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THE MASTERS SEMINARY

THE HERMENEUTICS AND HOMILETICS OF BRIAN MCLAREN AND  
MARK DRISCOLL AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EMERGING CHURCH

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF  
MASTERS OF THEOLOGY  
IN BIBLE EXPOSITION

BY  
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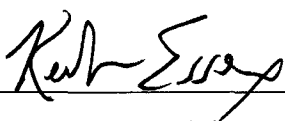
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Masters of Theology

  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
ICC	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
MSJ	<i>Masters Seminary Journal</i>
NICOT	<i>New International Commentary on the Old Testament</i>
NIDOTE	<i>New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIVAC	<i>The NIV Application Commentary</i>
PNTC	<i>Pillar New Testament Commentary</i>
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
WBC	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>

## INTRODUCTION

The Emerging Church (hereafter EC) has seen a crescendo in popularity in recent times. As an upcoming graduate from *The Master's Seminary* this writer thought it most worthwhile to examine the EC, giving special interest to two prominent figures within the movement. From the liberal side, this writer thinks the beliefs and practices of Brian McLaren must be examined (see chapters 1). From the conservative wing, the Hermeneutics (how one interprets the Scripture) and Homiletics (how one communicates the Scripture to others) of Pastor Mark Driscoll must also be examined (see chapters 2–3).

### **The Purpose of the Thesis**

The purposes for this thesis are tri-fold: 1) the demarcation of the dangerous trends and devastating end of abandoning the high ground of traditional grammatical-historical hermeneutics in the EC, 2) the delineation of the cardinal necessity of strict adherence to the hermeneutical process as traditionally understood in opposition to EC practice, and finally 3) the demonstration of biblical wisdom and holiness with reference to speech ethics practiced in the EC.

The concluding section will contain the subjective and objective conclusions of this writer. For this reason, the thesis body (chapters 1–4) is exclusively objective in nature,



### A Trajectory by Chapter

Chapter 1 will be an inspection of the EC as a whole (including its core doctrine and philosophy of ministry), zeroing in on its primary spokesman, McLaren. This chapter will mark out the points at which the liberal end of the EC has veered from Orthodox Christianity as well as what must be done for its restoration.

Chapter 2 is contains the testimony of another EC participant, Driscoll, and his eroding affiliation with EC liberals. The focus of the chapter is a critique of seven Driscoll sermons with a special emphasis on hermeneutics. Driscoll will be evaluated in five categories: 1) Historical / biblical background, 2) Remote context, 3) Immediate context (grammatical / syntactical / lexical), 4) Overall interpretation, and 5) Overall application. Strengths and weaknesses will be noted, as well as objective conclusions supplied.

Chapter 3 is a critique of the same seven Driscoll sermons, in this case from a homiletical perspective. A caveat on the purposes of humor will be incorporated, in addition to some biblical principles governing the Christian and his humor.

Chapter 4 contains four expositions on the tongue, one from the Old Testament Proverbs (10:30–32), the remaining three from the New Testament epistles, James (3:1–6), Ephesians (5:4), 1 Timothy (3:1). The Proverbs exposition juxtaposes the wise speech of the righteous and the foolish talk of the godless. Solomon's utilizes *antithetical parallelism* (a Hebrew literary device) to highlight these distinctions. The New Testament passages pertain to speech judgment, speech ethics, and speech qualification; James 3 being the most graphic passage on the tongue in the New Testament.

### Driscoll's Draw

Since literally millions of people around the world are intrigued with Driscoll, it is useful to consider the reasons why. First, Driscoll has good theology. This explains, at least in part, his explosive rise in popularity among conservative believers. Second, he has a compelling personality. Tony Jones, former coordinator of the EC, said of Driscoll in *Christianity Today*, "He is uncommonly intelligent ... he is uncommonly articulate and humorous. He could have been a stand-up comedian. He could have been a great actor probably."<sup>1</sup> Nathan Busenitz explains this draw toward Driscoll in this way,

As a young man myself, I understand why Mark Driscoll's ministry is attractive to many within the next generation of evangelicalism. He is energetic, articulate, and bold. He has a zeal for impacting his community, and he's willing to do so in ways that are creative and cutting-edge. (My wife is from Seattle, so I know the area well.) There is no question that he is a gifted and clever communicator which when joined with his evangelical theology makes for a compelling combination.<sup>2</sup>

Driscoll is an influential pastor with an impressive following.

Outreach magazine has recognized Mars Hill Church as the ninth most innovative and fifteenth fastest-growing church in America. Outreach magazine has also ranked Mars Hill Church number two of America's top multiplying (church-planting) churches. The Church Report has recognized Pastor Mark as the twenty-second most influential pastor in America. His sermons are downloaded more than a million times a year and he has been recognized by Christianity Today, Inc., as one of the most influential young preachers in America. Seattle magazine has named Pastor Mark as one of the twenty-five most powerful people in Seattle.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Collin Hansen, "Pastor Provocateur," *Christianity Today Magazine Blog*, entry posted September 21, 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/september/30.44.html> (accessed March 3, 2009), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Busenitz, "Clarifying Words about Harsh Language," *Pulpit Magazine Blog*, entry posted on September 23, 2008, <http://www.sfpulpit.com/2008/09/23/clarifying-words-about-harsh-language/> (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Biography [of]," *The Gosepel Coilition Blog*, [http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/mark\\_driscoll](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/mark_driscoll) (accessed March 3, 2009).

Driscoll is no stranger to the media. “Media coverage on Pastor Mark and Mars Hill varies from National Public Radio to Mother Jones magazine, the Associated Press, the New York Times, Blender music magazine, Outreach magazine, Preaching Today, and Leadership magazine to ABC Television and the 700 Club.”<sup>4</sup> On a typical Sunday, Driscoll speaks to more than seven thousand, spread over several campuses, though satellite video technology. Cathy Mickels describes Driscoll as “[a] popular author and preaching pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle that attracts 7500 attendees to seven church locations each week and who also has an enormous following world-wide.”<sup>5</sup>

Mars Hill Church, the first church Driscoll planted in Seattle (1996), has soared in numbers and popularity. Christianity Today reports that Mars Hill Church has grown to 6,000 members in 11 years.<sup>6</sup> Driscoll’s local influence in the greater Seattle area alone makes him a media magnet, not to mention his growing influence around the globe. As of September, 2007, his church planting network (*Acts 29*) had ballooned to 170 churches around the world.<sup>7</sup>

### **A More Personal Motivation**

Recent happenings in reformed circles have produced reasonable cause for a deeper examination of Mark Driscoll. Undoubtedly, informed Reformed believers have

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Cathy Mickels, “Mark Driscoll: Is He Qualified To Lead?” *The Christian Worldview Blog*, entry posted on January 16, 2009, <http://thechristianworldview.com/tcwblog/archives/1640> (accessed February 26, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Hansen, “Pastor Provocateur,” 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

been somewhat befuddled as to how venerable men like John Piper and John MacArthur can seamlessly divide over Driscoll's ministry. Regarding a recent Driscoll sermon he listened to on the humanity of Christ, MacArthur's response was disparaging. He reported, "Driscoll's smutty language and preoccupation with all things lowbrow are inappropriate, unbecoming, and dishonoring to Christ."<sup>8</sup> In the same article, MacArthur wrote,

I don't know what Driscoll's language is like in private conversation, but I listened to several of his sermons. To be fair, he didn't use the sort of four-letter expletives most people think of as cuss words—nothing that might get bleeped on broadcast television these days. Still, it would certainly be accurate to describe both his vocabulary and his subject matter at times as tasteless, indecent, crude, and utterly inappropriate for a minister of Christ. In every message I listened to, at least once he veered into territory that ought to be clearly marked off limits for the pulpit.<sup>9</sup>

In light of this assessment, is it any wonder why reformed believers might be baffled over Piper's recent invitation (and exaltation) of Driscoll as keynote speaker at the "Power of Words" conference, last fall (September of 2008)<sup>10</sup>? Curiously, Piper offered these reasons for inviting Driscoll to the conference:

1. *I love Mark Driscoll's theology*, that's bottom line for me, we stand together on the glorious truths about God, that's huge for me.
2. *He's a very effective communicator*, it's hard not to be interested when Mark Driscoll is talking.
3. *He represents the very thing I'm struggling with*, and I'll admit, it's a struggle. When is it right to use tough language, even raw language, and he's been accused of all kinds of misuses and clever uses of language ...

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<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, "Grunge Christianity?" *Pulpit Magazine Blog*, entry posted December 11, 2006, <http://www.sf pulpit.com/2006/12/11/grunge-christianity/> (accessed February 26, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> The "Power of Words" conference is hosted by John Piper and the Bethlehem Baptist Church (*Desiring God Ministries*).

4. *He's a friend*, I like hanging out with him, I think we're good for each other.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond Piper and MacArthur's disagreement, additional division is evident in the Reformed camp. Piper perceives Driscoll's sinful speech habits as a mere maturity issue, something he believes Driscoll will grow out of if granted grace and time. Piper's obvious optimism concerning Driscoll's future is most clearly evident in his decision to come alongside him as a father in the faith.

In his closing remarks at the "Power of Words" conference, Driscoll quoted Piper's affirmation of him, and responded with appreciation for his mentor's willingness to come alongside and help him through his struggles like a loving father to an erring child. Driscoll expressed his mentor's acceptance in this echo of Piper words, "I don't necessarily agree with where you were, I wonder about where you are at, but I'm hopeful of where you are going!"<sup>12</sup>

D.A. Carson's shares Piper's perspective on Driscoll. Carson advises believers to view Driscoll not based on who he is now only,<sup>13</sup> but on who he is becoming. Tim Challies elucidates,

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<sup>11</sup> John Piper, "John Piper on Why He Invited Mark Driscoll," Podcast, <http://www.desiringgod.org/Events/NationalConferences/Archives/2008/Podcast/95/> (accessed February 26, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Mark Driscoll, "How sharp the Edge? Christ, Controversy, and Cutting Words," (sermon presented at the Power of Words Conference at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN, September 27, 2009), <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByConference/41/> (accessed February 26, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> This writer disagrees strongly with this perspective. The primary reason is that the biblical qualifications for an elder are all in the present tense. An elder is not qualified based on the trajectory he is on, as though with enough time he will eventually meet the biblical qualifications. To the contrary, the biblical elder is to be in the elder office *only* if his current (present tense) life matches up to all 16 qualifications listed in the 1 Tim 3:1-7 and all 16 listed in Titus 1:5-9. Anything less is wrongheaded, unwarranted, and biblically unjustifiable. No one in biblical violation should be condoned because of their "improvement" or "growth" from where they have been. Sin is sin and must be dealt with in accordingly;

There is no doubt that people have had difficulty knowing what to do with Driscoll and knowing how to think about him. But Carson said he finds it helpful to look not just at where Driscoll is, but at the trajectory he is on. I took that to mean that if we look at where he has come from and then plot a course by where he is now, we'll see that he is growing and maturing as a Christian and that he is continually emphasizing better and more biblical theology. We are all works in progress. This is not to say that we should hope that Mark Driscoll grows up to become John MacArthur or R.C. Sproul. Rather, it simply means that it is sometimes wise to look at the wider picture... When we look to that wider picture we see that Driscoll clearly believes in and teaches the gospel. He has proven that he has a very good grasp on Christian doctrine and that he is no theological lightweight. He has proven that he's unashamed to preach the gospel in contexts adamantly opposed to it. Thus any of our criticisms of him are dealing with, at best, secondary matters. This is an important matter of perspective.<sup>14</sup>

In similar vein, notable evangelicals (i.e., C. J. Mahaney, Wayne Grudem, J.I. Packer, and Mark Dever) have extended right hands of fellowship to Driscoll and shared ministry platforms with him. Conversely, MacArthur, president of The Master's Seminary, and Albert Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, each steer their students in a more cautionary manner<sup>15</sup>

Acclaimed pastor, Mark Dever, in an address to *Acts 29* church planters, candidly expressed concern about the schismatic effect his alliance with Driscoll will trigger among evangelicals. His opening words are telling,

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if not, we can all huddle behind the trajectory argument and in that way holiness will never be brought to completion in the body of Christ (2 Cor 7:1).

<sup>14</sup> Tim Challies, "How Do You Solve A Problem Like Mark Driscoll?" *Challies Blog*, Posted Feb 20, 2008, <http://www.challies.com/cgi/mt/mtsearch.fcgi?search=How+do+you+solve+a+problem+like+mark+driscoll&IncludeBlogs=1> (accessed February 26, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> John MacArthur, president of the *The Master's Seminary*, has addressed the student body in multiple "Q & A" chapel sessions about the importance of avoiding carnality in the pulpit. He has made referenced Mark Driscoll on multiple occasions. Similarly, Mohler has addressed the issue of cussing in the pulpit. This can be accessed and listened to on his podcast (The Albert Mohler Program), "Bad Language in the Pulpit?" September, 9, 2008, [http://www.albertmohler.com/radio\\_show.php?cdate=2008-09-19](http://www.albertmohler.com/radio_show.php?cdate=2008-09-19) (accessed March 2, 2009).

Our differences are enough to separate some of my friends—your brothers and sisters in Christ—from you. And perhaps to separate them from me, now that I’m publicly speaking to you. And I don’t want to minimize either the sincerity or the seriousness of some of their concerns (things like: humor, worldliness, pragmatism, authority). But I perceive some things in common which outweigh our differences—which the Lord Jesus shall soon enough compose between us, either by our maturing, or by His bringing us home.<sup>16</sup>

The purposes of this thesis is to elucidate what the “differences” are, as well as the biblical truths that birth them.

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Dever, “Dever to Driscoll’s Acts 29.” *Between Two Worlds Blog*, entry posted on January 31, 2008, <http://theologica.blogspot.com/2008/01/dever-to-driscolls-acts-29.html> (accessed February 26, 2009).

## CHAPTER 1

### THE HERMENEUTICS OF BRIAN MCLAREN

#### Introduction

Perspicuity and Postmodernism are polar opposites. This collision between clarity and confusion is nowhere more evident in Evangelicalism today than in the EC clash with traditional hermeneutics.

The EC is familiar to the family of *The Master's Seminary*.<sup>1</sup> This movement/conversation/dialogue<sup>2</sup> has been researched, reviewed, critiqued, and discussed by faculty and students alike. In this institution's library, one could easily spend months perusing books, blogs, articles, and websites reporting this growing movement.

