

Modern Christian Heritage – Lecture Notes

- The Reformation.
- Evangelical/Pentecostal heritage.
- Recent Shifts in Evangelical views.
- One gospel.

Christ in You

As all veins lead to the heart, so all scripture leads to Christ. All scripture points to Christ and is fulfilled by Christ. Everything we preach as Christians must stem from Him and what He has done. The Law of Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament only make sense in Christ. He is the mystery that untangles the message. In Him all has its interpretation.

Even the mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations, but now is revealed to the saints, to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Whom we preach...(Col 1:26-28).

So what were the prophets speaking about when they spoke of His kingdom and glory? They were speaking of His redemption, Christ *in* us. This is what was hid. This is what the Jews, the Pharisees, the apostles and all Gentiles did not get, until the Day of Pentecost had fully come. Only by the Spirit in us can the mystery be unveiled, for in Christ the veil is taken away.

Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters and he that has no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread and labour for that which does not satisfy (religion)?

Hearken diligently to Me and eat that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come to Me and hear and your soul shall live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David...Behold, You shall call a nation that You knew not and nations that knew You not shall run to You...(Is 55:1-3).

In Christ God fulfils His promises to Israel and includes in those mercies the Gentiles, all we who believe, both Jew and Gentile in one. And God does this one way, by grace alone, that no Jew or Gentile shall boast. The Bible is so plain and simple when we interpret it in Christ.

In this passage in Isaiah we see the doctrine on faith and where faith comes from, the doctrine on Spirit baptism, the doctrine on Israel, the doctrine on the church and the doctrine on eschatology (end-times). These are not separate ideas, but all part of the one prophecy fulfilled in Christ's coming. This is what Christ came to do through His death, resurrection, ascension and outpouring at Pentecost:

...There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is My covenant with them, when I shall take away their sins. (Rom 11:26-27, Is 59:20).

Jacob means *His people*, the children of promise (Rom 9:6-8, Gal 3:16, 26, 29). Zion is the kingdom of Christ, to which we have come (Heb 12:22). Christ is the one who turns us from our sin. He took

away our sin and confirmed this covenant when He came. This is the gospel that the scripture declares. There is no other gospel.

Heritage

It is important to understand our Christian heritage and why we today believe what we do. There has been a huge impact upon Christianity from the Reformation in Europe, spearheaded by such people as John Huss, William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Knox.

Progressing from the Reformation to our current time, Wesleyanism, humanism, Dispensationalism, animism and Post Modernism are among the ideologies which have influenced today's church. In this book we look at these factors and how they have impacted Christian thought and practice.

This concerns our identity. Where do we come from and where are we going? What are the important features of our heritage? What is the gospel of Jesus Christ according to scripture and how can history teach us what matters as we move forward as Spirit filled believers? We look beyond our particular time, denomination and context, to see what scripture and church history have to say to us.

The Reformation

In the 19th Century, *Cessationism* (the belief that miracles and apostles passed away) became popular in the West. Modern writers have claimed that early Reformers such as Luther and Calvin were Cessationists, while the Reformers considered themselves Pentecostal. From the *Day of Pentecost* when the church was born, the gospel has gone out to the nations. God has empowered His people in all generations and confirmed His gospel through the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostalism is the Holy Spirit bearing witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostles in the book of Acts gave witness to His resurrection and life by signs and wonders, showing that Christ is at the Father's right hand and alive in us. The Holy Spirit is still a witness of this gospel today and so are we. We did not see Him before His ascension as the first apostles did, but see Him risen and alive in us through Pentecost.

Calvin claimed that our experience of Christ is impossible without the Holy Spirit. He fought a specific battle against the doctrine of *apostolic succession* and his words should be interpreted in this respect. He claimed that the first apostles' ministries ceased with them and were not passed on in succession. He said God raised up apostles with extraordinary gifts in many generations and would continue to do so.

Calvin has received *bad press* in recent years and we look at that later. Some of his statements in regard to Cessationism are interpreted by a different context, in the "light" of modern Cessationist ideas. Calvin's stand was against the false miracles of the Roman Catholics of his day. In this regard his stand was correct. If we claim that God has done miracles when He has not then we are false witnesses.

