral grandson of Billie Graham. Bill Hybels, the one who set so many churches in the 80's and 90's and 2000's along the path of mega, mega, mega. Build the numbers and bring them all in. And the whole time he's been sexually immoral internally in the church. Jerry Falwell, Carl Lentz, Ravi Zacharias, those stories, you can look them up.

Setting aside the immoral sexual scandals, we see immoral leadership by men like Mark Driscoll and James McDonald. Both of those men were founding counsel members of the Gospel Coalition. Mark Driscoll has, is the bad boy of Reformation Theology, and yet he's founded his church based on a dream. Now he's gone down after being expelled from his, the, the movement he started,

he's down in Arizona doing it all over again. James McDonald actually tried to hire a hitman to kill his ex-son-in-law.

What is going on? You can't really make this up. It's, truth is stranger than fiction. We see in the Evangelical churches divorce, pornography, fornication, co-habitation, now LGBTQ+. Some Evangelicals have capitulated on homosexuality; people like Beth Moore, Max Lucado. Others have apostatized altogether: Jen Hatmaker, Joshua Harris. It's tragic.

And that moral drift then draws attention to, when you start to get into what the church environment was, what the environment in their life was, you start to see that there is a cultural drift, number two, a cultural drift. What I mean by that is there has been an appropriation of worldly culture in order to be relevant in the world, in order to gain influence and attract followers who are worldly. So, they be worldly to gain worldly influence and attraction.

Look, from hip hop hipster culture of Hillsong to the Country Western culture of The Cowboy Church. They define this and

defend it as a strategy to win the culture, but it looks more like they just love the world. They're not calling sinners out of a sinful culture and critiquing a sinful culture. They're not calling them to repent and live holy lives. They're just appropriating it and living in it, not troubled at all by what comes along with it.

That cultural drift reveals, number three, an ecclesiological drift, ecclesiological drift. A, an understanding of what the church is for, Evangelicals have forgotten that. They have Bibles, but because of the church that they go to, where you don't need your Bibles because it's all put up on a screen, they'll tell you what you need to read for the day; they've really forgotten what a church is and what a church is for.

Rather than equipping the saints, an equipping center for God-fearing Christians, rather than a place where Christians come to hear and receive the teaching, and reproof, and correction, and training in righteousness, many Evangelicals now consider church as an event, something that they can use to attract their unbelieving friends, something that's cool, something that looks

more like the tonight show. Pastors and church staff, they serve the event. They serve the attractional elements in the event. They cater to the consumers. They're there to entertain, and inspire, and motivate, and provide, even, in some churches, group therapy. Pastors are not shepherds.

Andy Stanley believes that model, shepherding, is outmoded, needs to be replaced by a CEO model. Pastor is the chief fundraiser, he's the visionary, he's the chief executive, he oversees the program managers who handle all the programs in the church in these big, huge churches, and man, they have programs.

The ecclesiological drift has been caused, in large part, by, number four, an institutional drift, an institutional drift. The institution, and again, I'm not, just want to say this very clearly, put a footnote here, I'm not against institutions. God created the institution of the family at the very beginning. He designed institutions. Jesus Christ is the head of the church, and he said, "I will build my church." The church is an institution. The government is a good institution when it



follows the commands of God. It is there to protect the righteous and punish the evildoer.

Thankful for institutions, but what we're seeing now is a distortion of this institution called the church. The institution that Jesus Christ bled for, died for, redeemed with his own blood; the church, the institution that he ordained is the Christian church. But it was after World War II that parachurch organizations began to set the agenda for the churches. In Ian Murray's book, *Evangelicalism Divided*, he draws attention to the influence of one man in that enterprise, and it's Billy Graham.

I know that God has done good things through Billy Graham's life, inasmuch as his, his message has stayed near to the Gospel of Scripture. We can see that people are saved through that. But to recruit the necessary workforce in order to promote and execute on his massive evangelistic crusades, revivals, Billy Graham needed the cooperation and participation of churches in a very wide range of denominational backgrounds. So, he pursued an ecumenical strategy for pragmatic reasons, dropping the

doctrinal differences in order to bring the most people together so he could bring the most people in. It's exact same thing that's happening in many of our so-called Evangelical churches today.