Time constraints do not permit a thorough explication of all contentions the EC movement has with traditional hermeneutics, the sheer volume of which is mounting every day. Jason Sexton, a graduate of *The Master's Seminary*, has highlighted a non-exhaustive list of seventeen hermeneutical principles adopted by the EC, including: “no principles; dissatisfaction; revolt; anti-modernism; anti-foundationalism; non-propositionalism; philosophical dominance; artistic and non-scientific hermeneutics;

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<sup>1</sup> This was the subject of the 2006 Faculty Lecture series at *The Masters Seminary* (see <http://www.tms.edu/media.aspx?topic=The%20Emerging%20Church%20Movement>).

<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2005), 9.



cultural and personal contextual influence; integration of east/west; narrative theology; ecumenism; community; authenticity; spiritual formation; theology; and mission.”<sup>3</sup>

Though the inaccuracies of the EC are multi-colored, each stem from Postmodernism—the philosophy of this age. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold, first, to render the shortcomings of Postmodern philosophy; second, to reaffirm the biblical doctrine of the perspicuity (or clarity) of Scripture. The EC’s jettison of this indispensable truth has caused devastation among its leaders and laity alike, seriously impeding their ability to interpret, understand, and obey the Bible.

### **Postmodernism: An Attack on the Nature of Truth**

What is ultimately at stake by the EC is the authority and meaning of Scripture. The goal of exposing the shortcomings of the EC has far reaching implications. Sexton explains, “The importance for sound hermeneutics for anyone (in the EC or wherever) ... cannot be overstated. Simply put, without the ability to hear and understand God’s word, everyone would be hopelessly lost”<sup>4</sup>

What the EC has done with traditional Hermeneutics is shocking. One of the EC’s former pastors, a theologically conservative EC man, has acknowledged the wrong-headed practices of those who distort the meaning of the Bible. Driscoll explains,

Postmodernity is tough to pin down, though, because it changes the rules of hermeneutics but keeps the Bible. Some post-modern pastors keep the Bible but reduce it to a story lacking any authority over us, feeling free to play with the

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<sup>3</sup> Jason Sexton, “The Hermeneutics of the Emerging Church and the Historical–Grammatical Method: Compare/Contrast” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, D.C., November 16, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

interpretation and meaning of particular texts. They do not believe in a singular truthful interpretation. They believe that the interpreter ultimately has authority over the text and can therefore use it as he or she pleases rather than submit to it.<sup>5</sup>

A student of hermeneutics can easily discern that singular meaning, authorial intent, objectivity, and the very nature of truth are all under siege by Postmodernism. The time-honored principles of traditional hermeneutics have been replaced by a subjective set of principles—completely antithetical to the aforementioned principles. Tony Jones<sup>6</sup> writes, “In literary criticism, for example, Postmoderns have argued that no text has an actual meaning since each reader imports meaning into the text; even the author’s meaning of the text has been deconstructed.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Jones writes, “Objectivity is out, subjectivity is in. One person, or group of people, cannot claim an objective viewpoint. To be objective means one can stand outside of something, look in, and judge it. But you cannot really be objective because you’re always standing somewhere.”<sup>8</sup> According to Jones, Postmodernism deconstructs the concept of truth, as it has been traditionally understood. Tony Jones comments again on how Postmodernism views truth, “There is not Truth with a capital ‘T.’ Truth is in the eye of the beholder—one person’s truth is another person’s theory.”<sup>9</sup> Driscoll correctly assesses the long history of the war on truth, as well as the target of its current attack. He observes, “While this dance

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2004), 168.

<sup>6</sup> Tony Jones was the national coordinator for the EC in the United States in the early days of “the conversation.” The EC does not have a national coordinator at present.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2001), 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

may seem novel, it is as old as Eden. Satan first used this tactic on Adam and Eve, and later used it to tempt Jesus, by manipulating God's Word to change its meaning. In previous generations, the fight was over the inerrancy of Scripture. Today, the fight is over the authority and meaning of Scripture."<sup>10</sup> In short, in Postmodernism, the only truth is that there is no truth.

### **Postmodernism: An Attack on Traditional Hermeneutics**

John O'Keefe's fictitious depiction of the disciple's response to the Lord's Sermon on the Mount (a response unmentioned in Scripture) is illustrative of how many in the EC view hermeneutics. O'Keefe posted this on his website as the major part of his lesson. He cleverly describes:

as Jesus was speaking the disciples started to talk among themselves;  
 Peter looked around and asked, "are we supposed to know this?"  
 Andrew, looking puzzled, said, "do we have to write this down?"  
 James, frantically looking for something to write with whined, "will we have this on a test?"  
 Philip, pushing James aside said, "I have no paper."  
 Bartholomew, with a tear in his eye said, "do we have to turn this in?"  
 While John complained, "the other disciples didn't have to learn this."  
 Matthew, looking up at Jesus said, "could you go over this again?"  
 Judas, shaking his head said, "what does this have to do with real life?"  
 Just then one of the local pharisees asked to see Jesus' lesson plan. He wanted to know the scripture used, and quoted and he also desired to know the hermeneutics used to structure the lesson. He inquired of Jesus, "where is your anticipatory set and your objectives in the cognitive domain?"  
 Then, Jesus wept.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> John O'Keefe, "the lesson?" *The PM Theology Blog*, entry posted on June 23, 2004, [http://PM\\_theology.blogspot.com/2004/06/lesson.html](http://PM_theology.blogspot.com/2004/06/lesson.html) (accessed 12/10/07).

It is plain that O’Keefe disapproves of traditional hermeneutics. Not only is his writing poorly punctuated, but his statements are pure conjecture. The larger context of the Lord’s sermon is left out of his lesson. What is conspicuously left out is the text of the Bible. O’Keefe’s creative imaginings takes up two-thirds of his lesson! This mocking treatment of the sacred text is illustrative of the EC; further demonstrating how the abandonment of truth leaves men to tell their own tales.

### **Postmodernism: An Attack on Modernism**

Brian McLaren, the premier spokesman for the EC writes:

I often hear Christians beating the drum of ‘Absolute truth! Absolute truth!’ and I wonder if they know what they’re against (relativism, nihilism, hedonism) or in favor of. Are they for this myth of objectivism—an Enlightenment ideal that’s not a biblical category? Are they for absolute knowledge—the idea that humans are capable (with or without the Bible) of absolute, bulletproof, undoubtable, inerrant knowledge (even though the Bible itself says, ‘we know in part’)? Our brethren would do well to ponder these paragraphs and let themselves get rocked and unsettled a while.<sup>12</sup>

McLaren has embraced Postmodern philosophy and its wholesale upheaval of Modern values. In a comparative analysis, Jones details the values of Modernism Postmodernism. According to Jones, Moderns are: rational, scientific, for unanimity, exclusive, egocentric, individualistic, functional, industrial, local, compartmentalized/dichotomized, relevant, and relational. By contrast, Postmoderns are: experiential, spiritual, pluralistic, relative, altruistic, communal, creative, environmental, global, holistic, and authentic.<sup>13</sup> Because of the dichotomy of values, Robert

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<sup>12</sup> Brian McLaren as cited in *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, Tony Jones, Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2001), 201.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–37.

Webber<sup>14</sup> explains the futility of employing reason as a test for truth in the Postmodern matrix. “Postmodern philosophy has challenged the use of reason as a test for truth. For Postmoderns, reason has no power to bring a person to truth. Neither the liberal nor the conservative arguments are valid, because the world of modernity no longer exists. In the Postmodern world, truth cannot be known. It is completely relative ...”<sup>15</sup>

Webber details the severity of truth’s collapse in the Postmodern matrix, “The entire infrastructure of modernity, built on the notion that truth is attainable through reason and the use of the empirical method has collapsed.”<sup>16</sup> R. Scott Smith concludes, “In sharp contrast to the modern attitudes that we could find absolutely certain truths through universal human reason, Postmodernism instead stresses humility of knowledge, which appeals to Postmodern people today.”<sup>17</sup>

The attack on truth is also an attack on authority. In the modern world things were different. “Authority was in reason, science, and logic and for Christians was in the reasonable interpretation of the Bible.”<sup>18</sup> But in the Postmodern world everything changes; in the Postmodern world there is “suspicion of authority. The Bible is open to many interpretations and is but one of many religious writings.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Robert E. Webber was a professor at Wheaton College.

<sup>15</sup> Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2002), 98.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> R. Scott Smith, *Truth & The New Kind of Christian* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 61.

<sup>18</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2003), 44.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

John MacArthur perceives the intensifying warfare between Postmodern and objective truth. He correctly states, “Postmodernism in general is marked by a tendency to dismiss the possibility of any sure and settled knowledge of the truth.”<sup>20</sup> He continues, “Postmodernism suggests that if objective truth exists, it cannot be known objectively or with any degree of certainty.”<sup>21</sup>

EC leaders have adopted Postmodernisms’ unbiblical imagining concerning the cognitive ability of human beings. In doing so, Postmoderns reveal a low view of God; they do this by centering their arguments on man’s inability to understand, as opposed to God’s ability to communicate. At this point, their lack of faith in the Creator’s power to communicate is out in the open. The Creator is the One who spoke the world into being (Gen 1–2), and presently sustains it by the “word of His power” (Heb 1:3c). If anyone can communicate, it is He - the author of communication.

Living in a Postmodern world, it is not surprising to know that Postmoderns are suspect of objective truth, not necessarily its existence, but it’s potential to be understood rationally and with certainty. MacArthur explains why, “That is because (according to Postmoderns), the subjectivity of the human mind makes knowledge of objective terms impossible. So it is useless to think of truth in objective terms. Objectivity is an illusion [to a Postmodern].”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John MacArthur, *The Truth War* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

McLaren, one of the most innovative thinkers in the EC, reasons within this Postmodern matrix. He writes, “Postmodernism is skeptical of certainty.”<sup>23</sup> Referencing Doc Thorne (a Postmodern), McLaren writes:

As Thorne says, what we commonly call knowledge is really ‘just theories,’ and theories are just fantasies. In Postmodernism, the analytical and critical rationality of modernism is taken one step further: It critiques not only the objective world and other people, but also the self and the self’s very ability to know and understand.<sup>24</sup>

Not only is certainty of absolute truth beyond the realm of knowing, as McLaren asserts, but it is also a replacement for faith. Appearing sort of spiritual, McLaren suggests that certainty robs one of a need for faith. Furthermore, Smith notes, based on McLaren’s own words, that McLaren is convinced that “an appeal to certain, unalterable truths lends itself to a rigid approach to the faith—the attitude that we must live, think, and feel in certain predefined ways.”<sup>25</sup> McLaren suggests that certainty in interpretation betrays the fact that all have blind spots. In a reasonable critique of McLaren, Smith captures McLaren’s ideology in one sweeping statement:

McLaren thinks that Postmodernism makes room for faith. Otherwise, [in McLaren’s opinion] we think we have everything wired and figured out, by employing reason that is totalizing in its reach. With such an attitude, we tend to think we can completely figure out God. But the end result of such intellectual confidence is that, instead of standing in awe of God, who is ultimately beyond our ability to fully comprehend, we end up putting Him in a box.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), 162.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Brian McLaren as cited in R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian*, 62.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

This line of reasoning appears humble in its assessment of God, appearing to magnify His all-surpassing transcendence, yet upon closer scrutiny, it seems to lack substance. To be sure, certainty and a lack of faith are not equivalent, nor is the lack of certainty and faith the same thing. In fact, the battle for certainty is not even waged on the field of faith, but on the field of knowledge and man's ability to understand it.

Secondly, those who dismiss Postmodern theories of uncertainty certainly do not claim to know all things with certainty, nor do they claim to know all things. There is a great need for faith among all Christians, a "right now" faith by which to live, as the Scriptures record (Heb 11:6; 2 Cor 5:7; Gal 2:20). Thirdly, omniscience belongs to God alone. This is obvious. God is the only one who does not need faith because He knows all things already, even what is not seen to human eyes is known in the mind of God. D.A. Carson explains the difference between God's knowledge and the degrees of certainty in the realm of human knowledge, "Human beings can know things, not with the certainty that belongs only to God, but with all kinds of degrees of certainty on which you base your life. The kinds of knowledge that are appropriate to human beings."<sup>27</sup>

McLaren's philosophical arguments, from the grid of one of his recent releases, is very revealing. In the section, "D is for Deconstruction,"<sup>28</sup> McLaren and his coauthors detail the opposing nature of Postmodernity and grammatical-historical hermeneutics. The book reported of Postmodernism,

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<sup>27</sup> Kim Lawton, "The Emerging Church, Part 2," *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly* (online), July 15, 2005 <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week846/cover.html> (accessed December 8, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Leonard Sweet, Brian D. McLaren and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2003), 87.



An approach to interpretation of literary texts (and film and other media) that begins by *questioning many of the assumptions of traditional interpretation*. For example, traditional interpretation assumes that the author's conscious intent is a (or the) primary concern in interpreting a text. Deconstruction asks, 'Might the author have had *subconscious motivations* at work that express meaning even *deeper*, and perhaps more *interesting*, than his or her conscious intents?'<sup>29</sup>

Traditional interpretation generally assumes a logical structure and deep coherence of texts; in other words, the author meant to say something sensible and did so in a coherent way. Deconstruction looks for points of *inherent tension*, *contradiction*, and *incoherence*. It doesn't see these features as flaws or failures in the text, but rather as interesting elements that are essential to the meaning of the text . . . Perhaps because it believes that reality itself is mysterious and it defies comprehension and perhaps because it fears that simplistic systems may *obscure truth rather than clarify it* . . . deconstruction seems to treasure these inherent tensions and incoherence as sparks of genius and insight . . . By driving for 'the one true interpretation,' for example, they disenfranchise Postmodern readers for whom deconstruction is as much the mother tongue as traditional interpretation is for modern people. Will Postmodern Christian leaders demand that deconstructionist hearers 'convert' to their traditional mode of interpretation? Is such a demand an act of faithfulness to scripture and our Christian tradition, or is it faithfulness to modernity?<sup>30</sup>

The book continues, "While deconstruction feels to moderns like chaos and nihilism, it feels to Postmoderns like honesty and liberation. While moderns feel deconstruction yields readings that are unclear, slippery, unserious, and unscientific, Postmoderns feel that deconstructive readings are *meaningful, interesting, playful, rich, honest, rewarding and inclusive*."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., (emphasis added).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 89, (emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., (emphasis added).