Calvin made different statements, sometimes claiming miracles continued and sometimes limiting them. He was limiting the corruption of man and not the power of Christ. He was not a Cessationist. Commenting from Matthew 28, he stated:

For He who, in respect of His body, is at a great distance from us, not only diffuses the efficacy of His Spirit through the whole world, but even actually dwells in us. *Even to the end of the world.* It ought likewise to be remarked that this was not spoken to the apostles alone; for the Lord promises His assistance not for a single age only, but *even to the end of the world.*

The *Grace Online Library* recognizes a shift of modern Cessationism away from the Reformation:

The recognition that miracles...support the authority of God's servants (first apostles) marks a subtle change away from...the Reformers. The Reformers recognised the purpose of miracles is not so much to support the divine mission of God's servants as to testify to the truth of their message.

Thus Calvin speaks of miracles as 'seals' added to the word of God and warns that 'miracles must never be separated from the word.' When coupled to the word of God miracles serve 'to prepare us for faith, or to confirm us in faith.' (Calvin's *Commentary on John*.)

Luther also decried the use of superstitions and false claims of the miraculous. He rightly warned some of the Anabaptists in their fanaticism. But to claim that the early Reformers were not invested with power, in the light of what they did, would be wrong. They turned the world upside down with their preaching, as few in history have done. Commenting on Mark 16:15-18, in his *Ascension Day Sermon*, Luther said:

We must allow these words to remain and not gloss them away, as some have done who said that these signs were manifestations of the Spirit in the beginning of the Christian era and that they have now ceased. That is not right; for the same power is in the church still...we still have the power to do such things.

Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf tells how a demon possessed girl was brought to Luther. Luther quotes Jesus' promise in John 14:22 ("greater works than these shall you do") and cast the spirit out of the girl, who fully recovered.

The historian Sidlow Baxter quotes Luther, "Often has it happened and it still does, that devils have been driven out in the name of Christ; also by calling on His name and prayer, the sick have been healed". The extraordinary affect of Luther's life upon human history was the power of the Spirit of God in the gospel.

Lutheranism afterward became cold, especially when rationalism began to affect it. In the 17th Century early Pietists, such as Philipp Spener, revitalised the importance of the Holy Spirit. Pietism also positively impacted England, as a part of the Reformed Puritan movement.

The Puritans, such as Knox and John Bunyan, had a strong Reformed faith. Though they held the scripture to be truth, they understood the word of God to be Jesus Christ who by power birthed the Christian into a new life. It was impossible for Christianity to exist without power. This is decidedly Pentecostal faith.

Such power worked in John Knox that Scotland was transformed by the gospel, which in turn had a very great impact on the world. The Huguenots, who came to England from France, were *Reformed Pentecostal*, as were many *Dissenters* of those days. The original journals of George Fox speak of many miracles as he preached in England in the 17th Century.

Original journals of George Whitefield and John Wesley speak of signs and healings that accompanied their ministry. Whitefield and others who worked with him turned England and America to Christ. This is the greatest sign of the power of God.

Charles Spurgeon is often called the *prince of preachers*. His influence in the 19th Century was immense. In his latter days he lamented the falling away in churches into coldness. The miraculous healings in Spurgeon's ministry are well documented.

The Reformed Reader (a Baptist website) claims that several thousand reports of such healings could easily be gathered. Spurgeon himself did not speak much of these, not wanting to arouse a superstitious response, though in every service petitions for the sick were made.

As some churches moved away from God, due in part to the *Darwinian climate* of the 19th Century, a number of believers began to move out of them into *Pentecostal*, or later into *Charismatic* churches. There were many movements before *Azusa Street* that used the description "Pentecostal". (See William Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*.) Pentecostalism was not a new restoration of God's power to the church, but rather a shift into new denominations as parts of older ones grew colder.

A distinct doctrine of modern Pentecostalism is related to the gift of tongues. Tongues were well documented in all previous centuries, including American revivals in the 19th Century. Modern Pentecostal denominations differed only in that they often made this gift mandatory.

