

**A LOOK AT THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH  
THROUGH THE THEOLOGICAL  
LENS OF PAULINE TEXTS**

Beverly J. Elliott  
Theological Research and Writing Ath 613  
Beulah Heights University  
Fall 2017

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1, Table of Contents
2. Acknowledgements
3. Abstract
4. Chapters
  1. INTRODUCTION
    - a. Defining the Contemporary Church
    - b. What is the Pauline Text
  2. WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE TRADITIONAL CHURCH
  3. LIVING ON THE EDGE
  4. IS THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHANGING?

## Abstract

This research paper will take a look at the issues that continue to pervade the Contemporary Church as it relates to the lens of the Pauline Texts. It will try to seek out according to the Bible, if the church is staying in line with the message of Jesus as it moves to incorporate the methodology which would appeal to this new age of faith seekers. By taking information first from the foundation of truth which we will have based on the Scriptures, the Word of God, the research will be able to compare some trends and try to discover if there are missing pieces. Secondly it will gather scholarly writings and then get more information from interviews with some young people, Pastors, leaders and lay members to find out if the Contemporary Church is here to stay, is this church growing and why, and what, if any effect will it's teachings have on where this age is heading as it relates to the preparation for one's final destination.

In short, this research seeks to evaluate if the plan of the Contemporary church is in accordance with the Word of God? This research is driven with purpose as it seeks to expose the problem of the missing pieces. If in fact it is found that something is missing, what can be done before this missing piece grows deeper and darker, it is the hope that this research will endeavor to shed some light on that piece and to bring together the puzzle.

The focus scriptures for this research paper will be the following, as this research will base all investigations, questions and findings on these foundational truths. 2 Timothy 3: 1-17 and 2 Timothy 4: 1-4 affirms:

**3.** “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. <sup>2</sup>For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, <sup>4</sup>Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; <sup>5</sup>Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. <sup>6</sup>For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive

silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, <sup>7</sup> Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>8</sup> Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. <sup>9</sup> But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was. <sup>10</sup> But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, <sup>11</sup> Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. <sup>12</sup> Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. <sup>13</sup> But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. <sup>14</sup> But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; <sup>15</sup> And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: <sup>17</sup> That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3: 1-17). KJV<sup>1</sup>

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

<sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.

<sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

<sup>4</sup> And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:14) KJV<sup>2</sup>

---

1. *Holy Bible*, King James Version

2. *Holy Bible*, King James Version

## INTRODUCTION

The word contemporary can be described in the dictionary as existing, occurring, or living at the same time; belonging to the same time: and of the present time; modern: Therefore this contemporary meaning is generating synonymic words such as instant, modern, present day, current, latest, mod, and now. These words are hard pressed against the forms of tradition and its meanings which anchors on something to be handed down or relating to or characteristic of the older style. The traditional is joined by words such as classic, common, conventional historic, old, and long established. We can certainly see a meaningful difference as it relates to those things, ordinances, lifestyles, and more particularly our everyday churches and church services. It is that which incorporates the people of the era, those that embrace the contemporary and those that shun the traditional. This includes the scope of our older generations and certainly the 'Millennials' as well.

Our Contemporary church is breaking the traditional ties that bound them to the first century church. In an essay, written by Dr. John H. Armstrong he states that "the contemporary plan is plain... create a worship service (none dare call it liturgy) that is fast-paced, light on doctrine and very heavy on music and drama. We are preoccupied, with being "trendier-than-thou."<sup>3</sup> He notes that one church advertises, 'Church like You've Never Seen It Before' while another in which this author has observed advertises, 'Changing the Way We Do Church.' So we can ask why are we looking for a church likened unto one we have not seen before and or one that is not based on the principles, doctrines or standards that have been taught by Jesus. Did not Jesus proclaim that "upon this rock I will built my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18) KJV One question that prevails overhead and in our

---

3. Dr. John H Armstrong, "" "The Contemporary Church" - albatrus.org, [www.albatrus.org/english/church-order/worship/contemporary\\_church.htm](http://www.albatrus.org/english/church-order/worship/contemporary_church.htm).

race to have the biggest, and most captivating sanctuary or a church building that the church, unchurched and millennials have ever laid their eyes on, is our thought as to ‘what the church looks like to its Pastors and leaders,’ and ‘does it look any different as to what Jesus says the church should be?’ Many questions come to the forefront as ‘what is observed by those outside of the buildings in which many worship,’ and ‘how the church which is not the building is being presented worldwide?’ C. Peter Wagner writes that ‘church growth thinking leads to a methodology that is “phenomenological” not “theological.”