### **Postmodernism Attacked**

The apostle Paul acknowledges man's incomplete knowledge in his first letter to the Corinthians. That is why he writes concerning the Holy Spirit's ministry of revealing the Word of God (a.k.a. special revelation), and of His corollary ministry of illuminating His Word to believers. The Holy Spirit shines His light upon the written revelation enabling "us" (1 Cor 2:12), to "know the things freely given to *us* by God" (emphasis added) (1 Cor 2:12c).<sup>32</sup>

Later on in the letter, in the great chapter on love, the apostle highlights the secondary stature of both faith and hope in contrast to love (1 Cor 13:13). The reason for love's preeminence, Paul explains, is love's eternal permanence ("love never fails [ends]," 1 Cor 13:8a); the present virtues of faith and hope are not present in the eternal state, but will end prior to Christ's return. The cessation of faith and hope is because in the future state of limitless perfection, believers will have all knowledge, faith will become sight and believers will never again have need for faith or hope. At that time, believers will never again know things only in part, as they do right now (1 Cor 13:9). Paul repeats the incomplete nature of human knowledge in verse 12, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then [in heaven] face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."

The finitude of earthly human knowledge is a biblical doctrine and is certainly the common ground of both EC and non-EC believers. The difference is that the EC has

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<sup>32</sup> All Scripture references are from the New King James Version of the Bible (NKJV), unless otherwise noted.

exacerbated the uncertainty of human knowledge to unbiblical proportions, and in some cases, to illogical extremes.

Albert Mohler commends Carson for his comments concerning the fallibility of human knowledge. In fact, Mohler demonstrates that Carson actually credits Postmodernism for drawing people's attention back to the fact that human knowledge is always limited—marked by finitude. Mohler quoted Carson, ““We get things wrong not only because we are not omniscient, but also because we are corrupt, morally blind, painfully selfish, and given to excuses in self-justification.””<sup>33</sup> Although Carson agrees with the Postmodern virtue of skeptically questioning one's understanding of knowledge, he exposes the unwarranted extremes to which Postmoderns have taken their skepticism. Mohler cites Carson,

Once we have acknowledged the unavoidable finiteness of all human knowers, the cultural diversity of the human race, the diversity of factors that go into human knowing, and even the evil that lurks in the human breast and easily perverts claims of knowledge into totalitarian control and lust for power—once we have acknowledged these things, is there any way left for us to talk about knowing what is true or objectively real? Hard Postmoderns insist there is not. And that's the problem.<sup>34</sup>

#### The Capstones of Postmodernism: Inconsistency and Incoherence

Mohler writes, “The ‘hard’ Postmoderns also fail to acknowledge that, even as language is complex and communication is uneven, some degree of communication does take place.”<sup>35</sup> Mohler reveals a glaring disconnect between Postmodern philosophy and

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<sup>33</sup> Albert Mohler, “What Should We Think of the Emerging Church? Part One,” June 30, 2005, [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2005-06-30](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2005-06-30) (accessed December 8, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

praxis, “A deep inconsistency in Postmodern thinking is apparent when radical Postmoderns write books, give speeches, or engage in conversation. If the communication of truth is as ambiguous, awkward, and uneven as the Postmoderns argue, why write books?”<sup>36</sup>

### The Children of Postmodernism: Confusion and Contradiction

The deadening affects of philosophy plays itself out in popular culture. Don Kimball writes:

When famous musicians receive awards on television, we hear them over and over publicly giving enthusiastic thanks to God or Jesus for their success, even though their music, image, and lyrics may be in contradiction to the Bible. There is no hypocrisy here. It is simply their personal viewpoint of God and Jesus. They feel there is no problem with the contradiction because to them, there isn't one.<sup>37</sup>

Kimball is suggesting that in Postmodernism, speaking out of both sides of your mouth is completely normal. Under the banner of relativism; duplicity is permissible. When “tolerance for all” is the rule, everyone is entitled to their own god in their own way. No absolute standard of right and wrong exists, so everyone is free to say virtually anything and can expect to be tolerated and maybe even a pat on the back from a fellow Postmodern. This kind of thinking produces lying and hypocrisy, both are tragic abortions of truth. Kimball writes, “Notice how artists like Destiny’s Child and Jessica Simpson, young women who are vocal about their Christian beliefs, send hypersexual messages through their appearance and lyrics. Beliefs blatantly contradict actions, and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 53.

from a Postmodern viewpoint, no harm is done.”<sup>38</sup> This confusing and contradictory thinking is the will of Postmoderns, the EC, and the culture, but it is not the will of God. The chilling truth is that Postmodernism has penetrated every medium the culture employs to purvey their information and ideas, its influence is pervasive and must not be taken lightly. Kimball explains,

Those who think that Postmodernism is a figment of the academic imagination, a passing fad, could not be more wrong. Postmodernism has flowed right out of the musty corridors of academia into the world of popular culture; it is on the pages of youth magazines, on CD boxes and the fashion pages of Vogue. When we open our eyes and alert our senses, we begin to recognize the influence of Postmodernism all around us. Look at the magazine covers and advertising graphics; see how TV commercials are written and visually produced; listen to the dialogue of TV sitcoms and movies and to the lyrics of today’s music. Observe fashion; learn what popular authors are writing. Consider the changes occurring in our methods of education. As we look in all of these directions, the implications for the emerging church are mind-boggling.<sup>39</sup>

#### The Problem of Preunderstanding

Another challenge with EC people is that they refuse to rid themselves of Postmodern preunderstanding when studying Scripture. The Postmodern matrix continually blinds them to the purity, beauty, and clarity of Scripture, causing the interpreter to interpret things not based on objective rules of hermeneutics, but upon his preunderstanding. This is a major barrier in the way of accurate interpretation of Scripture.

The unrestrained subjectivism by which Postmoderns have embraced Postmodern preunderstanding is alarming. In the EC, Postmodern preunderstanding is celebrated as a

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 54.

necessary and viable component of the hermeneutical process. By shifting the starting point of interpretation from author to interpreter, the authority on what a text means has shifted in the same direction. The result is a direct attack on propositional truth. Robert Thomas describes the effects of this in the hermeneutical process, “It [preunderstanding] brings a degree of tentativeness to all conclusions and thus hinders the interpreter from deriving propositional truth from Scripture.”<sup>40</sup>

Because preunderstanding resides in all interpreters, the issue is not, “Does it exist?” but rather, “How does one deal with it?” The critical question before engaging in exegesis is, “What am I going to do with my preunderstanding?” The answer to this question will determine the quality of interpretation derived thereby.

Historically, the EC has Rudolph Bultmann, a prominent German thinker, to thank for his role in inculcating the reader’s preunderstanding into the interpretive process. Bultmann believed in the necessity of preunderstanding as well as the naiveté of attempting to ignore it. In an article entitled, “The ‘Analogy of Faith’ And Exegetical Methodology: A Preliminary Discussion on Relationships,” H. Wayne Johnson refers to R. Bultmann as the man who ... started the ball rolling by affirming the naiveté of believing that the exegete can operate devoid of presuppositions.<sup>41</sup> He affirmed that ‘there cannot be any such thing as presuppositionless exegesis.’<sup>42</sup> ‘The demand that the interpreter must silence his subjectivity... in order to attain an objective knowledge is

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 41.

<sup>41</sup> R. Bultmann, “Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?” in *Existence and Faith*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), 194–200.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 343–344.

therefore the most absurd one that can be imagined.’<sup>43</sup> ‘Pre-understanding’, or a prior life-relation of the interpreter to the subject matter of the text, implies ‘not a prejudice, but a way of raising questions.’”<sup>44</sup>

By underscoring the impossibility of “presuppositionless exegesis,” as well as the absurdity of achieving objective knowledge, Bultmann is objectivity’s long-standing arch enemy. In his mind, preunderstanding thwarts objectivity because the latter is simply an illusion.

Wayne G. Strickland<sup>45</sup> provides additional insight into the proper place (or placement) of one’s preunderstanding in the hermeneutical process.. Strickland writes:

Some may suggest that because of preunderstanding, objectivity is impossible in hermeneutics. Yet the key to maintaining objectivity in the interpretive process while also recognizing the validity of preunderstanding is to recognize that the preunderstanding of the interpreter is not to be regarded as final. It must remain open to revision and modification by the text in order to avoid eisogesis. The biblical text must be the final authority over preunderstanding. Otherwise the interpreter is guilty of manipulating the text to say what he wants it to communicate. So it is helpful to examine the preunderstanding behind a person’s interpretation of the text to determine if his preunderstanding is valid.<sup>46</sup>

In a rather provocative manner, McLaren explains how his church doesn’t just offer answers, it offers mysteries:

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<sup>43</sup> R. Bultmann, “The Problem of Hermeneutics,” in *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (London: SCM, 1955), 255.

<sup>44</sup> H. Wayne Johnson, “The ‘Analogy of Faith’ And Exegetical Methodology: A Preliminary Discussion On Relationships,” *JETS* 31:1 (March 1988) p. 76.

<sup>45</sup> Wayne G. Strickland is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Capital Bible Seminary in Lanham, Maryland.

<sup>46</sup> Wayne G. Strickland, “Preunderstanding and Daniel Fuller’s Law–Gospel Continuum” *BSac*, 144:574 (Apr 87), 182.

In the old apologetic, we acted as if we had easy answers to these questions [author is referring to ultimate questions (i.e. Why am I here? Where does life come from? Where am I going?)]<sup>47</sup> as if they were math problems. Our easy answers wore pretty thin pretty fast. In the new apologetic, we offer the faith not because it has easy answers to the big questions (that is, shallow answers to deep questions), but because the faith is the context in which one can explore the mysteries that underlie these questions. Instead of ‘Here’s the solution to your mathematical problem,’ we will say ‘Here’s the place to learn math,’ or better yet, ‘Here’s the place to work with your questions, live your questions, explore possible answers, and find direction to live by . . .’<sup>48</sup>

McLaren’s enthrallment with mystery is pervasive; he writes, “In the twenty-first century the new church will feed the seeking mind with the savory mysteries of Creation, Incarnation, Trinity, Atonement, transformation, and unity.”<sup>49</sup> McLaren is not only encouraging unstable seekers to continue in their uncertainties, he is using the Bible in the process!

The truth is that nowhere in the Bible is creation described as a mystery, or the trinity for that matter. Nor is the atonement, transformation, or unity classified as mysteries. This is theological nomenclature, not unsolved mysteries. This is not to say that these doctrines are easy to understand, only that the Bible teaches doctrine for faith and belief, not mysteries for the curious.

#### Style over Substance: Imagination not Instruction

In “Reinventing Your Church,” McLaren charms his readers with another Postmodern approach he calls, “Learn a New Rhetoric.”<sup>50</sup> McLaren details a few

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<sup>47</sup> McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 78.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>50</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), 87.



personal hunches on how to reach Postmoderns with just the right words; he wrote this under hunch number three:

Our words will seek to be servants of mystery, not removers of it as they were in the old world. They will convey a message that is clear yet mysterious, simple, yet mysterious, substantial yet mysterious. My faith developed in the old world of many words, in a naïve confidence to the power of many words, as if *the mysteries of faith* could be captured like fine-print conditions in a legal document and reduced to safe equations.. *Mysteries*, however, can not be captured so precisely. Freeze-dried coffee, butterflies on pins, and frogs in formaldehyde all lose something in our attempts at capturing, defining, preserving, and rendering them less jumpy, flighty, or fluid. In the *new* world we will understand this a little better.<sup>51</sup>

In the “new world,” McLaren believes Postmoderns will be irresistibly enticed toward his mysterious “new rhetoric.” McLaren furthermore sees the need to get the rest of the church ready for the “new world” invasion. McLaren prepares himself with a sort of new language. Convinced that this new world of post-modernity will itch for his seductive language, McLaren has jettisoned the time-honored trustworthiness of clear truth. He has exchanged clearness for cleverness, an exchange completely antithetical to the apostle Paul (1Cor 2:1–5).

In reflection, how far has McLaren’s appetite for mystery taken him? It has taken him far away from the literal interpretation. McLaren writes,

The literalist approach requires us to take the Bible literally from beginning to end. If by literally we mean, literally ‘paying attention to every letter’ well, okay. That’s what good readers do anyway. But if by literally we mean unimaginatively, without regard to the genres and cultures of the original writers, treating the whole thing like a code of law or textbook on science, prying the Bible out of its milieu, pretending to unjustified levels of certainty . . . I’m sorry, I can’t recommend that.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 89, (emphasis added).

<sup>52</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1999), 253.

An unquenchable thirst for mystery has driven McLaren unashamedly away from the literal interpretation of the Bible.

Since McLaren has abandoned the literal hermeneutic, what has he opted for in its place? McLaren has adopted his own set of self-styled hermeneutics. He employs a subjective grid which undermines the genres of the Bible, broad-brushing all books of the Bible as one continuous narrative. This approach fails to take into account the various genres of the Bible, thereby undermining the sovereign layout of the inspired text (2 Tim 3:16). Furthermore this approach wrongly prioritizes application above interpretation, a clear violation of grammatical-historical hermeneutics.

McLaren communicates candidly,

To be truly biblical does not mean being preoccupied with some golden age in the ancient world and God's word to people back then. It means learning from the past to let God's story, God's will, and God's dream continue to come true in us and our children . . . But this is a whole new way of approaching the Bible, you say. This is a whole new concept of being biblical. Orthodoxy has a deeply different feel in this light—less rigid, more generous. Yes, I think your right.<sup>53</sup>

### **Brian McLaren: the Man behind the Mystery**

The personal life of Brian McLaren offers additional insight into why this EC leader thinks and does the things that he does. Herein are the thoughts of a man deeply dissatisfied with the perfections of Holy Scripture. In "A Confession,"<sup>54</sup> McLaren openly shares his struggles with the Bible. He writes, "I have often wondered about the Bible, as I have about the church: 'God, couldn't you have done better than this?' If God

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>54</sup> McLaren, *Finding Faith*, 231.

were trying to give us a holy book, a self-revelation, couldn't God have made it clearer, less controversial, more universal, less vulnerable to cultural irrelevancy?"<sup>55</sup>

McLaren writes, "Couldn't there have been clear, expository, timeless prose, with titles like, 'First, Second, and Third books of Theology,' 'The Truth about the Trinity,' and 'How to Have a Good Marriage,'<sup>56</sup> to name a few. This is confusing for this writer in light of McLaren's earlier eloquence that clearness and categorical thinking are sub-standard and unimaginative. Intestingly enough, this is exactly what he wishes for in his musings about a more user-friendly Bible.