It is important for all Christians to trace the development of modern Evangelical and Pentecostal belief and practice through the past. Current Evangelical and Pentecostal movements are considered to be Protestant, meaning we trace our ancestry down through all the fathers mentioned above. Along the way other influences have also impacted upon our development.

Whatever our opinion on whether early Reformers were more or less Cessationist and however right or wrong they may have been, there has been a variety of views held by God's servants throughout the Protestant era, not only on the *charismata*, but in other doctrinal fields. The factors that we claim for our Evangelical/Pentecostal heritage are the main faith principles of the Reformation, which we now look at.

Evangelical/Pentecostal Heritage

Evangelicals/Pentecostals claim to be children of the Reformation. The principles that were most important to the Reformation include these below. Notice they are *power* doctrines. They are not *Fundamentalist*, meaning the scripture works by dead letter. The work of God is done by His Spirit:

1. *Sola Scriptura* – Theology comes from the word of God alone, not from nature or philosophy. Only God's word is truth.
2. *Interpretation* – Scripture is understood in its plain meaning, not rationalised or allegorized contrary to its intent.
3. *Sola Fide* – Salvation is by faith alone, not faith and works. Saving faith is shown by its works. Works cannot produce faith.
4. *Christ Authors Faith* – Saving faith is God's gift. It is not man's faith. It is the faith of Jesus Christ.
5. *Authority* – Authority is in the word of God alone, not in the Pope, experience, human reason, culture, church community or collective human opinion.
6. *The Depravity of Man* – The *Fall* and depravity of man is total. Any goodness is due to grace alone. Man in his natural state does not seek God and cannot come to God.
7. *Christ the Mediator* – The Father draws man through the Lord Jesus Christ, without a human priesthood. No human, angel, pastor or ancestor is a mediator between man and God. (1 Tim 2:5)
8. *Sovereignty* – God is Creator and Governor over all His creation. His power cannot be challenged. There is no dualism, meaning there is no other power than God's.
9. *Preaching* – Church services must focus on the preaching of the word of God, not on ritualism such as statues, candles, relics, beads, superstitions and not on entertainment.

10. *One Sacrifice* – Christ died once for sin at Calvary and is not re-sacrificed every Mass by priests. This applies to charms, some uses of *point of contact*, *seed sowing* and the *Holy Land*.
11. *Finished Work* – Christ's sacrifice was sufficient. Nothing can be added to it by man, religion or tradition. Salvation, sanctification and perfection are by the blood of Christ alone.
12. *Regeneration* – The blood of Christ dealt with both justification (forgiveness of sin) and sanctification (the power of sin). Regeneration makes us complete in Christ.
13. *New Birth* – Man is saved by an instantaneous experience of new birth, without which we cannot know the Father. The new birth is not in man's power. It is a creative act of God.
14. *Indulgences* – Man cannot buy salvation or any other gift from God. Neither does giving money initiate the grace of God. We can give to support ministry, but not give *for* ministry. The ministry of the Spirit is free, *gratis*, by grace alone.
15. *Ministry* – Ministry is a calling by God. The minister's duty is first and foremost the sound communication of the gospel through the scripture, by the power of the Spirit. He or she must also be well trained in the knowledge of the doctrines of Christ.

Benson Idahosa

Benson Idahosa turned much of Nigeria to Christ before he went to be with the Lord in 1998. During the period of his work the Christian population of the nation increased by some 30 million people (see *Operation World* statistics). He was indeed a modern Pentecostal apostle. In his book *If Your Faith Says Yes God Will Not Say No*, Idahosa claimed that our faith is a miracle of God's grace:

I fully agree that no one can truly reach or seek God...no faith or any religious exercise...of the creature can have any truth, goodness or blessing in it...If our faith is of God, it follows that He first plants it in our heart before we come to a position where we can exercise it. True faith like true religion depends absolutely on God.