Ian Murray writes, quote, "One of Graham's most frequently repeated sayings from 1957 onwards was, 'The one badge of Christian discipleship is not orthodoxy, but love.'" To set those two in contradistinction to one another, as if love and orthodoxy don't belong together, and love, true love is orthodox, and true orthodoxy is loving, that is a terrible misunderstanding of truth.

But who could argue with Billy Graham's numerical successes? He packed stadiums by the tens of thousands and became the very handsome face and smooth voice of the success of the new Evangelicalism. He surrounded himself with scholars, especially from Fuller Seminary. And Billy Graham set the tone for future Chrinsten, Christian institutions, household names that many older people will recognize very well: Wheaton College, Fuller Seminary. The publications of Christianity Today and Decision

Magazine, Youth for Christ, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Urbana, Student Missions Conferences, World Congress on Evangelism, the Lausanne Movement, Bible Study Fellowship, Billy Graham had his hands in the start of all those things and, held by his ecumenical orthodoxy verses love mentality, sowed the seeds of that into all those institutions.

So again, those institutions, they're not churches, but they're parachurch institutions. They have trained Christian laity for decades. They have especially trained and educated the young people. So, the young people have a whole different understanding of what Christianity is. They don't have an appreciation for the local church. In fact, the local church seems to them to be a stifling institution, not one that allows them to be performative and to see their gifts realized. So, they left the environment of the local church, preferring instead the ins, exciting institutions of this new Evangelicalism on a new frontier of new growth and new possibilities.

Worldwide evangelization seemed to be within their grasp. They imbibed a spirit of revivalism and ecumenism. They're doctrinally Arminian, and they're American pragmatic, measuring success by counting nickels and noses. All of them embraced Billy Graham's ecumenism, with an aversion to doctrine since doctrine divides. And many who rose to leadership in parachurch institutions, they're not ordained, they're not theologically trained, they're not biblically qualified for eldership or leadership in the local church.

Nonetheless, they influence local churches, entering into local churches and encouraging them to be suspicious of doctrine. Resulted in theological anemia, a weakness in the local churches. They opted instead for producing concert or conference-like experiences every single Sunday, every single weekend for Sunday visitors.

In the visible Evangelical world, the parachurch has prevailed over the church. In what's visible, in what your neighbor may look and see on the news, and what they may click on, on the internet, this is what they see: the parachurch has prevailed

over the church. And we understand that saying, The mistress has supplanted the bride of Christ. The evidence to that? Well, the most popular, well-recognized form of visible Evangelical Christianity is represented by the megachurch.

More than five hundred churches in this country have more than two thousand members, which qualifies them as megachurches. If they have more than ten thousand people, those are called giga churches, evidently. I didn't know that. Giga churches, and the largest of which number between thirty thousand and fifty thousand people. I would say fifty thousand members, but they actually don't believe in church membership. So, I'm not really sure exactly how they, I guess they just count nickels and noses. I guess that's how it goes.

But they're, these huge giga churches are led by such figures as Steven Furtick and Andy Stanley, Ed Young, Jr., Joel Osteen, Craig Groeschel of Life Church. He does multisite megachurch, online church combo, and he bumps that number up over one hundred thousand people. All those identify themselves as Evangelical and identify whatever that thing is called online

church as an Evangelical church. All told, Evangelical megachurches account for anywhere from 3.5 to 5 million of America's Evangelicals. And as everything is kind of going online, I'm sure that number's going up and up.

In any community with a megachurch, I tell you, its influence is felt. Megachurches have a gravitational force in any community, and they present, the sad thing is they present a false witness of what Christianity truly is. It's not the church, it's the parachurch wearing local church skin. So, it stands to reason that the institutional drift of today's Evangelicalism with no deep, theological foundation leads to, number five, a doctrinal drift. Fifthly, a doctrinal drift.

Building and maintaining parachurch organizations and megachurch institutions, that requires unity. It requires unity of mind and purpose, and a whole lot of money. So, everyone stays united, and donors are kept happy and giving when doctrinal and theological differences are minimized and ignored for the sake of mission, when nobody is confronted in their sin. Most megachurches are populated and even led by doctrinally immature

people. So, Ephesians 4:14 says, They're "tossed to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

You would be shocked at the level of doctrinal error and theological error in many of these churches, many of these institutions. Parachurch ministries, the megachurches, they embrace, I mean, frankly, godless enlightenment ideologies that are hostile to Christianity. They were set on a course from the very beginning to be hostile to Christianity. Sigmund Freud was no friend of the church, no friend of God. He rejected all that. So, many churches are practicing godless psychology in their churches.