#### From Dissatisfaction to Doubt

Concerning God's layout, order, and style in the Bible, McLaren ended this section of his confession with, "What could God possibly think we gain by having a collection of Holy Scriptures in this seemingly disorganized, patchwork form, if indeed they came from God at all?"<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, McLaren's degenerating imaginings go from bad to worse: first, a thirst for biblical mystery; second, a desire for biblical revision; ending finally with a cynical approach to the inspiration of Scripture.

#### Uncertain and Creating More Uncertainty

In his book, *A New Kind of Christian*, McLaren prefaces his clever conversation between Dan Poole and Neil Edward Oliver ("Neo") with specific glimpses into his own

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., (emphasis added).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., (emphasis added).

story. In this personal rendition, McLaren concedes his troubling bouts with doubt, frustrations with being a minister, as well as his feelings about giving up on Christianity altogether.

According to his own testimony, McLaren's past frustrations with the church stemmed from his congregants unrealistic expectations. He grew weary of parishioners perceiving him to be the resident authority on God and the Bible. He disliked the notion that ministers are expected to know everything all the time. He writhed against the need to have total certainty in one's faith, as well as an arsenal of bomb-proof answers to people's toughest questions. McLaren soon grew faint of heart, eventually conquering his inner struggles with this conclusion—life isn't that simple and certainty is not that easy to come by.

It was this conclusion, resulting from dissatisfaction with the way truth was being perceived, that transitioned McLaren from modern-thinker into a Postmodern imaginer. McLaren has become the most recognized voice in the EC, laboring diligently to persuade the believing community to see things his way.

### McLaren Deconstructed

McLaren's mystery-thinking is a combination of dissatisfaction with Modernism as well as Postmodern deconstructionist beliefs. In the chapter, "D is for 'Deconstruction,'"<sup>58</sup> the deconstruction priority is asserted to be, "One of the most important philosophical/interpretive concepts of Postmodernism."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Sweet, *A is for Abductive*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

Grammatical-Historical interpretation and the doctrine of biblical clarity both have modern affinities (1750–1989),<sup>60</sup> and as such are rendered obsolete and irrelevant in the Postmodern system.

For Postmoderns, logic and cohesiveness are unsought, while mystery remains the essential element to meaning. This mindset removes one far away from the plain interpretation of Scripture.

Postmodern thought depends on several key beliefs, some typical ones of which are that 1) although a ‘real’ world may exist, we cannot know it as such; and 2) the only way we can know anything about this ‘real’ world is by out talking about it in the language of our community [hence the writing of *A is for Abduction, the language of the Emerging Church*]. But 3) we cannot know the essence of language, for that would be to know something as it really is. Instead there are only languages-in-use in specific times and places. Thus, 4) our talking about reality shapes and ‘makes’ it what it is for us- we ‘make’ our world (s) by the use of our language (s) within our communities . . .<sup>61</sup>

The end of such uncertain and disorderly thinking is a theology of full of enigmas and mysteries. When asked about his position on homosexuality McLaren avoided answering the question directly. When asked about the issue of homosexuality, McLaren acted in line with his self-made hermeneutics. Carson reported,

First, he said he is not entirely clear that what the Bible means when it speaks of homosexuality is exactly what we mean today when we speak of homosexuality, and therefore he wants to stress the crucial importance of treating homosexuals as people, like other human beings in need of grace.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Larry G. Pettegrew, “The Perspicuity of Scripture,” *MSJ* 17/2 (Fall 2006), 164.

<sup>61</sup> R. Scott Smith. *Truth and the New Kind of Christian*, 95.

<sup>62</sup> Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 175.

This ethical illustration confirms the fact that when the clarity of Scripture goes unrecognized, doctrinal heresy soon follows. In support of this dictum, consider MacArthur concerning ambiguity's relationship to doctrine:

A Bible that is ambiguous can produce only doctrine that is equally indefensible, since no sure argument can be made from any given text. But this is not how the Scripture describes itself. All men are responsible to submit to scripture. And all believers are commanded to know, defend, and apply."<sup>63</sup>

On the importance of clarity for communing with God, MacArthur writes, "Without clarity there's no conviction, without conviction there is no affection for truth, and without affection for truth there's no communion."<sup>64</sup>

### **The Case for Clarity**

#### Scripture's Self-Defense

The Bible offers its own defense for its clarity. The Bible is in one sense like a lion on a leash, it does not need defending, just unleash it and it will defend itself! Consider this short list from Scripture concerning the Bible's self-claim for clarity:

- 1) Scripture is described as light, and never as darkness (Ps 119:105; 2 Pet 1:19a).
- 2) Scripture describes itself as "profitable." But what profit is a book that is too ambiguous to understand? (2 Tim 3:16).
- 3) Scripture contains the way of salvation, the only way (Ps 19:7).
- 4) Scripture was written to common people, not the religious elite (Dt 6:4; Mk 12:37; Eph 1:1; 1 Cor 1:2).
- 5) Scripture commands parents to teach their children the Scriptures (Dt 6:6-7).
- 6) Because Scripture can be understood even by children (2 Tim 3:14-15a).

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<sup>63</sup> John MacArthur, "Perspicuity of Scripture: The Emergent Approach," *MSJ* 17/2 (Fall 2006), 158.

<sup>64</sup> John MacArthur, "The Power of Expository Preaching," *Masters Mantle*, 13/2 (Fall/Winter 2006), 1.

7) Scripture is the surest test for the rightness of religious thoughts and ideas (Acts 17:11).

### Certain about Certainty

The Bible speaks of many things that are known with certainty. Although there are mysteries in the Bible (Dt 29:29), in the short book of First John alone, there are at least seven things that a believer can know with certainty—and beyond all doubt. As Carson points out, these known entities are in the form of, “‘knowing *that something-or-other*’; that is the construction and context show that the content of what is known or believed to be true is a proposition.”<sup>65</sup> Henceforth are six propositional truths from First John,

- 1) Knowing with certainty that we know God because we keep His commandments (2:3).
- 2) Knowing with certainty the end is near by observing the signs of the times (2:18).
- 3) Knowing with certainty the forthcoming bodily glorification of the true saints (3:2).
- 4) Knowing with certainty what Christian love for God looks like (5:2).
- 5) Knowing with certainty the believer’s promise of everlasting life (5:13).
- 6) Knowing with certainty God’s promise for answered prayer (5:15).<sup>66</sup>

Suffice to say there nevertheless remains an irremovable mystery in the Bible, particularly in the person of God. This is gloriously displayed in God’s non-communicable attributes—those attributes possessed by God alone and shared with no one else. As Richard Mayhue points out, “The very nature of God displays His authority in that He is characterized as ‘unapproachable light’ (1 Tim 6:16), unsearchable (Rom

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<sup>65</sup> Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 193, (emphasis added).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

11:33), immortal (1 Tim 1:17), inscrutable (Is 40:28), incorruptible (Rom 1:23), invisible (1 Tim 1:17), unfathomable (Rom 11:33).<sup>67</sup> These non-communicable attributes of God are what make Him unique and beyond our human capacity to comprehend fully.

### A Logical Argument

In the Old Testament, God command the Israelites (commonly known as the *Shema*, Hebrew for *hear*),<sup>68</sup> “these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut. 6:6–7). The only way the justice of God could continue even through the issuance of a command like this would be if God communicated His words with unmistakable clarity. If not, the children of Israel would be unable to understand what God has said; likewise parents would be unable to clearly communicate these commands to their children. Foundational understanding is a prerequisite for teaching; therefore since God required teaching from parents, this parental requirement assumes the rudimentary foundation of understanding. In other words, without understanding, good teaching would be impossible. God would be guilty of injustice, had He issued commands without the ability to understand or apply them.

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<sup>67</sup> Richard L. Mayhue, “The Authority of Scripture” *MSJ* 15/2 (Fall 2004), 230.

<sup>68</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible (NKJV)* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 258.



### From the Lips of our Lord

In similar fashion, Jesus himself, the master teacher, never hinted a whisper to the effect that the Old Testament Scriptures were somehow vague, unclear, or ambiguous. Instead, he routinely pointed his questioners (i.e. the Pharisees) to the Old Testament. On one occasion, Jesus posed a question of inquiry to the Pharisees, “Have you never read the Scriptures . . . (Matt 21:42)?” To which he added rather emphatically, “You are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt 22:29). Again, Jesus never said anything suggesting the OT Scriptures were unclear, ambiguous, or too difficult to understand; in fact quite the opposite is the case.

Similarly, in the New Testament, Wayne Grudem points out that there is actually little difference between twenty-first century Christians and first-century believers in so far as the understanding of the Scriptures is concerned. Grudem noted that a vast number of Christians in the early church were Gentiles. He writes:

They (Gentiles) were relatively new Christians who had no previous background in any kind of Christian society, and who had little or no prior understanding of the history and culture of Israel. The events of Abraham’s life (around 2000 B.C.) were as far in the past for them as the events of the New Testament are for us! Nevertheless, the New Testament authors show no hesitancy in expecting even these Gentile Christians to be able to read a translation of the Old Testament in their own language and to understand it rightly (see Rom. 4:1–25; 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1–11; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; et al.).<sup>69</sup>

In conclusion, it is clear that McLaren is looking for a mystery under every rock, even imposing upon the text unwarranted and unbiblical mystery-descriptions.

McLaren’s general attacks upon Scripture are falsifiable, not to mention his attacks upon

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<sup>69</sup> Wayne Grudem and Jeff Purswell, eds., *Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), 51.

biblical doctrines which God has communicated for belief and acceptance—based on faith alone.

Bernard Ramm said, “The only way to clear the atmosphere and to determine what is right and wrong, proper and improper, orthodox and heretical, is to give one’s self to a careful study of the science of Biblical hermeneutics. Otherwise we deal with symptoms not with causes; we debate about superstructure when we should be debating about foundations.”<sup>70</sup>

This writer takes Ramm’s position; hermeneutics is a matter of foundations. When hermeneutics are sound, the foundation for solid doctrine, teaching, and preaching are likewise in place; sadly, the reverse is also true. When unsound hermeneutics are in use, the foundation for solid doctrine, teaching, and preaching are shaky; and will soon sink into the quicksand of Postmodern subjectivism. A system of sound hermeneutics, according to Milton Terry, must be intelligent and intelligible, quite antithetical to Postmodern philosophies. Terry stated, “Hermeneutics . . . aims to establish the principles, methods, and rules which are needful to unfold the sense of what is written. Its object is to elucidate whatever may be obscure or ill-defined, so that every reader may be able, by an intelligent process, to obtain the exact ideas intended by the author.”<sup>71</sup>

#### Clarity Defined

The logical evidence for this writer’s case must be considered through a definition of clarity. Evangelical scholar Grudem expressed the clarity of Scripture this

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<sup>70</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation, rev. ed.* (Boston: Wilde Company, 1956), 4.

<sup>71</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1974), 19.

way, “The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teaching are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”<sup>72</sup> Synonyms of clarity include: precision, transparency, and intelligibility. Its antonym is ambiguity.

Clearly, clarity and mystery are mutually exclusive. One always rules out the other. MacArthur, describes the indispensable importance of clarity as well as the spiritually devastating results that inevitably occur when this critical doctrine is defied or denied. He wrote, “The doctrine of biblical perspicuity is critical to the life and mission of the church. If believers cannot know with any degree of assurance that they accurately understand God’s Word, they have no hope of rightly applying divine instruction in their everyday lives.”<sup>73</sup>

Clarity, therefore, is the doctrine which pleasingly answers the oft-asked question, “Can I understand for myself what the Bible means?” Clarity’s answer of course is “absolutely yes!”

MacArthur adds,

McLaren undermines the clarity of Scripture by questioning whether biblical doctrine can be held with certainty. He questions the clarity of Scripture by needlessly introducing complexity into biblical interpretation . . . disdain for the perspicuity of Scripture. McLaren’s position on the perspicuity of Scripture is clearly at odds with what the Bible itself says about its own clarity.<sup>74</sup>

Mayhue leaves this challenge,

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<sup>72</sup> Grudem, *Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, 52.

<sup>73</sup> MacArthur, “Perspicuity of Scripture: The Emergent Approach,” 158.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

Does the emerging church, as presently envisioned and understood by Bryan McLaren, in this his manifesto [Generous Orthodoxy], have any solid shape to it? By his own words, it could be concluded that it is more like an amorphous blob. Where is it going? What will it be like? He does not know—by his own admission. Therefore he generally obfuscates the truth rather than clarifies it.<sup>75</sup>

Mayhue closes out with this logical ending. “It is impossible to imagine Jesus, Peter, James, or Paul saying such a thing. It is inconceivable that the heroic martyrs of the faith would have given their very lives for such uncertainty.”<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

As previously stated in the introduction to this chapter, “The importance for sound hermeneutics for anyone (in the EC or wherever) ... cannot be overstated. Simply put, without the ability to hear and understand God’s word, everyone would be hopelessly lost.”<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the task of elucidating the accurate meaning of a biblical text, both for the EC and for all interpreters, must be done through “faithful exegesis that is rooted in the sound hermeneutical principles articulated by the historical-grammatical method.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Richard L. Mayhue, “The Emerging Church: Generous Orthodoxy or General Obfuscation?” *MSJ* 17/2 (Fall 2006), 203.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Jason Sexton, “Hermeneutics of the Emerging Church.”

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 2

### THE HERMENEUTICS OF MARK DRISCOLL

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate two *critical* steps in the Hermeneutical process (interpretation and application), explaining how they harmoniously relate. The hermeneutics of Mark Driscoll will be examined, following a brief overview of his Christian testimony and his relationship to the EC.

#### **Mark Driscoll: Pre and Post-salvation**

Another EC leader, of a more conservative ilk, is Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church. Driscoll's hermeneutics and homiletics will be examined further in the next two chapters.

Driscoll is a potent example of a person who has beaten the odds. From childhood, Driscoll distinguished himself from his father and grandfather in his stiffened resolve to make something significant out of his life. Born in a small town in North Dakota, Driscoll (the first of five children) was born into a long line of wife-beating, alcohol-abusing men. Violence was a normal part of life for young Driscoll. He said, "I grew up with a lot of violence ... a lot of violence."<sup>1</sup> Now a church planter and author, Driscoll looks back on family life on the streets of Seattle (where he was raised) with

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Driscoll (session 3 of the Convergent Conference at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., September 21, 2007) <http://apps.sebts.edu/chapel/pdf/logBook.pdf> (accessed March 2, 2009).

various blood-curdling memories. Recollections of serial killers, street fights, and having a knife pulled on him more than once remain fresh in his mind to this day.<sup>2</sup>

If violence at home and outside the home did not discourage him, church-life accomplished the job. Church was unappealing to Driscoll because it was grounded in lies, hypocrisy, and false assurance, not the kind of thing that would appeal to a young boy. Religion was more harmful than helpful. Reared under the odious influence of Catholicism, young Driscoll determined from a young age that he would have nothing to do with church and hypocrisy, so at age 12 or 13 he quit going to church.