The apostle Paul stood for these principles. They are found in the church councils, beginning in Acts 15 and then at Nicaea, with 1,500 bishops from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Augustine who was African and who followed his godly Tuareg mother, held to the same principles of faith. These truths do not begin or end with the Reformation. They are the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The ECWA church in northern Nigeria, with their pastor Byang Kato, held to these truths. This faith is preserved in the *Westminster Confession* and in the *Thirty Nine Articles*. This statement by Idahosa constitutes our Evangelical/Pentecostal heritage. Faith that comes from God through the Holy Spirit is Pentecostal.

Our faith is not either Evangelical or Pentecostal. It is both. We take the best from both. We have the same heritage. The gospel is the power (*dunamis*) of God to salvation (Rom 1:16).

Shifts in Evangelical Views

The 19th Century saw many influences which helped form the background to modern Pentecostalism. These influences were seen particularly in American and British revivalism, from which the modern Pentecostal movement came.

The motto of the *Four Square Pentecostal Church*, founded by Aimee Semple McPherson, depicts the main themes that came out of the 19th Century: *Christ the Saviour, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Healer and soon coming King*. It also shows some of the changes in Christian thought over the period.

This motto expressed the developing themes of *subsequence* or *second blessing*, made popular through the Methodist revivals; *Restorationism*, made popular through Edward Irving and John Alexander Dowie; and *pre-millennialism*, made more popular by Dispensationalism. We will discuss these below.

Here we introduce just a few of the main factors that bear on Evangelical and Pentecostal movements today:

1. Wesleyanism

John and Charles Wesley were gifts from God. Their ministry was a great blessing to the church and many nations. Charles passed on inspiring gospel truths through his hymns. John had many influences in his background. He started in a High Anglican holiness group, which tried to earn salvation through works.

He claims to have been born again after meeting with Moravian Pietist Christians who told him about faith in Christ. He was also influenced by the Reformed Puritans of England. There was a mixture of teachings in his ministry.

John advocated a *second blessing* experience which he said promoted sanctification. We call this the doctrine of *subsequence*, meaning a work of sanctification in the believer *after* being saved. This was not seen as just a progressive work, but a *subsequent instantaneous miracle*. In many people's minds this blessing came about when the believer adhered to religious requirements.

19th Century Methodist and Baptist revivalism in America and Britain emphasised different forms of this teaching in meetings and publications. They may not have all agreed to the Methodist model, but held to similar revivalist concepts to promote Christian sanctification and growth. Charles Finney, Phoebe Palmer, Dwight Moody and the English Keswick movement all emphasised Wesleyan type themes of *Christian Perfectionism*.

2. Humanism

Modern humanism stems from the *Renaissance* (14th – 17th Century), which refers to a period of *re-birth* of knowledge in European history. People freeing themselves from Papal authority and church dogma emphasised the importance of the individual. In secular communities humanists were generally also atheists. In church communities, humanists such as Philip Melancthon, Erasmus, Huldrych Zwingli and Jacobus Arminius and the Pietists, emphasised compassion for all individuals.

Arminius (1560-1609) noted that cold Reformed churches cared little for humanity, while he respected Calvin's publication, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, as "second only to the Bible". Wesley later entered the Arminian dispute, but he was also careful in the matter. Wesley claimed that the new birth was a sovereign creative act of God, not man's decision, but emphasised the human role in seeking God for salvation and sanctification.

The major change with regard to modern Christian humanism came through Charles Finney (1792-1875). One must go back to early publications to appreciate this. He claimed that new birth was a human decision made from a person's own will and did not require a change of nature and that it was not a miracle of God. This period caused the biggest shift in church theology and practice since the Reformation and brought in a form of Arminianism that would be unrecognizable by John Wesley.

3. Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism has impacted a huge number of modern Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Many may not be aware of what the term means, but would nevertheless be Dispensationalist in several beliefs they hold. Dispensationalism is a way of interpreting scripture that relates particularly to end-times teaching.

Early Dispensationalism was founded by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), who was an elder in a very legalistic and Cessationist church denomination in England. Edward Irving also promoted some Dispensationalist ideas at the same time.