We know here, in our state, that there's a seminary that trains men for ministry and tells them, well, men and women for pastoral ministry, and tells them, Yeah, don't even bother with counseling issues, don't even bother with those things. Send them out, refer them out to the trained counselors. And they happen to be partners with another education institution that is training those. So, the one is paying the other and feeding the

other. It is a business agreement, and relationship, and enterprise.

All of it is proffering this godless psychology that comes from Sigmund Freud and his ilk that hate Christianity altogether. They see no place for God, the Bible, truth. They don't see sin. They don't even acknowledge an immaterial part of the self. All they say that matters is atoms and material self. How can they get the truth if they reject it all, they reject even the, the problem, understanding that sin is the issue? This is rationalism that comes out of the enlightenment.

Many today have rejected that, and they embrace the mysticism; go on the other side. They let the pendulum swing to the other side and embrace the mysticism of the charismatic movement. That's, that's falling off, you know, getting out of one ditch only to jump into another. Because all of that, whether it's rationalism on one side, or mysticism on the other, all of it is an attack on the absolute authority and complete sufficiency of Scripture.

So, being groomed to turn away from Scripture, so many Evangelicals are wide open for errors pertaining to everything that matters: the Gospel, so they have a false understanding of imputation and justification and atonement. Errors about the nature of God: open theism, denying God's immutability, his impassability, divine simplicity; these are things that are promulgated from well-known seminaries. It's now a legitimate question whether some of these Evangelical churches are even proclaiming the same God anymore.

No wonder godless ideologies like critical race theory, cultural Marxism, post-modernism, woke-ism, feminism, now LGBTQ-ism, all these godless ideologies have infiltrated churches like Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, Matt Chandler's Village Church, David Platt's McLean Bi, McLean Bible Church. All of these have been infiltrated by false doctrines, godless ideologies. They've infiltrated parachurch organizations like CRU, other campus ministries. They've all come crumbling down, been taken over by this woke narrative. It's even infiltrated the Southern Baptist Convention as well, as Tom Ascol can attest to.

This doctrinal drift means that Evangelicalism cannot deal, then, with the ethical challenges, that's number six, the ethical challenges hitting the Evangelical coastline in waves of increasing frequency and severity; the ethical challenges. There was an investigative report by the *Houston Chronicle* in 2019, and it really kind of mirrored the *Boston Globe's Chronicle* of the, its investigative report of the Roman Catholic clergy abuse scandal that was released, I think, back in 2002.

Houston Chronicle had one in 2019, and it revealed widespread clergy sexual abuse in the Southern Baptist Convention. Victim advocate, Rachel Denhollander, went on the warpath, and she says, "Churches can't be trusted anymore to deal with complex legal matters. They should come under the judgement of parachurch legal organizations and victim advocacy organizations from the top, looking in and calling them to account." Listen, if the SBC cannot or will not deal righteously with its newly elected president, Ed Litton, for his lack of Christian integrity, that is to say he flagrantly plagiarized sermons from other preachers for years, if they can't deal with that, well then maybe Denhollander isn't too off-base, at least about ins, the institutional form of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Churches of Jesus Christ operating in obedience to the Word of God, practicing biblical church membership, church discipline, actually shepherding its people, listen, they don't need the services of victim advocacy advocates and legal services, whether from Denhollander or anybody else. They know the saints will judge the world, 1 Corinthians 6, even angels. They're competent to handle these matters, sticking to the Word of God. They're informed by the truth. They understand law and Gospel. True churches are competent to handle these moral and ethical challenges that keep coming, coming with rapid rapidity in our day.

But the Evangelical parachurch, the Evangelical megachurch, multisite church, online internet church, though they hold that same Bible in their hands, and though they profess the same Jesus, they are ignorant in matters of law and Gospel because they do not fear God. It leaves them hopelessly encumbered by ethical confusion, therefore subject to the godless injustice of the world.

This leads to, finally, number seven, the political, rather than the righteous, God-fearing response to moral and ethical problems. Leads to a political way of dealing with the church, a political way of dealing with moral and ethical issues. The larger the megachurch, the larger the parachurch, they have a, too big to fail, mentality about their organization. Too many interested parties with too much to lose: jobs, salaries, donors, donations, brand, reputation; too much to lose.