Despite the deterioration of his family, neighborhood, and church, Driscoll worked hard and disciplined himself for excellence. With delinquency and criminal activity all around, Driscoll was able to stay out of trouble and succeed in school. As editor of the school newspaper and captain of the baseball team, he enjoyed sweet success in academics as well as athletics. He was “the classic overachiever.”<sup>3</sup> Driscoll’s perseverance paid off handsomely with a full scholarship to Washington State University (being voted in as *Most Likely to Succeed*, student body president, and a four-year letterman<sup>4</sup>). Looking back on his pre-conversion days, Driscoll now sniffs the stench of his youthful self-righteous pride. He recalls, “I was very proud to have never drunk alcohol, smoked a cigarette, tried a drug, or voted Republican.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2004), 11.

College life brought its own set of twists and turns. Sadly, Driscoll's auspicious High School career did not cross over smoothly into college, thanks to a frat fight that stripped him of his scholarship and almost landed him in prison! The redeeming sunshine is that at this time, God was already drawing Driscoll nearer to Himself and to spiritual salvation.

Shortly after the fight, Driscoll got convicted of his pharisaical hypocrisy and was through the working of the Holy Spirit, born-again at the young age of nineteen.<sup>6</sup> Recalling the verse God used to assure him of salvation, Driscoll writes, "As I was sitting on my dorm bed, the words of Romans 1:6, 'And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,' sounded in my head like an alarm."<sup>7</sup> From the onset new life in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), Driscoll possessed a profound affection for the Bible. He began, in his words, "studying Scripture with the enthusiasm of a glutton at a buffet."<sup>8</sup>

Subsequent to salvation, Driscoll grew greatly in his knowledge of Scripture, and graduated college with a Philosophy degree. His young heart was ignited for the Lord. He wished to do only three things with his life: 1) preach the gospel, 2) plant a church, and 3) train men to do the same. So as an optimistic 25-year-old, holding no seminary degree or ordination license, Driscoll planted Mars Hill Church in Seattle.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 14.

Granted, Driscoll's work for the Lord is inspiring. But Driscoll goes farther, claiming his work was divinely inspired.<sup>9</sup> He said, "He [God] told me to lead men, preach Scripture, plant churches, marry Grace, and trust him."<sup>10</sup> Remarkably, this is what Driscoll did and is still doing today.

Driscoll's rise from "worst to first" is captured well in an article featuring his first book,

*Confessions of a Reformission Rev* is about how God took a broken Bible study with a dozen young people in America's least churched city—where there are more dogs than evangelicals—and grew it to 5,000 people. In less than 10 years, Mars Hill has helped influence 100 church plants around the nation and gone to number one on *iTunes* for religion/spirituality.<sup>11</sup>

### **Driscoll and the EC**

At twenty-six, Driscoll's first experience with the EC came by way of a phone call from Chris Seay, a young minister involved with an organization called Leadership Network.<sup>12</sup> Upon recently planting Mars Hill, the Leadership Network invited Driscoll to speak at an upcoming Leadership Network conference in California. Driscoll accepted,

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<sup>9</sup> This writer differs with Driscoll on this point. I prefer to reserve the phrase "God speaks" to the limited context of inspired Scripture, as implied in 2 Tim 3:16.

<sup>10</sup> Driscoll, *The Radical Reformission*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Jason Bailey, "Men are from Mars Hill," *Christianity Today (Web Only)*, July 4, 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/julyweb-only/127-52.0.html?start=2>; (accessed October 20, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> According to Wikipedia, "Leadership Network is a nonprofit that helps innovative Christian leaders increase their impact. Leadership Network's main office is located in Dallas, Texas. It has also been less precisely described as 'a non-profit church-growth consulting firm', 'research group and consultant,' 'a church-growth think tank', and 'a church consultant group'. According to the LN website, "Leadership Network's mission is to *identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.*"



lecturing on the transition from the modern to the postmodern (a sermon he called, “Flight from God”<sup>13</sup>).

The sudden and unexpected success of the message was felt most intensely by its deliverer. Driscoll had no idea of the wave he had started by that one sermon. He writes, “To my surprise and delight, it ended up being the bestselling tape from any event at the conference center that year.”<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, Driscoll’s Leadership Network stardom, and EC involvement was far from over, it was just beginning. In the ensuing months, Driscoll began a rigorous touring campaign around the country, along with a team of young ministers formed by Leadership Network.<sup>15</sup> The team flew around the country “speaking to other ministers about the emerging culture and the emerging church.”<sup>16</sup>

Leadership Network created additional connections for Driscoll. Some of the men associated more closely with Driscoll and Leadership Network included: Doug Pagitt (minister of *Solomon’s Porch* in Minnesota), Chris Seay, and McLaren.<sup>17</sup> Others more loosely associated with the organization include: “minister and author Dan Kimball, youth minister Tony Jones, minister and *www.Ooze.com* founder Spencer Burke, and blogger and itinerant minister Andrew Jones.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation*, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Including Leonard Sweet, Stan Grenz, Sally Morgenthaler, George Hunsberger and Tom Sine, for further detail see Driscoll’s *The Radical Reformation*, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Navigating the Emerging Church Highway,” *The Christian Research Journal* 31/04 (2008), 12.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

More experienced in life and ministry, men like Pagitt and McLaren willingly spent time with the young minister. Acquaintances were made over amiable chats on trendy topics such as postmodernism, and the cultural relevance of the church. To this day, Driscoll speaks honorably of these men for their warmth and social graces.

All that aside, the fading relationship between Driscoll and the Leadership Network is accounted for most by doctrinal incongruity. The more these men involved themselves in doctrinal discourse, the more apparent it became that on key doctrines, Pagitt and McLaren were as far apart as the *literal* is from the *figurative* in hermeneutics.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Driscoll withdrew from the Leadership Network.

In matters of doctrine, Driscoll is doggedly firm on the core doctrines of the faith,<sup>20</sup> he does not broad-brush all beliefs (or all leaders for that matter) in the EC. But to cut to the chase surrounding where Driscoll stands in the murky waters of the EC sea, Driscoll has conveniently catalogued the beliefs of the various schools of thought among EC church types. He has divided the EC highway into four lanes: Emerging Evangelicals, House Church Evangelicals, Emerging Reformers and Emerging Liberals.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Both Pagitt and McLaren fail on the homosexuality issue. When Pagitt was asked, “Is it OK for a Christian to be a homosexual?” He replied, “Yes.” McLaren skirts the issue entirely, paralyzed by the fear of man. When asked for his position on homosexuality, he told *Time Magazine*, “You know what, the thing that breaks my heart is that there’s no way I can answer it without hurting someone on either side.” McLaren prefers the path of least resistance – that of ambiguity and avoidance. To his credit, Driscoll despises cowardice and brings straight answers to boiling issues; his stand against sin is stalwart.

<sup>20</sup> Core doctrines of Christianity are uncompromised by Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church. Driscoll cherishes the precious doctrines of the Bible (i.e. inspiration, inerrancy, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the virgin birth, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ). For more info see Mars Hill’s doctrine on the church’s website ([www.marshillchurch.org](http://www.marshillchurch.org)).

<sup>21</sup> Driscoll, “Navigating the Emerging Church Highway,” 12–21.

### Four Streams of the EC

First, the *Emerging Evangelicals*. This stream of the EC is all about being hip and cool for Christ. They want church to be cool and hot, not cold and not. Making positive connection to culture is top priority to them. The idea that you have to *sing* the culture to *win* the culture is the *Modus Operandi* of these men. Their goal is to find common ground so that ministry can then take place. Men like Don Kimball, Rick McKinley, Don Miller (author of “Blue Like Jazz”), and John Burke fit this category. These men are not doctrinally heretical, at least on the fundamentals of the faith, but are deeply passionate about widening the church’s influence through pop-culture, post-modern means and technologically trendy methods. They are the innovationists, the creativity crowd, the “new ways of doing things” group, all in the name of ministry for the Master. They are not trying to change Christianity, they are seeking to make church and Christianity more applicable to people who otherwise have no interest.

Driscoll said of this group,

"We're not trying to change all of Christianity - we're just trying to make church and Christianity more relevant—more applicable to people who otherwise have no interest in Jesus or church. We [Emergent Reformers] would disagree with them on a few things: a lot of them have women ministers and such, but for the most part that lane's fine. We're not gonna do any drive-bys. We love them. It's cool."<sup>22</sup>

Second, the *House Church Evangelicals*. This brand is simple, they like small churches better than big churches. Speaking of this group, Driscoll perceives them as preferring small churches to big churches. Meeting in houses and coffee shops with ten, twenty, thirty people max, is better than the mega church model in their estimation.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Driscoll does not share this particular view of church order, but by-in-large he has no qualms with this group doctrinally.

Third, the *Emerging Liberals* (a.k.a. Reconstructionists). This stream consists of people who are more of a threat than anyone else, according to Driscoll. This includes: Pagitt, Bell, Tony Jones and McLaren. They place an extremely high emphasis on the experiential, even to the desertion of orthodox doctrine. The consensus view is that postmoderns are highly relational; they must be granted freedom of expression in order to sort out their spiritual lives.

In many cases they feature a blended, eclectic approach to worship, sharing in various religious activities (many of which are borrowed from Pagan religions) that have been “Christianized” to suit their tastes; they are vying for acceptance of this new kind of *religious* freedom of expression among mainstream evangelicalism. Afterall, they reason, Christianity is not a dead set of codes or doctrinal assertions / affirmations, it is based on a relationship of grace. With a high emphasis on experience, this brand of EC is amorphous in shape, unbiblical in doctrine, and unpredictable in practice. It purposely avoids categories and labels, preferring instead to be known simply as “a conversation.”

The major division between Driscoll and Revisionists, however, is in the area of doctrine. Because Pagitt caves on the doctrine of hell, Bell on the Virgin Birth of Christ, and McLaren on the issue of homosexuality, Driscoll has parted company with this group entirely.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Driscoll, “Navigating the Emerging Church Highway.”

Raising a warning to his Mars Hill flock, Driscoll said, “I would not have them teach here, I would not sell their books here, and I can’t recommend for you to listen to them.”<sup>24</sup> Driscoll views their doctrinal compromise as abhorrent. He has openly separated himself from their fellowship and continues to warn the undiscerning of the dangerous path these men are plotting. Doctrinally, he views them as “off the highway and lost out in the woods.”<sup>25</sup>

The fourth group is the *Emergent Reformers*. This is Driscoll’s camp, so some further elaboration is to be expected. Akin to the *Relevants*, this camp too is trendy and techy in their approach to ministry. Driscoll elucidates, “These are people who believe all the evangelical distinctives and are trying to find a way to make the church more relevant, accessible, [and] culturally connected.”<sup>26</sup> One way to accomplish this goal is through church planting (i.e. the *Acts 29 Network*). Some of the big names in this group are: Tim Keller (a church planter in NYC), and C.J. Mahaney of Sovereign Grace Ministries. Theologically, “these men love the reformed theological tradition.”<sup>27</sup> Dead white guys<sup>28</sup> from long ago are their favorite theologians, including: Calvin, Luther, the Puritans, Edwards, and Spurgeon. The men who helped start Evangelicalism (Billy

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Should I listen to the E.C. Church Types?” You Tube video, 4:38, March 1, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3px0viXLYQ>, (accessed February 27, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Religion Saves & Nine Other Misconceptions: Emerging Church (Session 8)” (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, February 24, 2008), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/religionsaves>, (accessed March 2, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Fear, Judgment, & Obedience,” (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, August 3, 2003), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/ecclesiastes>, (accessed March 2, 2009).

Graham, John Stott, J.I. Packer, Francis Schaffer) are also esteemed. Theological favorites include scholars like Carson, Grudem, and Piper.

Driscoll believes the biggest difference between the theologians of yesteryear and the Emergent Reformers is over worship style. Driscoll said, “It (EC Reformed) tends to be different than older Reformed theology in that worship is pretty free, and we tend to be charismatic, meaning all the gifts are for today: speaking in tongues, healing. We believe in all of that. And we tend to be a little more loose about it.”<sup>29</sup>

In sum, Driscoll is an EC Minister, but he simply cannot and should not be misplaced into the 3<sup>rd</sup> category of Emergent Liberals. He is theologically conservative.

### **The Importance of Hermeneutics**

What is “hermeneutics”? The classic definition of *hermeneutics* is the “art and science of Bible interpretation.” Moises Silva adds, “Some writers like to call it the *science* of interpretation; others prefer to speak of the *art* of interpretation (perhaps with the implication, ‘Either you’ve got it or you don’t’).”<sup>30</sup> Regardless of perspective, the common concern here is single - biblical interpretation. Simply put, “Hermeneutics” is about interpretation, not just biblical interpretation, *but right* biblical interpretation. There is a wrong way to handle Scripture, Hermeneutics is the field of study that sheds light on the *right* way of handling it, or cutting it straight (2 Tim 2:15). My definition of biblical hermeneutics is this, “Hermeneutics is a set of principles for interpretation the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 15.

Bible, which when accurately applied, lead to a reliable and trustworthy understanding of what God has said.”

The word “Hermeneutics” has an intriguing history. Hermes was a Greek god who allegedly interpreted messages for mortals, messages from the gods. The word *hermeneuo* means “to explain, interpret.” In Luke 24:37, the compound form (*diermeneuw*) is employed. In the last chapter of Luke (Lk 24), the master interpreter, Jesus Christ himself, interprets the Old Testament for two little-known men as the three walked down the road of Emmaus just three short days after the Messiah’s crucifixion. As the master spoke, he purposely kept his resurrected identity a secret, and in so doing, afforded the men the joy of discovering who he was as he accurately unraveled the Old Testament prophecy concerning himself. What a teaching lesson? As He unraveled the Old Testament, He unveiled His glory. How wonderful it must have been for these men to hear Jesus teach about *himself*.