Later Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921) popularized the teachings in his reference Bible. We will look at Dispensationalism more later on. It denies historic *Covenant Theology* and scripture, which shows that no man has been justified by any means other than by the faith of the Messiah (Rom 4:1-16, Gal 3:18), whether before or after the cross.

Before the cross believers in Israel were justified by a free gift, which they acknowledged by the offering of blood. We are justified the same way, which we acknowledge by the Holy Spirit who is within us. They were under the law, not for justification, but to keep them as a guardian as they awaited the promise, the gift of the Spirit. The law offered righteousness by works, but all fell short of that.

Dispensationalism holds that man is justified by various means in changing dispensations that God imposes. The view is that after the church age, God will return to justification by the law when, it is claimed, Jesus will reign in Jerusalem on earth. Dispensationalism has the following outcomes:

- (a) It sees the evil in the world as an indication of the imminent return of Jesus Christ.
- (b) It views the evil somewhat fatalistically, claiming there is little the church can do about it.
- (c) It sees the church's task as to withdraw from society and await the rapture into heaven.
- (d) It claims a special role for the nation of Israel in our day, meaning that God has two separate covenant people including the church and Israel.
- (e) It claims the Law of Moses will be reinstated in Jerusalem after the Second Coming of Christ, resulting in an antichrist position on the atonement.

Though early Dispensationalists were Cessationists, some Evangelicals and Pentecostals found the teaching attractive because it related to our Restorationist ideas, the belief that God is restoring the gifts of the Spirit in the *last-days* for a final world harvest before the Second Coming of Christ. Dispensationalism is also attractive because it relates to our Pietist background of withdrawal from the world.

4. Animism

Animism relates to native or natural religion, occultism, or witchcraft religions, found in all cultures of the world. The pagans of the Celtic tribes in the UK were called Druids. In some parts of Africa these practices are referred to as *Ju Ju*. Animism holds to certain views about truth, the spirit world and holiness that are formed out of experience.

Initially, missionary work in nations around the world did not entertain these views, but as the modern world moves closer towards multi-culturalism the views are embraced more freely and today are having a big influence on Christian belief worldwide.

5. Post Modernism

Post Modernism means *after the modern scientific era*. It considers the scientific age as objective and impersonal, while the Post Modern age today is viewed as subjective, experiential and relational. There is a denial of absolute truth and a concern for relationships, experience and emotion, which fill the need in people that materialism cannot satisfy.

Churches that hold doctrinally sound positions may be seen as impersonal and non-relational to the world around them and this may often be true. Jesus is both the truth and a person, so in Him we have both truth and relationship because we are Spirit filled.

Post Modernism, in elevating the personal and emotional, claims that there is no one correct view on truth and considers correction of others impolite and dogmatic preaching harmful. It believes therapeutic (softly spoken, healing) style ministry improves a person's self-image and life style.

This has suited a current trend called *Neo-Orthodoxy*. Neo-Orthodoxy, founded by Karl Barth in the 20th Century, holds theology less rigidly than Orthodoxy, claiming truth is more subjective and adjustable to personal and cultural preferences.

These terms may seem new, but all Christians today are affected by them.

The Simple Gospel

As we go through this book we will see how each of these 'isms has impacted upon the gospel that we believe, live and preach. We will look at theology, the New Covenant, Christian history and at practical Christian life and see what our real heritage is as it was left to us by Jesus Christ and the first apostles in the scripture.

The gospel is simple. It is a matter of chiselling off some of the complexities that have encumbered it and spotlighting the central and liberating truth of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul did in the book of Galatians. Galatians is the model we follow in this book. Augustine, to some point, and Luther followed the Galatians model.

There are many who take a wholly different lineage through church history. Beginning with Tertullian, who sided with Montanism and withstood early official encroachment by the Roman church, they see the Reformation as continuing dogmatism. They see the *spirituality* of Tertullian (who was also very ascetic) in revivalist movements through history to the present day. We discuss these issues as we go through the book. Pietism is one movement that probably tried to balance these ideas.

Before looking at the basics of theology, we look at some essential principles in biblical interpretation.