So, since megachurch and parachurch bureaucracies, since they cannot deal with these challenges biblically and theologically, since they are biblically unqualified and ethically incompetent, and I don't mean that as an insult, it's just a fact, they are not competent to handle these ethical matters. They are ill-equipped to deal with them righteously. So, they do what they know. They default to what they know and understand, which is a worldly way of dealing with issues. They use worldly wisdom and worldly methodologies to deal with these problems that are coming to them that are inherently spiritual.

So, they protect the brand, they do damage control, they manage the situation for the best post-crisis, corporate benefit. Those with shared political interests, they affirm one another. In all their different organizations they just affirm one another, flatter each other, pat each other on the back, protect each other's brand and reputation. There's no open criticism, no instruction for the sheep, no concern that they learn from a bad decision, learn from sin, ami, in their midst. It's about political survival, it's about protecting the brand.

So, just to summarize all that: the moral drift reveals a love of worldly culture, which reveals an ecclesiological drift, based on a prior institutional shift. This exposes an appalling doctrinal ignorance which creates very serious confusion on moral and ethical issues, and it leads to political, non-biblical responses.

The more political Evangelical thinks, acts, reacts, becomes, listen, the more dangerous it becomes to the righteous remnant. The more political it gets, the more dangerous it is to the faithful, to the true Christian. As a political force, as

Evangelicalism sees the righteous to be troublesome, like Ahab said to Elijah, "You troubler of Israel," the more that we, rejecting in our churches the mask mandates, and the distancing, and number reductions, and online, and all that other stuff, the more we do that, you know, we're not just wrong, we're harmful, we're dangerous. These are dangerous ideas that come out of our mouths. So, we become a threat, a threat that must be silenced, or at least controlled.

It's a political force. Evangelicalism, as it becomes a political force, it will join forces with those political voices because it wants to protect its interests and it sees us as harmful, and they'll join our persecutors. There's a famous C.S. Lewis quote that comes to mind. I've seen it bandied about the internet a little bit, "Those who torment us for our own good will" torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their own conscience." That's a scary place to be, because Evangelicals politicized, they will torment us for our own good with the approval of their own conscience, thinking they're on the righteous side of the issue.

That, folks, in my estimation, is what Evangelicalism has become. It has drifted far from the old Evangelicalism. It's so far, it's unrecognizable from the old Evangelicalism. That which was biblically faithful, doctrinally robust and sound, Gospel driven, far from it. In its most visible, public representations, it has become a mongrel religion. It goes by the name Evangelical, but it doesn't know the evangel anymore. Much of it is drifting apostate, if not already apostate.

Looking back to John the Baptist, to Jesus the Messiah, to the apostles of Christ, if you'll permit me this analogy, you could say that they were a reforming movement to what was an apostate Judaism of the time. That was the most visible and dominant form of religion in Jesus' day, was Judaism, and it eventually ended up being a Christ-rejecting, Christ-crucifying religion. Shared more in common with modern Muslims than it does with anything biblical.

John, Jesus, the apostles, they feared God, they spoke on the authority of God's Word, they preached the truth, they called for repentance, and they dealt with the consequences. They

weren't concerned, first and foremost, to recover a name, but to recover the substance of true religion. They left the name, the naming of their movement, actually, to their opponents. It was called, The Way, early on, Acts 9:2. It was, they were called Christians first at Antioch, and that was not a compliment. That was Acts 11:26, they were called Christians. They were called in Acts 24:5, "the Sect of the Nazarenes."

Well, whatever the Jews and the Romans called them, the popular religious mainstream, which was apostate, considered them a problem, dangerous, turning the world upside down with their teaching. Saw them as destructive force. So, they rejected, and persecuted, and eventually tried to end them altogether by killing them.

Same thing happened in the 16th century when Martin Luther, when Tyndale, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, others, hoped to reform Christianity. At first, they did that within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic church. Came out of the Roman Catholic, they were good Catholics. They're trying to be good Catholics. In

fact, Martin Luther thought, "Well, once the pope sees my theses, he's going to agree."