This crash course in Old Testament Hermeneutics reaped amazing results for the students. The result was that the men’s hearts burned within them (v 32). James Rosscup rightly wrote, “Good, sound hermeneutics can produce burning hearts.”<sup>31</sup> Hermeneutics is so important to the Lord that He purposely reserved his post-resurrection revelation for it. Instead of dazzling light and supernatural wonders, the Messiah used good Hermeneutics to reveal His resurrection! If Hermeneutics was that important to the Lord, should it be of less importance to us?

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<sup>31</sup> James Rosscup, “BI 505 Hermeneutics,” unpublished class syllabus, The Master’s Seminary, 2007, 20.

Bible interpretation (Hermeneutics) is a trendy topic these days. In recent years, the book market has been flooded with new Hermeneutic books. In the 1990s alone, at least seventeen major works were published on the subject in the United States.<sup>32</sup> These works are diverse in their approach, revealing a seismic shift in the way Scriptures are being interpreted and applied. These shifts are not new, but have been slowly emerging from the 1960s. Silva writes, “Hardly any sphere of the interpretive process has escaped major restructuring and rethinking since the decade of the sixties. The life of the interpreter will never be what it was prior to the last half of this century.”<sup>33</sup>

One particularly destructive trend is the blurring of interpretation with application. Brian Shealy observes, “However, among evangelicals recent trends in biblical interpretation are obscuring the line between hermeneutics and application, making accurate interpretation and valid application difficult, if not impossible to achieve.”<sup>34</sup>

Simply put, the interpreter must buck the trend if he values divine approval. When God wrote the Bible he wrote it with meaning and intent. Faithfulness and fidelity to the true meaning of the text is therefore synonymous with respecting the author! To put it another way, proper interpretation and the preservation of God’s “meaning in the message” are inextricably linked. An eclectic hermeneutic may be trendy and cool, but its effects are costly. An eclectic hermeneutic takes the plain meaning of the plain text

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Shealy, “Redrawing the Line Between Hermeneutics and Application,” in *Evangelical Hermeneutic: The New Versus. The Old*, Robert L. Thomas, Ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 165.

<sup>33</sup> Kaiser and Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation: The Search for Meaning*, 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



and changes it into something altogether ambiguous and hard to find. Such scriptural rabbit chasing almost always leads in the wrong direction, most often causing the interpreter to miss the point of the Bible altogether! MacArthur frequently reminds students at *The Master's Seminary*, "The meaning of the Scripture *is* the Scripture." Therefore, in a very real sense, if the meaning is lost, the Scriptures have also been lost!

This flurry of changes in Hermeneutics should trigger sober-minded interpreters toward a higher scrutiny and more precise handling of the text. Discrimination is not a *bad word* in Hermeneutics; the opposite is the case actually. The more discriminating the interpreter is, the greater his chances of preserving the message from God to men. Should a novice interpreter find himself in a bit of a fix regarding the set of hermeneutical principles he should use, he should take heart, the grammatical-historical method this writer practice is a solid place to start.

The grammatical-historical method of interpretation is based on time-tested principles, common sense, and a strong sensitivity to the structure of the Bible (taking into account its historical, literal, and grammatical aspects). This method is the only reliable compass for the wavy sea of hermeneutical uncertainty. Again, right Hermeneutics is not a secondary matter, it is primary! Since right application is built on right interpretation; everything rises and falls on Hermeneutics.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> After considering some of the hermeneutical systems, this writer is convinced of only one biblically sound system, the traditional system (traditional, grammatical–historical hermeneutics).

### Interpretation and Application

Much could be written about the practice of Hermeneutics, but for the purpose of this assessment, only two elements will be examined: *interpretation* (i.e. “What does this text mean?”) and *application* (“What does this text mean to me in my current situation?”). Again, what is of primary concern is the necessity of these two principles remaining interdependent, application depending on, not determining interpretation. In this stolid rubric, interpretation is searched for first, application (s) follows. As it is often said, “interpretation is one, application is many.”<sup>36</sup>

The importance of distinguishing the single interpretation from the many applications that can be drawn from it is best explained by Milton Terry, a long-standing authority on biblical interpretation. Terry wrote this at the end of his study of biblical hermeneutics:

In all our private study of the Scriptures for personal edification we do well to remember that the first and great thing is to lay hold of the real spirit and meaning of the sacred writer. There can be no true application, and no profitable taking to ourselves of any lessons of the Bible, unless we first clearly apprehend their original meaning and reference. To build a moral lesson upon an erroneous interpretation of the language of God's Word is a reprehensible procedure. But he who clearly discerns the exact grammatico-historical sense of a passage, is the better qualified to give it any legitimate application which its language and context will allow. Accordingly, in homiletical discourse, the public teacher is bound to base his applications of the truths and lessons of the divine Word upon a correct apprehension of the primary signification of the language which he assumes to expound and enforce. To misinterpret the sacred writer is to discredit any application one may make of his words. But when, on the other hand, the preacher first shows, by a valid interpretation, that he thoroughly comprehends that which is written, his various allowable accommodations of the writer's words will have the greater force, in whatever practical applications he may give them.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Hermeneutics*, 113.

<sup>37</sup> Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 600.

Is it any wonder that preachers are running the gamut when it comes to interpreting and applying the Bible in a sermon. The self-centered, narcissistic culture of our day is clearly reflected in the over-emphasis on application in preaching, and that most often to the neglect of interpretation. What tends to be the trend today is preaching that is high on application and low on interpretation. Often preachers stick to topical sermons that often wrench verses out of context to support the preacher's message (not God's message). Almost equally obstructive, are those who go too far with interpretation and function more like historians and grammarians than biblical expositors. What is patently obvious is two binary opposite methods at work.

Roy Zuck helpfully explains, "Christians tend to make one of two errors in applying the Bible. Either they give too little attention to application or they give too much attention to it."<sup>38</sup> Zuck explains, "In the first error some feel interpretation is enough, that Bible study is complete when a passage has been interpreted. In the second error others tend to move toward application before fully and accurately interpreting a passage. However, application without interpretation leaves us open to applying the Bible improperly."<sup>39</sup>

There must be a direct and dynamic correlation between application and interpretation. Grant Osborne explains, "The most important thing is to base the application/contextualization on the intended meaning of the text [the interpretation]. We want the passage to live anew in our current situation, but it must be the inspired message

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<sup>38</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs: Victor Publishing, 1991), 279.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

which is relived rather than our subjective manipulation of the text. Therefore, we determine what the text says [that's interpretation] before we apply it."<sup>40</sup>

In summation, if application is the engine that drives the hermeneutical train, it is headed for a wreck! Similarly, if accurate application flows only from accurate interpretation, it makes good sense that is also to follow it.

Rosscup, explains the distinction of interpretation to application. One of the primary aims of his course is "to help students develop a keener awareness of the difference between the interpretation of a passage, that is, the meaning of what it does say, and any applications that may legitimately flow from this interpretation."<sup>41</sup>

Shealy explains, "Application as I learned it has well-defined limits, being controlled by the meanings produced through the use of hermeneutical principles."<sup>42</sup>

Zuck ends it best, "build application on interpretation."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 344.

<sup>41</sup> Rosscup, "BI 505 Hermeneutics," 3.

<sup>42</sup> Shealy, "Redrawing the Line Between Hermeneutics and Application," 166.

<sup>43</sup> Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 282.

## The Description and Evaluation of Driscoll's Hermeneutics

### The Description of Driscoll's Hermeneutics

Type	Title	Text
Doctrinal	"God Makes"	Genesis 1–2
Doctrinal	"God Speaks"	Selected Scriptures
Topical	Humor: From "Religion Saves and 9 Other Misconceptions"	Selected Scriptures
Topical	"Christ, Controversy and Cutting Words"	Selected Scriptures
Expositional	"Fear, Judgment, Obedience"	Ecclesiastes 12:9–14
Expositional	"Stopping Self-Indulgence"	Ephesians 5:1–12
Expositional	"The Seven Churches of Revelation"	Revelation 2–3

This writer listened to each of the above sermons at least twice, some three times, each time jotting down his observations. The assessment falls into five categories:

- A. Historical / biblical background:
- B. Remote context:
- C. Immediate context (grammatical / syntactical / lexical):
- D. Interpretation:
- E. Application:

The goal of this assessment was to examine the level of hermeneutical accuracy exhibited by a leading conservative representative from the EC. Thoroughly reformed in theology, Driscoll claims to have a literal hermeneutic. While researching this writer has

found that professing a literal interpretation of Scripture and practicing one are not always the same. Claiming something and committing to that same thing cannot always be assumed. The aim of this assessment is to provide a sure-footed grid to help discerning readers understand the hermeneutical inconsistencies of Driscoll's preaching.

For Driscoll, it appears plainly that Hermeneutics is the final factor in determining his theology. Vitaly important issues like marriage and gender roles hang *on* and *from* his Hermeneutic. In a commendable outcry against feminism for example, Driscoll explained how his hermeneutic led him to a complimentary view of gender and roles. He writes,

I will now simply come out of the closet and reveal that I am an intense biblical literalist who believes that the man is the head of the home, the man should provide for his family, that children are a blessing, and that we would not have so many deceived feminists running around if men were better husbands and fathers because the natural reaction of godly women to godly men is trust and respect.<sup>44</sup>

Distinguishing himself from the haphazard handlers of Scripture among the EC, Driscoll writes, "They do not believe in a singular truthful interpretation. They believe that the interpreter ultimately has authority over the text and can therefore use it as he or she pleases rather than submit to it."<sup>45</sup> Here, Driscoll describes his own hermeneutic, the literal hermeneutic.

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<sup>44</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2006), 66–67.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

## The Evaluation of Driscoll's Hermeneutics

### *Question #1 – the Question of Biblical / Historical Background*

The historical background of a biblical book or theological subject is essential to comprehensive comprehension. One cannot correctly interpret present context apart from historical context (i.e. historical background). If the past is the key to the present, then one must go backward in time before he can move forward in understanding. If one is divorced from the past, not only is he needlessly ignorant (considering the many good resources and commentaries available), but the proclivity of him not swerving deathly off the road of hermeneutical fidelity is staggering, if not utterly predictable. Without a deep grounding in the biblical context, interpreters are left to meander in a maze, a maze of musings and fancies. Without strict hermeneutical principles, the door to “error” is ajar, making room for speculation and imagination to walk in like honored guests, driving out interpretation with their entrance. This has had catastrophic results whenever it has been practiced.

By necessity then, interpreters must engage with scholastic writings of the past, checking their research carefully against their own. When this cross-checking is complete, the result should be a well-balanced, well-informed, and historically accurate exposition. And since the scrutiny for teachers is the strictest of all (Ja 3:1), one cannot labor too intensely to procure an unashamed approval rating before the holy bar of God (2 Tim 2:2, 15). Since the first century apostles, ministers are simply called to be faithful (1 Cor 4:1), following the faith of other faithful men (2 Tim 2:2; Heb 13:7, 17).

On a more practical note, this step includes basic background into the genre of the biblical book, as well as its author, date, occasion, theme, and purpose. These historical

and literary markers are the vital organs of healthy exposition. Pertinent to and permanent in sound exposition, these organs provide external controls for the interpreter, that is, an accurate contextual framework in which to build his sermon. Outside of this framework, the preacher is likely to twist the text out of context, making him no better than Satan in his lies. A text without a context is only a pretext.

Before this writer evaluates Driscoll at this critical juncture, a few enjoinders are necessary. First, of the three expositional sermons, none were the first in a series. This is important because traditionally a good sermon series will be fronted with good background material, thereby setting the course of the series in the right direction. Since none of the expositional sermons listened to were the first in a series, this may account, at least in part, for the patent absence of historical background in these sermons. Be assured however, this writer listened to two other sermon series,<sup>46</sup> Driscoll's historical background was very minimal.

Of the sermons surveyed, the Ecclesiastes 12 message provided the strongest historical underpinnings. The background was brief but helpful. The sermon was over one hour in length, with less than twenty seconds of historical background at the beginning of the message! Driscoll's historical summary is:

The theme of Ecclesiastes so far has primarily been wisdom, and he has juxtaposed that continuously with folly. Tonight he is going to tell us how to obtain wisdom, up until this point he has in large part argued for the benefits of wisdom, and now he is telling us how to receive it. And so if you would, we will just jump right in, chapter twelve [and] verse nine.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This writer has listened in entirety to "Trial," (a sermon series on 1 Peter), as well as "The Peasant Princess" (a sermon series on the Song of Solomon).

<sup>47</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Fear, Judgment, & Obedience," (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, August 3, 2003), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/ecclesiastes>, (accessed March 2, 2009)



In Ephesians, Driscoll mentioned nearly no historical data whatsoever on the local church at Ephesus (Eph 1:1). Aside from an aside about the sins committed today differing little from that of the first century (something painfully obvious by observation), no specific reference to the church or the culture surrounding it was mentioned. In hindsight, more background would have better grounded the text in its historical context.

In Revelation, there was never a mention of genre. Revelation is arguably the most controversial (and confusing) book in the canon, yet no interpretive framework was provided by Driscoll. This was disappointing in lieu of all the scholarship available on this subject. Furthermore, no polemic detailing the reason Driscoll holds the literal-historical perspective was given either. By observation, it appears the controversial or “more problematic” areas of interpretation were conveniently left unmentioned. This writer recognizes that this is a sermon, not an exegetical commentary, yet Driscoll’s dance around, not through the interpretive issues of the passage (though not a major issue for most listeners) casts doubt in my mind of his priority for literal-interpretation, and historical background in particular.

On the positive side, there were at least three historical things mentioned about Revelation 2–3. This was helpful. First, John was mentioned as the inspired author. Second, the place of writing was given as John’s exile to the island called Patmos. Third, Driscoll made excellent contrastive comparisons concerning the bearing of Christ in Revelation, juxtaposed with his posture in the Gospels. Driscoll highlighted the humility of Christ in the incarnation (he was simple, poor, and common) with the high honors he will receive at His second revelation (exaltation, triumph, victory, and glory). His comparisons drew largely from Revelation 1 and the Gospel accounts. Additionally,

Driscoll helpfully highlighted the contrast between the exaltation of Christ in his perfect state with the imperfect state of the church—“a work in progress,”<sup>48</sup> as he called it.