“That approach (i.e. phenomenological) may appear altogether too subjective to many traditional theologians...As a starting point, church growth often looks to the 'is' previous to the 'ought.'...What Christians experience about God's work in the world and in their lives is not always preceded by careful theological rationalizations. Many times the sequence is just the opposite: theology is shaped by Christian experience.”<sup>4</sup>

When we look at the contemporary church, there appears to be a disconnect in communicating the foundational truths of the Pauline texts to what is also known as a new age church that is in search of its own truth. Can there be a meeting of the minds, or does one’s point of view need be considered as right, while the other is considered wrong? The Contemporary church seeks to be inclusive of all people, and finding a new means of making all who enter into its doors very comfortable. Are they finding their own niche into a newly developed spiritual environment that is lacking and is leaving out the teachings, preaching, and the moral and spiritual fiber of the Bible, and the practical principles cited in the Pauline texts? Are they thereby painting a very vague message for the ‘truth seekers’ of the Contemporary church to engage themselves?

---

4. John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 79.

The internal growth of the existing church and the apparent frenzy to plant new churches under some denominational title will be seen in positive light in regards to this research, if the outreach embraces the true Gospel message. Creativity in this outreach is healthy if the church will base its foundational truth on the principles of the Scriptures. However it has been seen far too many times that the quick establishment of the new movements will lack doctrinal truths. Despite it being important that as the Gospel is spread to every nation and people, it should make sense that more locations should be acquired to accommodate the people that will be drawn to the faith.

But problems arise when there is confusion between the clarity of the Gospel message and the increased trending to overlay or set as priority the emphasis on building a mission for monetary gain and prestige with secondary emphasis on making disciples. The Scriptures establishes for growth, principle and order, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). KJV

There is a tendency, because of the technological age in which we live to compromise and restructure the Contemporary church and its worship service to focus on the culture of people with which we desire to attract otherwise they will take their business elsewhere. At the communities fingertips are advertisements of many of the different menus of worship in which they might choose to fit their liking or that which appeals to their circumstances. As stated by one of the focus scriptures to this research that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; <sup>4</sup> And they shall turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:3-4a). KJV

Knowing this factor as it relates to the Contemporary church, the traditional membership and this age of millennials, it causes one to consider the message that is being put out there, locally, universally, socially and technologically. Meeting needs does not always satisfy needs; it

often strokes further ones and raises the pressure of eventual disillusionment...Need is subject to consumer fashion and become shallow, plastic and manipulative.”<sup>5</sup> The drive to meet ‘felt needs’ can cover up the ‘real need’ and that the truth of the Gospel expressed in the Pauline texts, separation from God.

### IMPORTANCE OF THE PAULINE TEXTS

What are the Pauline Texts or Epistles and what makes them important? The author of these Epistles is known by scholars as having been written by Paul the Apostle. This was the same Paul known earlier as Saul of Tarsus, a Roman citizen and also known as a religious Jew, who zealously sought to persecute the church. As he was on the road to Damascus, during one of his campaign missions against the Christians, he had his encounter with Jesus the Christ and was immediately converted.

Being exposed to the light of the risen Christ, it became clear at it related to the One Paul once denied as we see in Acts 22: “And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? <sup>8</sup> And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. <sup>10</sup> And I said, What shall I do, LORD? It was after this encounter that Paul’s life will be completely changed forever. With this meeting Paul has a new assignment and after this miraculous change, it now ‘particularly qualifies’ him to be the one called to carry the message of the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul accepts this assignment which he carries out with the same zeal, vigor and commitment in which he denied Christ. So we can

---

5. Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Hourglass Books, 1993),

expect a great deal of influence on his converts, and passion in the letters Paul has written because of his dramatic meeting with Christ Jesus.

“The Epistles are generally divided into the Pauline Epistles and the Non-Pauline (General) Epistles. Paul’s epistles fall into two categories: nine epistles written to churches (Romans to 2 Thessalonians) and four pastoral and personal epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon) followed by eight Hebrew Christian epistles (Hebrews to Jude). Many questions would arise as to the meaning and application of the gospel for Christians. The Epistles answer questions, give the interpretation of the person and work of Christ, and apply the truth of the gospel to believers.”<sup>6</sup>

The scholars have concluded the authorship of the texts either by explicit means or implicitly. One is because the author in some texts clearly identifies himself, gives a recognized form or has given some autobiographical details. The texts include fourteen books of the New Testament writings, but the book of Hebrews is one that does not give clear clues as to its authorship. The Pauline letters contain similar phrases and sentence structure and a certain style in that the scholars were able to attribute these writings as Paul’s and in them we find narratives regarding his life and his ministry. The narrative of Paul’s conversion gives us a clear picture of what God wants for the Contemporary church of today. This research will reveal that a sudden or gradual encounter with the risen Savior, lives will be changed. Once the gospel is preached or taught to people they will not be the same. The unbeliever will only need to hear the Gospel (recognizing God’s love) and see the light of the Word to be convicted of their sin. The preacher/teacher will have to just preach Jesus and Him crucified, for change to take place. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). KJV Just preach Jesus.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

6. “The Pauline Epistles,” Bible.org, The Pauline Epistles | Bible.org  
<https://bible.org/seriespage/4-pauline-epistles>