They were a reforming movement coming out from within an apostate form of Christianity. They were calling for a return to Scripture in the *Solas* of the Reformation. Once again, the Roman Catholics branded the protestants as heretics and authorized everyone to reject them. They formally excommunicated them and then they called upon people to practically push them out of society. Marginalize them, persecute them, burn them at the stake, why? Because the protestant reformers were dangerous, harmful to the public good.

I'm no prophet, but, looking at the biblical and historical evidence from the past, I think the past can safely predict the future. I think we can safely predict that this same pattern is going to be repeated. Bible tells us it's going to be repeated in Revelation when there is a beast and a false prophet to support him. And that false prophet, I believe, is going to run parallel to Christianity. So many people, I think, will look at that and say, That is Christianity.

We're looking at a, an increasingly, if not altogether, an increasingly adrift Christianity, an apostate form of Christianity at the popular level in Evangelicalism. Unless God grants a special season of grace, unless he sends his Holy Spirit to turn many hearts back to the truth, I believe the same pattern is going to happen again. Already happening to some degree, really. There are faithful, reforming voices that have been -nored, and mocked, marginalized. The more insistent they become, the more their view, voices are turned off, deplatformed, ridiculed. Whoever survives those tactics are canceled altogether.

John MacArthur lost a lot of friends over the statement on social justice and the Gospel. Phil Johnson, shamefully treated for trying to press for clarity on those issues. Voddie Baucham has been marginalized, ignored for his critiques of the racial reconciliation movement, systemic racism, black lives matter, critical theory. His book, "Fault Lines," has just been tried to, the, they're trying to get it away off the internet so you can't even see it. Tom Ascol has been ostracized for his very valid, honest, straightforward, in good faith critiques on the

floor of the Southern Baptist Convention about Resolution Nine, and he's shut down. He protests about Ed Litton's plagiarism, all ignored. His concerns about Resolution Nine, all ignored.

Listen, unless God grants a reprieve, unless he gives us a special season of grace for churches in this country, these United States, I, I think popular Evangelicalism, the most visible form of Christianity of our time, it's not just going to drift into apo, it's going to seal its apostacy, homogenize its opposition to the truth, and line up with the world. It'll become increasingly intolerant of true Christianity to the point, as it's already doing, of marginalization. But I think, even, it could come to a point of persecution, whether that's joining in, that's with a soft totalitarianism, or even a harder form, a violent form.

So, with all of that in view, we've come through the really, the unpleasantness that we see around us. Now we're going to turn to a second part in the message. And with that overview in mind turn in your Bibles to the final chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 66. And it's at this point, with that in mind, I want to

issue a warning to Evangelicals, and at the end of it I want to comfort the remnant. So, a warning for Evangelicalism in the way I've described it and then a comfort, a word of comfort for the remnant.

Isaiah 66:1-6, "Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

"'He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; I,' will also, 'choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen;

but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that,' which, that 'in which I did not delight.'

"Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: 'Your brothers who hate you, cast you out for my name's sake have said, "Ah, Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy"; but it is they who shall be put to shame. The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!'"

That passage was bad news for an apostate Judaism, it's bad news for an apostate Roman Catholicism, and it is bad news for any apostate form of Evangelicalism we see today. Bad news. Bad news for Evangelical elites, architects and managers of big Evangelical institutional Evangelicals who have wandered from the truth. This is a warning for those who embrace any apostatizing form of religion.

Just a few points, here. God addresses the apostate majority, as you can see, in the first four verses, those who represent the majority position in an institutionalized form of Israel's

religion. Look at first, number one, a first point you could put in an outline, number one, God rebukes the apostate majority. God rebukes the apostate majority, and he does so on two points: for failing to discern his true nature, and for failing to discern the nature of his true people.

Look at verses one and two again. "Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool; what is house that you would build for me, what's the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD.'" The apostate majority gets God wrong at a most fundamental level. They think that God is best represented by visible signs of success, by things that can be seen, and touched, and admired; that which impresses men: large buildings, big rocks cut well covered with gold, big budgets, huge numbers. Evidence, all evidence that they don't know God.

When Solomon built the original temple, he was being obedient to God's will, he was building according to God's revealed pattern and design, and yet he, Solomon himself, rightly reflected on the fundamental unsuitability of a building to represent God. He

said in 1 Kings 8:27, "Will God indeed dwell on the earth?

Behold, Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you! How much less this house that I have built." I mean, it's small!