On the whole though, this sermon was disappointing since no historical background into any of the churches or cities in which they lived was ever mentioned. A great deal was spoken about what can be learned from the text (application), yet almost nothing from the historical context of the text was explained (historical background). A glaring imbalance in these hermeneutical categories must be considered. In his doctrinal messages, Driscoll stepped it up significantly. In “God Makes,” the various views on how to interpret “day” were enumerated, though there was no trace of thoughtful argumentation behind Driscoll’s view. Driscoll takes the literal “twenty-four-hour day” position, but perceives this as not a primary issue. In his view, everyone at Mars Hill is entitled to his own view, not to the literal hermeneutic. The pastoral staff at Mars Hill Church stand divided on this issue, but agreeably. If Driscoll fully affirmed the literal hermeneutic, the creation account of Genesis one and two, should be the opportune passage to make that clear to all, therein making a clear stand for consistency of interpretation. Disappointedly, Driscoll’s commitment to the literal hermeneutic substantially weakened, when in this writer’s estimation, it should have stiffened.

In “God Speaks,” a solid biblical and historical background was provided. “We live in a world full of obsession with communication,” Driscoll begun. “Because we are made in the image of God we speak to each other ... [much the same ways as God speaks

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<sup>48</sup> Mark Driscoll, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, October 5, 2003), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/revelation>, (accessed March 2, 2009).

to himself within] the Trinitarian community.”<sup>49</sup> Driscoll explained *revelation* as, “God’s means by which He has chosen to reveal to us, to speak to us.”<sup>50</sup> ... Unless God speaks, we would not know Him ... without revelation there is only speculation (philosophy, spirituality, religion, social science).”<sup>51</sup> The frequency of the phrase “God said” in Genesis 1 (10x in one chapter), strengthened his teaching on this subject. Driscoll thoroughly explained the two kinds of revelation (general and special), providing biblical examples for each. Overall, this sermon scored higher than the rest because it was the most biblical, the most comprehensive, and provided the most background information.

*Question #2 – the Question of Remote Context:*

Remote context refers to the context of either a given biblical writer or genre. The remote context is important to understand because it shows how a biblical book or doctrinal theme fits in and relates to the broader canon. Remote context is the pivotal antidote against biased, one-sided approaches to Scripture. Understanding the remote context of a passage (speaker, audience, and textual placement in the book, genre, or Testament) helps the interpreter understand and apply the text with pinpoint accuracy. Without it, the interpreter has a better chance of getting struck by lightning than of getting to the correct meaning of the passage.

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<sup>49</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Revelation: God Speaks,” (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, April 6, 2008, , Minneapolis, MN, September 27, 2009), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/doctrine?page=2> (accessed March 2, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Driscoll showed strength in this area. In his message on Ecclesiastes, Driscoll did a good job explaining the profligate lifestyle of the book's author, Solomon. Driscoll demonstrated how Solomon was the wisest fool who ever lived because he learned by experience not by obedience. At end of his life, Solomon looked back with solemn regret on his wanton sinfulness, "drinking to the point of drunkenness ... acting like an imbecile."<sup>52</sup> The remote context tunes the listener into the context of the author, concurrently shedding additional light on the passage. Driscoll depended heavily on chapter two of Ecclesiastes while fleshing this out.

In his message on Ephesians, remote context was also provided, shedding greater light into the why and how for "Stopping Self-Indulgence."<sup>53</sup> The why was provided by harking back to the grace of God in salvation (Eph 2:8–9), the source of the believer's new life, and verse 10 as the goal of the new life; "created for good works" (2:10). The how was illustrated by harking back to the remote context of 4:22, the "put off, put on" principle of the new life. By referencing both the doctrinal (2:8–9) and practical (4:22–24) remote context, Driscoll carved his message out well from its remote context. To wrap up, Eph 2:8–9 provided the bigger picture of salvation, Eph 2:10 provided the big picture of the new life - good works, and Eph 4:22–24 provided the smaller picture—how to put off sin and put on righteousness.

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<sup>52</sup> Driscoll, "Fear, Judgment, & Obedience."

<sup>53</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Stopping Self Indulgence," (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, December 8, 2002).<http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/ephesians>, (accessed March 2, 2009).

*Question #3 – the Question of Immediate Context (grammar, syntactical, lexical study):*

While remote context assesses a biblical writer and genre, the immediate context assesses the actual passage of study. To be fair, like historical background, this was harder to assess because of Driscoll's survey-like approach to exposition (he covers a lot of verses in each sermon). Because so many verses are covered, many of the exegetical, grammatical, syntactical, and lexical details appear absent from his teaching. It is not uncommon (as in two of the sermons critiqued) for Driscoll to cover entire chapters of the Bible in one message (Genesis 1–2 for "God Makes" and Revelation 2–3 for "The Seven Churches of Revelation"). Because of his sweeping style, depth must be sacrificed for breadth. Naturally, there is only so much depth that can be given in an hour of time when one is traversing through so many verses (nine in Ecclesiastes, twelve in Ephesians, and fifty-one in Revelation).

With that said, there were strengths and weaknesses here as well. By and large, when preaching exposition, Driscoll dealt considerably more with the text as a whole, so that little explanation was given to the finer points of grammatical construction, word choice, and syntax.

Positively, the uncommon word "goad" of Eccl 12:11 was rightly defined as "a piece of wood with nails out of the end."<sup>54</sup> The uncommonness of the plowman's term, necessitated further explanation because unless one is from an agrarian society, the term "goad" is alien. By defining "goad," Driscoll evaporated what would otherwise be a haze

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<sup>54</sup> Driscoll, "Fear, Judgment & Obedience."

of confusion over the minds of his listeners; Driscoll is to be commended for defining the word *and* illustrating it creatively for his hearers.

In Ecclesiastes, the explication of the kind of wisdom under discussion is vitally important (12:11). The Bible uses several words for wisdom, each carrying varying nuances of meaning.<sup>55</sup> The kind of wisdom is critical because even pagan religions (like Buddhism, Islam, and even Mormonism), teach the virtues of wisdom and the importance of obtaining it. With that said, a bit more precision is essential to abate any false parallels that could otherwise be inferred. In other words, the precise nuance (or truest sense) of the word *must* be communicated and in this message it was not. Reason being, there is worldly wisdom and there is “wisdom from above” (James 3:13ff). In fact, “wisdom” is such a major theme in the book of Ecclesiastes, and in the wisdom books in general, and in the Old Testament as a whole, that it necessitates a fuller explanation in context.

This writer is concerned that without clarification, the average hearer could easily mistake worldly wisdom (i.e. human wisdom) for the kind of wisdom Solomon refers to in Ecclesiastes twelve. Without this clarification, others will equate wisdom with making certain not to waste life’s lessons as synonymous with biblical wisdom. To be sure, this virtue certainly emanates from wisdom, but is certainly not the source of it. Driscoll equated wisdom with something you do, like being teachable. Again, I fear that many will unwittingly draw the wrong conclusions about how to attain wisdom, and waste

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<sup>55</sup> *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* cites at least six different uses: “1. skill in technical matters Ex 28:3; 2. experience, shrewdness; 3. the worldly wisdom of the חָכְמַיִם and of Egypt 1Kgs 5:10; 4. the pious wisdom of Israel Ps 90:12; 5. God’s wisdom 1K 3:28; 6. wisdom personified Jb 28:12ff.” Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Volumes 1–4, (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999, c1994–1996), 314.

precious time searching for wisdom in the wrong places. Driscoll said, wisdom comes from “life ... pain ... books ... [and] fearing God,”<sup>56</sup> or worse yet, from any combination of these, and not from fearing God only. As Proverbs 1:7a reads, “The fear of the Lord [alone] is the beginning [or source] of wisdom.” Therefore, because no clarification was given concerning either the divine nature of wisdom (Prv 9:10), or the divine source of wisdom (Prv 2:6), this writer is concerned that what was left unsaid might have been the key to unlock the nature of true wisdom. Unless this point had been clarified in an earlier or subsequent message, the explanations given (i.e. books, pain, life lessons) were misleading.

In his sermon on the seven churches, (Revelation 2–3), Driscoll worked methodically through the passage one church at a time. He left a lot out because he sprinted through all seven churches in a flash, cramming seven sermons into one (most preachers will preach seven sermons on the seven churches, one church per message). Seventy-five minutes on fifty-one verses, does not allow for ample coverage of the inner-workings of the passage. Overall, no major red flags here, though more will be developed in question #4.

*Question #4— the Question of Interpretation:*

As this writer has alluded to earlier, interpretation is the most critical category of all. The first three categories all contribute to and are a part of this category. A.W. Tozer soberly explained the specialization of biblical interpretation when he writes,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

The scholar has a vitally important task to perform within a carefully prescribed precinct. His task is to guarantee the purity of the text, to get as close as possible to the Word as originally given. He may compare Scripture with Scripture until he has discovered the true meaning of the text. But right there his authority ends.<sup>57</sup>

Again, pinpoint accuracy in interpretation is the basis for everything in a sermon. Interpretation of the text can be likened to the foundation of a building, if the foundation is off base, the whole building will be dangerously built and likely to topple. Similarly, if interpretation is off base, the body of the sermon is too. Erroneous interpretation kills the meaning of God's message, leaving hearers in the blackness of darkness. Terry explains:

There can be no true application, and no profitable taking to ourselves of any lessons of the Bible, unless we first clearly apprehend their original meaning and reference. To build a moral lesson upon an erroneous interpretation of the language of God's Word is a reprehensible procedure ... To misinterpret the sacred writer is to discredit any application one may make of his words. But when, on the other hand, the preacher first shows, by a valid interpretation, that he thoroughly comprehends that which is written, his various allowable accommodations of the writer's words will have the greater force, in whatever practical applications he may give them.<sup>58</sup>

In Ecclesiastes, Driscoll interpreted well the biblical concept of judgment by providing a short survey of some of the major acts of judgment God unleashed on the earth during both the Old Testament era (the curse of Genesis 3, the flood of Genesis 8–9, fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gommorah of Geneses 18–19, the death of the Egypt's firstborn in Exodus 12) and the New Testament era (Ananais and Saphira struck down dead for lying to the Holy Spirit in Acts 5, drunken fools executed by God for making a mockery of the communion table in 1 Corinthians 11). Driscoll also nailed the

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<sup>57</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961), 27–28.

<sup>58</sup> Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 600.



white throne (judgment of unbelievers) and bema seat (judgment of believers) distinction accurately.

The Ecclesiastes sermon was weaker here however because the sermon was almost entirely application. The main points were application points, not wrong in and of itself, but proved harmful because half of them (two out of four) were not built from solid exegesis of the text.

Points two and four were built on an accurate interpretation of the text. Principle #2 is, “Wisdom comes from pain”<sup>59</sup> (cf. 12:11). The goad Driscoll defined as “a piece of wood with nails out of the end.”<sup>60</sup> Issuing from accurate interpretation flowed accurate application, “God does love you but he loves you with a big stick with nails in it ... and what he’s trying to do is not kill you, what he is trying to do is correct you.”<sup>61</sup>

Points one and three, however, were not built on the text. Principle #1, “Wisdom comes through life.” Driscoll waxed eloquent here, “Wisdom comes through those who have experienced life and learned lessons through it ...”<sup>62</sup> His application was equally loose, “as you obtain wisdom, your goal should be, as it is for Solomon, to record what you have learned and then to teach that carefully to others in a way that is upright and true ... you can’t teach until you’ve lived something.”<sup>63</sup> This whole point is only half-true. If wisdom came through life, then all a person needs is a teachable spirit and he will

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<sup>59</sup> Driscoll, “Fear, Judgment, & Obedience.”

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

get along fine, getting wiser all the time. Nothing more need he know, not even Christ! However, since there are many old fools (and many wise youth), and no one is truly wise who does not know God, the principle is broken. He could have said, “Wisdom can come through rightly responding to God’s word.” This would have been more accurate. The point he made though was grounded in Driscoll, not in Scripture, and therefore lacked the effective power of the truth.

Principle #3 is, “Wisdom comes from books” (v 12). And the application, “I wanted to read after I got saved, not much before. Do you like books? If you don’t, you need to pray about that.”<sup>64</sup> Driscoll waxed eloquent (ten minutes is a conservative estimate) about the importance of reading and how much he himself loves to collect and read books.

All alone and apart from the text, principle #3 sounds great. This principle was reminiscent of the old children’s show *Reading Rainbow*, or of a *Book-It* advertisement from Pizza Hut, motivating children to read more books. Driscoll’s tips, though practically helpful, are nonetheless void of Scriptural foundation, and therefore not authoritative. Nothing in the text suggests that wisdom comes from books of all kinds.

The text is exalting specific reading material, Solomon’s own writings namely. This is seen in every verse (vv 9–12). Solomon is commending his own writings (vv 9–12) and the writings of other great scholars (v 11 – “the words of great masters”) as what his readers are to be admonished by (v 12). He is not giving an open-ended exhortation for people to read more widely (which only wearies the body, v 12), rather he was

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

providing a command to not waste time with man's wisdom ("many books," v 12a) but to *know* the commandments of God (which require Scripture saturation) and "keep" them (12:13).

This writer concludes therefore, that Driscoll's two application principles are merely uninspired suggestions, certainly not biblically derived. This writer concedes that apart from a hermeneutical procedure firmly rooted in Scripture (in the original language preferably), authoritative and life-transforming preaching cannot take place. Since Driscoll has no traceable exegesis or interpretation upon which to base two of his four points, he has left this writer no option but to question his interpretive integrity.

In spite of eager attempts to trace Driscoll's hermeneutical procedure, this writer continued to come up short. The problem is that application has been inaugurated as king. Driscoll's sermons bear this out, time and time again. Sermon points are all application, and not all are directly connected to Scripture, leaving doubt in my mind as to whether these messages can be legitimately classified as biblical exposition.

As an aside, this writer is well aware that the use of application as sermon points is the contemporary way to preach, and is not contending with this method. With that said, the application points must still be closely connected to the text in order to ring true, they cannot be random and disjointed from the text and still be an accurate reflection of what the text is teaching.

In the Ephesian sermon, Driscoll did not mention anything about the surrounding culture of Ephesus during the time of Paul's writing. There was no continuity, no bridge spanning the first and twenty-first centuries. Because the biblical context was not expounded, the sermon lacked historical situation. In this epistle, Driscoll did not

mention Ephesian believers at all, aside from the meager observation that what sinners struggled with then are the same ones we struggle with today. The passage was not translated in its original context, instead it was translated to the context of its audience. As a student of context, Driscoll's message begged for interpretive answers. What was happening in the church at Ephesus that provoked Paul to write on these matters? What did "coarse jesting" look like in the first century (5:4)? What was considered "foolish talk" at the time of writing (5:4)? How widespread were these vices among Ephesian believers? What does it mean to be "partaker together with them (5:7)?" or to have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (5:11)?" Major emphasis was placed on the contemporary scene (the Grunge culture of Seattle), almost none on original audience.