So, when the Lord asks, "What is the house," and "what is the place," that's rhetorical. He's not asking about his address. He's not looking for a suitable place to dwell and get comfortable. This isn't a matter of where, as in location. It's a matter of size, as in nothing fits him. Nothing is big enough to contain the uncontainable, infinite God. In his essence he is infinite, eternal.

"All these things my hands have made," thus the, "all these things came to be." In other words, Do you, do you really think you can arrange wood, and stone, and gold, and materials that I created and called into being, you think you can arrange that into a structure that fits me? Can anything I've created suitably represent me? Do you, you really represent me, you people who take pride in eh, and glory in these external things? Do you really think you represent me by defending a visible, physical form? They thought so.

When trying to find cause to condemn Jesus the Sanhedrin found witnesses to testify, Matthew 26:61, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" That was sacrilege against an external form of visible, physical representation. Same charge made by that same body against Stephen, Acts 6:13-14, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we've heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place. He'll change the customs that Moses delivered to us."

Stephen, to answer for his teaching, he's called to account before the Sanhedrin. He gives, in Acts chapter 7, a masterful defense, an apologetic. He demonstrates from Israel's history this pattern in Israel's leadership to, to refuse the inward work of God's Word, preferring instead outward forms of religion, which is the pattern, the very pattern of idolatry. They treated God's temple more like the shrine of a false god. It's gold and ornate beauty was the evidence of God's favor.

So, as Stephen comes to the climax of his argument in Acts 7:47, he points out, Look, "it was Solomon who built a house for God." Not you; Solomon. Then he quotes Isaiah, "Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool. What kind of a house will you build for me, says the Lord, what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?' You stiff necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so did you."

They didn't like that. The institutional leaders of Israel's religion, a Christ-rejecting, apostate Judaism, they are unregenerate. That's why they always resist the Holy Spirit. That's why they're always ignoring and twisting his prophetic word. They confined God to their building. And, by confining God to their building, to their institutions, they patted themselves on the back for defending it against the likes of Stephen. They saw him as the problem, him as the one worthy of death. They're blind to the fact that men like Stephen, men like Jesus Christ, are the men that God favors. End of verse 2, "...this is the one," who, "whom," I'll, "look: he who is humble and contrite in s, in spirit and trembles at my word."

So, since the apostate majority gets God wrong, it cannot identify God's people either. They think that they themselves are God's people because they're defending God's buildings and stuff, but they're unregenerate. They're ignorant of God. They're prone to reject and persecute his true people. So, God rebukes them.

Secondly, number two, God rejects the apostate majority. He rebukes the apostate majority and now he rejects the apostate majority. The apostate majority engages in the same forms of religion as true believers, but God sees through it, and he rejects them for their acts of worship. Look at verses 3 and 4, "He who thur, slaughters an ox, like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck...." On and on it goes. It's even starker in the original. It shows a contrast between what the apostate worshipper thought that he was doing, and the way God truly r, sees and interprets his acts of religion.

"He sacrifices an ox," this is what it says in the original, murderer. He sacrifices a lamb; he breaks a dog's neck. He offers a grain offering, pig's blood. He burns incense; he blesses an idol. That's God's view. Apostate majority thinks God is favoring them, thinks God accepts their external forms of religion. They think he sees all the good that they do, and he's pleased. All their social programs, all their enterprises, all their big, national, international, well-known things, God sees it all.

All the religious works, he sees it in exactly the opposite way. They couldn't be more wrong. In fact, he sees it in the worst way possible. He sees through all those external forms. He sees what no man can see on the outside. That's why we should not judge based on external things. He sees the heart, end of verse 3, "These have chosen their own ways, and," look at that, "their soul delights in their abominations." He calls all that external form of sacrifice, abominations. So, take all that external junk we see in Evangelicalism: abominations. If the heart is not right, God sees it as abominations.

And, keep in mind, look, these are the moral people. These are the upstanding people in society. They're the seminary presidents, they're the institutional leaders, they're the highly sought-after conference speakers. They aren't literally breaking dog's necks to offer in sacrifice. They're not literally defiling the altar, pouring pig's blood on top of it. Nah, but the rejection of God's Word turns all their acts of worship and sacrifice into abominations. End of verse 4, what is their fundamental flaw, their sin? "when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they," didn't, "listen; they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight."

In our time, it's the time that Paul described that's come upon us, "when men do not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and they turn away their ears from the truth and they turn aside to myths." Morally, culturally, ecclesiologically, institutionally, doctrinally, ethically, politically, Evangelicals are adrift. They're in steep decline. They seem headed for total shipwreck. If they don't repent, God will rebuke them. He will reject them, and then, thirdly, he'll repay them. God will repay them.

Number three, God recompenses the apostate majority. He recompenses the apostate majority. The word, recompense means he's going to repay them. He's going to pay them back. He owes them something. His justice demands it. First, God will recompense apostate, the apostate majority with terror, verse 4, "I'll choose harsh treatment for them, bring their fears upon them." The word translated, harsh treatment, comes from a peculiar word, to me, meaning, to make sport of. So, God is going to treat them like, like cats treat a dying mouse, playing with them, toying with them, making sport of them, as they're terrorized under his judgement.

Second, God is going to recompense this apostate majority with shame, end of verse 5. "Hear the word of the LORD," you, "you who tremble at his word: 'Your brothers who hate you, cast you out....'" By the way, why do they, wha, wha, wha, what are the, you, what do you call those brothers who hate you? Brothers, but who hate you; what do you call them? Not brothers, right? They're false brothers. They're religious hypocrites. So, false brothers. Not true brothers, but false brothers, cast you out. That's a technical expression referring to formal

excommunication. The religious majority pretends friendship, so it's brother this, and brother that, but they hate the godly. They want them silenced.

"Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his, at his word: 'Your brothers who hate you, cast you out for my name's sake, they've said, "Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy"; but it's they who shall be put to shame.'" They claim to do the Lord's work, act like they speak for the Lord, but they're hypocrites. They speak with condescension and derision upon people they should respect and honor. "To God be the glory, brother, we just want your joy." All the while they kick the righteous out of the fellowship, slander, misrepresent the godly, cancel them, shame them.

When John MacArthur responded with a boldness and clarity to government overreach in the republic of California, when he led the way for churches to stand up to political and cultural pressure, rather than appreciate Pastor John MacArthur, some that we counted as friends chose to criticize him, and they did it in the most subtle, but revealing way. Sure, you can choose

to keep Grace Church open, but is that the wisest approach? Is that the most judicious thing to do, and to encourage others to do? Is that the most loving thing to do to your neighbor? Brother, we just want your good. We're just concerned for the consciences of the weak who might come underneath your pressure.

James Coates, pastor in Alberta, Canada, refused to be bullied by the Alberta health services and he kept his church open. He was swiftly arrested and imprisoned. And those who repress, reprimanded Pastor Coates were, guess what, other Canadian pastors, Evangelicals. And they sounded a lot like Isaiah 66:5. Can't this brother love his neighbors by following the health orders? I mean, we're doing it, going online, doing online church. He should do like us. It's not loving to spread a deadly disease. Stop grandstanding, Pastor Coates. We know what you're about. Glorify God.

They intend to shame people like John MacArthur and Pastor James Coates. It's they who shall be put to shame, God says. Adding to the terror, adding to the shame, verse 6, there's a campaign of what I would just call shock and awe. "...sound of an uproar for

the city! ...sound of the, sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!" Those are all vivid, very vivid descriptions of battlefield noise. An uproar portrays this crashing, clanging of an encroaching, approaching army, preparing to attack or in full-on attack mode, which is a thunderous and terrifying sound.

Three *stepra*, separate stanzas there. Each starts with the word *kol*. In the Hebrew that's the word voice, or sound. When spoken out loud in succession it resembles the beat of a war drum: *kol, kol, kol*. After each use of the word *kol*, the words that follow have descending syllables in the word. So, it's, first it's *kol*, followed by four syllables. Then *kol*, followed by three syllables. And then, finally, *kol*, followed by two syllables. It's the sound of judgement coming closer and closer, closer, until judgment is right at the door.

What they dreaded has come upon them. What they never expected themselves. We're the guardians of God! We're the gatekeepers of the temple! We protect temple and city. We're holy! These self-appointed representatives, speaking for God, acting on his

behalf, they never, ever, ever expected God to turn on them. God couldn't have been clearer when he warned the apostate majority through the prophet Isaiah. Man, they loved that temple. They loved it! But they did not know or love the God of the temple. They didn't tremble at his Word. Since they didn't repent, they, God sent the Babylonians to destroy the temple in 586 B.C., carried away the people into exile.

God couldn't have been clearer when he warned the apostate majority through Stephen, quoting the prophet Isaiah back to them again. Again they, they sure love that temple. They didn't love the God of the temple. They didn't tremble at his word. Since they did not repent, he sent the Romans to destroy the temple in 70 A.D., kill more than a million Jews. Horrific reports of the slaughter inside of Jerusalem.

The Evangelical majority of today should heed the warning. God does not change. His Word does not change. He is immutable; he is unchanging. He still expects us who have his Word to heed his Word. The Evangelical majority keeps a Bible close. It could pull up verses on an iPhone. It puts it up on a jumbotron in

their megachurches. They don't know their Bibles! Why? Because they don't know or love the God of the Bible. And God will recompense them for disregarding his Word.

One more point for tonight. This is a point for the faithful remnant. Number four: God rewards the righteous minority. God rewards the righteous minority. He looks out for the f, the remnant, the faithful. Back to Isaiah 66:2, end of the verse, "This is the one to whom I will look, he who's humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." Three precious virtues, in God's sight, of the righteous remnant: humility, contrition, and the fear of the Lord.

The humble and contrite are the poor and the weak. They're those with no positions of influence, no titles of authority, no sitting in seats of power; humble and contrite before God. They are beautiful people, beatitude people, poor in spirit, mourning over their sin, meek toward men. Oh, they're hated and rejected by the religious majority. They're eventually, verse 5, excommunicated. But they don't tremble before men. They're God fearers, not man-fearers. Tremble before God, they tremble

before his Word. One commentator said, "They have an eager, yet fearful haste to execute his will."

They're adoring, obedient children, ready, zealous to do their father's will. So, when God says, "This is the one to whom I will look," he means a loving look. He means a tenderhearted look toward them. He's got fatherly approval in his look, in his gaze, a loving acceptance. And it's a sustained look, here. Keeps on showing love and care and affection and favor and generosity. And he never changes, his favor never ceases to those who tremble at his Word.

When Isaiah says in verse 5, "Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word," the assurance is this: "look, justice will come. Hold on a little longer. Justice will come. You're ignored, you're marginalized, you're maligned, you're per, de-platformed, canceled; the evil of an apostate majority, trust me, will be recompensed."

Keep fearing God, stay humble, stay contrite, keep waiting, stay faithful. God sees them, he knows them, he blesses them. He

speaks words of tender comfort and deep assurance. All-seeing eye of God's favor rests upon them. He knows our situation, he sees our trials, sees our persecutions, he delights in us, and he will deliver if we tremble at his Word.

So, for that trembling remnant, for the humble and contrite who cling to Christ, God's powerful words give strength, and comfort, and confidence, and assurance. And so, Isaiah 35:3-4, "Strengthen the weak hands, make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He'll come and save you.'"

In the meantime, let's stay faithful, but let's do what we can to call big Eva to repentance, in hope that God will spare them. We may feel as small as ants pointing our boney little fingers up at that big boot about to step on us or over us, but our words are not our own; they're God's. "Is not my word like a fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? The battle is not by might, it's not by power, by my Spirit, says the LORD." So, keep speaking out in humility and

boldness. Yeah, they may kick us out of Evangelicalism. We won't know what to call ourselves. Don't worry about it. We'll just leave the naming of our new movement to our persecutors. Amen? Let's pray.

Our Father, we're so grateful for the comfort that we derive from a, your Word. We don't listen to or speak a message like this with any triumphalistic attitude at all. We are those that are described in Isaiah 66 as those who are humble and contrite, and, and that means we're meek before men, even as we speak a very strong message. We're he, we're humble before you, and we must speak, because we believe, and we believe these things are serious.

We long to see those who are caught up in a drifting Evangelicalism, we long to see them repent and turn to you. Oh, Father, will you please be gracious and send your Holy Spirit, spirit of revival on this land that we may be there to rejoice in your glory and the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to see his name lifted up high and rejoiced in by many? We want to see gratitude spread to so many that it redounds to your glory.

But Father, if, if that does not happen, we trust you along the way, we're rejoice to be in our fellowships, we rejoice to be among this remnant, faithful to you. We love you and thank you in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.