In his sermon on Revelation, Driscoll rightly interpreted the symbols of the book. Driscoll explained that the lampstands symbolized the churches, and that Jesus Christ comes to the churches. The unknown identity of the Nicolaitans was explained. Bronze was rightly interpreted as "the strength of iron, mixed with the enduring nature of copper, showing that Jesus is immovable, impenetrable, and enduring."<sup>65</sup> Jezebel (2:20) was also given great explanation from the Old Testament,

"Jezebel is one of the classic whores of the Old Testament ... Jezebel was a woman who, she was married to a king, she was a politically active woman, she had 900 false prophets ... (long tangent on false prophets), who would all speak lies, she was a sexually loose and immoral woman who led God's people into idolatry and into sexual perversion ... this woman is working in the spirit of Jezebel, Jezebel is long since dead, but apparently this woman is like one of her kids, one of her daughters."

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<sup>65</sup> Driscoll, "Fear, Judgment, & Obedience."

Hermeneutically, Driscoll blanked on a few places. First, to the loveless church at Ephesus (2:1–7), the purpose of the Lord’s rebuke was to redirect the church back to her first love (v 4). It is clear from the immediate context the “first love” is referring to—the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet love for the Lord Jesus Christ was barely whispered. Pure and loyal love for Christ alone, in my estimation, was actually deemphasized. Shockingly, the greatest commandment was overtaken by the lesser commandment (Mt 22:37ff). With at least five minutes of airtime devoted to calling people to obey the second command (Mt 22:39), it is appalling that the first commandment could go unnoticed. It is not surprising that since correct interpretation was deemphasized, incomplete application inevitably ensued. It is not an overstatement to suppose that some people walked away from that message thinking that their unloved neighbor was their “first love.”

What is being observed here is both an incompetent and an incomplete handling of the text. Driscoll talked for a solid five minutes on love for “one another” but not once did He elaborate on “love for God.” Granted that love for God is proved by love for believers (1 Jn 4:7–8; 5:1–3), but should not the former have been a point of the sermon?

Notwithstanding, the great commandment (Mt 22:37–39, “Love the Lord with all your heart ...) was cited along with 1 Jn 4:8 (“God is love”), but aside from a only a brief mention, no explanation was given about loving Christ. This was disappointing especially since both personal repentance (2:5) and obedient returning (2:5) to Jesus Christ as “first love” (2:4) was unspoken (though they are written as commands to be obeyed). This mixed up emphasis is most disturbing because it is love for Christ that is at the very heart of the command (repent and return) and the overall point of the rebuke.

To clarify, what this writer is not saying is that the church at Ephesus should *not* be concerned about loving their neighbor; this is certainly not the teaching of Scripture, and is in fact the clearest evidence for one's love for Christ (1 Jn 4:7–8, 20, 5:1–2). Loving one's neighbor is most surely an inseparable aspect of loving God (1 Jn 4:20), only that the object and goal of the passage was missed – the person of Jesus Christ. This kind of imprecise interpretation lacks the power of straight-cut truth, and the blessings of God ancillary with that. How indispensable is sound and strict hermeneutical procedure to soul and life-changing preaching?

Driscoll showed impreciseness in his misdiagnosis of the true spiritual condition of the Laodicean church (3:17). John describes the church's spiritual deadness in a dire fashion. “Wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, naked” are the descriptive adjectives he uses for this lifelessness church. When interpreting the adjective “naked,” Driscoll said, this “means you can't afford clothes.”<sup>66</sup> Naked, in this context, actually means the absence of the righteous robes of Christ, that is, you are unclothed with God's righteousness (its not literal, but figurative).

#### *Question #5 – the Question of Application*

Driscoll fluctuates like a canoe on the Colorado rapids at this point. When his interpretation is spot on, his resultant application is just as solid. When his interpretation is off base however, his applications are equally off kilter. Much of Driscoll's application will be scrutinized more heavily in the next chapter, particularly the more risqué and low-brow speech that is his reputation.

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<sup>66</sup> Driscoll, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

In this section only the accurate/inaccurate dichotomy will be assessed from a hermeneutical standpoint. The appropriate / inappropriate dichotomy based on the teaching of Scripture will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Like interpretation, his application had strengths and weaknesses. From Ecclesiastes, Driscoll applies his teaching well because he anticipates the objections his message will cause, and addresses these well. He is certainly aware of his audience. In many ways he knows the questions they have, and the excuses they raise. Addressing the issue of pride and idolatry, Driscoll said held nothing back, “It’s about God. And it’s about what He says and about what He wants, and if you don’t like that, that’s because you think your God.”<sup>67</sup> Addressing the harder hearts, Driscoll said, “‘He’s trying to scare me!’ Right, like a parent seeing his kid running into traffic ... you give a command, ‘Stop! There is death there!’”<sup>68</sup>

This writer commends Driscoll’s boldness. He shoots straight on this, “Bottom line; some of you know about God but you don’t fear him, at all.”<sup>69</sup> To the unbeliever he was even more straightforward and scathingly honest. He did not withhold the truth from anyone headed for a disastrous eternity in hell. He said, “... bottom line, many of you are dead, you don’t know God, and someday you’re going to die and then you’ll spend eternity in hell.”<sup>70</sup> Anyone who can shoot this straight is no coward and possesses commendable courage!

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<sup>67</sup> Driscoll, “Fear, Judgment, & Obedience.”

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

When applying the command to “fear God,” out of Ecclesiastes 12:13, Driscoll connected well. He said, “God is the kind of God that you truly don’t want to mess with. I know what I’m supposed to say, I’m supposed to say that Jesus wears lavender tights, has feathered hair, holds daisies, and runs around the cosmos giving out free backrubs ... but that’s not Jesus, that’s an extra from *Will and Grace* ...”<sup>71</sup>

In another scathing rebuke, Driscoll breathed out more fire,

Some of you know about God but you don’t fear him, at all ... there is a corresponding scale, either you think high of God and low of yourself, or you think low of yourself and high of God ... some of you fear spiders more than God! It is a dreadful thing to fall in the hands of a living God. Fear changes everything. Fear of God is what keeps me ... many of you have no idea who you are dealing with, if you knew, you would shape up a lot more quickly! If you knew how serious God is about sin ... you’ll be more sober in your judgment and in your lifestyle. “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prv 1:7). If you don’t fear God, it’s because you haven’t read your Bible to see who you’re dealing with.<sup>72</sup>

In Ephesians, he had more straightforward, “in-your-face” application as well.

The command of 5:6 is to be sure no one deceives you. Driscoll hammered this home:

In this culture, anyone can find somebody who will tell you what you want to hear. You just want to be told that what you want to do is okay and there is a good reason for it ... don’t play academic games with God, don’t argue yourself out of conviction ... many of you hate this, but hell is real, and hell will be full, and hell will be filled with some really moral people who don’t love Jesus ... there is consequence for sin, there will be judgment. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Don’t fool with God. This is the same God who flooded the earth, this is the same God who rained fire down on Sodom and Gommorah ... if God will kill Himself, don’t think that He does not have the courage to deal with you ... let no one deceive you ... not everybody is going to heaven, not everybody knows God, not everyone has their sins forgiven, it doesn’t go well for everyone.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Driscoll, “Stopping Self Indulgence.”



Driscoll's application points are especially strong when they come directly from the text. In Ephesians 5, the anecdote for avoiding filthy talk is right in verse four.

Driscoll said, "How do you get out of this? Live in thanksgiving to God ... Thank you [God]... I'm not going to hell."<sup>74</sup>

Driscoll's application of Revelation was especially excellent in that he connected concretely to every day life many times. When explaining the role of angels in the seven churches for example, Driscoll said, "Each church has an angel that's designated to it. There are angels that work here at Mars Hill. Spiritual beings that are created by God ... we have real advocates, angels, working on behalf of God."<sup>75</sup> When describing the lampstands, Driscoll said, "Lampstands are like a Jewish menorah, kind of like these candles that we have here tonight ... a simple and common object that exists for one purpose, and that is illumination."<sup>76</sup> In describing the eyes of Christ, ("eyes like a flame of fire"), Driscoll said, "Jesus doesn't look at you, He looks in you, He looks through you, Jesus sees and knows everything ... Jesus knows it all."<sup>77</sup>

Lastly, Driscoll's application of the church at Ephesus really hit home. He likened the church at Ephesus to the Bible-believing, Bible-teaching, fundamental churches of our day. The churches that have all there theology together, all wrapped up tightly in a bow, but who lack in the area of love. Speaking of these types, Driscoll

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Driscoll, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

commented, “You can answer Bible Trivia questions all day ... but your like a roofing hammer to the frontal lobe ...”<sup>78</sup> How is that for a word picture? He gave a cutting rebuke to those puffed up with knowledge (1 Cor 8:1), “If you consider yourself to be a Bible scholar, and you’re a jerk, you’re a bad theologian.”<sup>79</sup> And then a final upper-cut for the cold-hearted academician, “You gotta be nice ... if your not nice you really are a bad representation of God.”<sup>80</sup> Driscoll’s two practical ways to show love include: baking cookies, and giving people hugs. How is that for practical theology (1 Jn 3:16–18)?

### **Conclusion**

The sweet spot of Driscoll’s delivery is undoubtedly his clever, funny, and “in-your-face” application. In this writer’s estimation, this is what attracts the masses; Driscoll brings biblical truth home in profound and personal ways many times. He is uncommonly proficient at this level of communication.

This writer fully acknowledges the need for the interpreter to “bridge the gap between the cultural elements that are present in the text of Scripture and those in his own time.”<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, the interpreter must honor God by being true to the text from which his applications are supposed to be derived. This is not a matter of ingenuity, but of integrity. This is one of the ways a minister remains an approved and unashamed workman (2 Tim 2:15), rightly dividing the word of truth. The accurate interpreter will

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Kaiser and Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 172.

someday stand shameless before the judgment seat of Christ because he has “cut it straight” and applied it right! By contrast, many preachers will hang their heads while giving account for how they handled the Word of God.

Poor interpretation leads to even poorer application. As Rosscup said, “We need applications, yes, but applications lined up in harmony with tried and trusty laws for getting at the proper meaning.”<sup>82</sup> Above all, the interpreter must pledge to honor the God of truth first in his interpretation (applying sound hermeneutical principles properly), then and only then in his application. The cart should never go before the horse.

Lastly, God is only honored through accurate and appropriate use of application. Failure here is unacceptable in the sight of God, a falsified counterfeit to His intended message. May we as ministers never be accused of putting words in God’s mouth! Also, think about the unspeakable damage a fast-and-loose approach to Scripture has upon its uninitiated hearers, who in many cases are full of eagerness and zeal for Christ.

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<sup>82</sup> Rosscup, “BI 505 Hermeneutics,” 20.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE HOMILETICS OF MARK DRISCOLL

#### **Introduction**

If hermeneutics is the art and science of biblical *interpretation*, homiletics can be defined as the art and science of biblical *communication*. Homiletics is a technical word, used consistently in colleges and seminaries, to refer to a preacher's communication style or method of delivery. Classes on homiletics (often dubbed "preaching classes") are an integral part of seminary curriculum, much like Speech and Communications for Liberal Arts programs.

To be fair, Mark Driscoll is not criticized as much for his hermeneutics (however loose and unrefined they have been at various times) as he is for his provocative applications of Scripture. His self-styled shtick of crude quick-wit has earned him a reputation both inside and outside the church.

#### **Driscoll: The Center of Controversy**

##### Outside the Church

From a secular standpoint, the New York Times wrote of Driscoll, "... he has the coolest style and foulest mouth of any preacher you've ever seen."<sup>1</sup> This confusing

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<sup>1</sup> Molly Worthen, "Who Would Jesus Smack Down?" New York Times Magazine online, article published January 6, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11punk-t.html> (accessed March 12, 2009).

paradox is largely why Driscoll is considered to be “the most admired – and reviled – figures among evangelicals nationwide.”<sup>2</sup> The article concluded that Driscoll “thrives on paradox.”<sup>3</sup>

### Inside the Church

Among church leaders, John MacArthur presents a fair assessment of Driscoll, “He is a very effective communicator—a bright, witty, clever, funny, insightful ... [then he goes on] ... crude, profane, deliberately shocking, in-your-face kind of guy. His soteriology is exactly right, but that only makes his infatuation with the vulgar aspects of contemporary society more disturbing.”<sup>4</sup>

Driscoll’s slippery tongue has become a sticky subject among evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike. Christianity Today reports, “Driscoll ‘comes off as a smart-aleck former frat boy,’ according to *The Seattle Times*. Guilty as charged. If he hasn’t offended you, you’ve never read his books or listened to his sermons.”<sup>5</sup> The same article wrote of Driscoll’s “sharp tongue—his greatest strength and his glaring weakness.”<sup>6</sup> But Driscoll also disturbs many fellow evangelicals because he straddles the borders that divide us. Donald Miller, an EC leader, dubbed him “Mark the Cussing Pastor.”<sup>7</sup> From his own

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, “Grunge Christianity?” *Pulpit Magazine Blog*, entry posted December 11, 2006, <http://www.sfulpit.com/2006/12/11/grunge-christianity/> (accessed February 26, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Collin Hansen, “Pastor Provocateur,” *Christianity Today Magazine Blog*, entry posted September 21, 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/september/30.44.html> (accessed March 3, 2009), 3

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 134.

lips, Driscoll spoke quite naturally about his “tend to offend” speech in a topical message on humor at Mars Hill. He said, “I always say, there are two kinds of people, those who have been offended by me, and those who don’t listen to me.”<sup>8</sup> In the same sermon he repeated himself, “[there are] two kinds of people, people I’ve offended and people who’ve never heard me.”<sup>9</sup>

Bloggers and writers have spilled much ink covering the latest drama from Driscoll’s pulpit. Be that as it may, regardless of where one stands currently on Driscoll (whether defender or dissenter), a biblical critique of both his rhetoric and his rationale are long overdue. This chapter will graciously serve the discerning reader as he ponders this puzzling question, “What is the character of Driscoll?”

#### Inside The Masters Seminary

One of the major reasons this writer chose to hone in on Driscoll for this thesis is the divergence of opinions spread across the student body here at *The Master’s Seminary*. Truth be told, Driscoll and his ministry have been met on differing terms. Some students are warm and welcoming, others think themselves wise in heeding our president’s warning. A recent graduate and friend from *The Master’s Seminary* has recently taken a job on the pastoral staff at Mars Hill Church. This news has sent some seminary colleagues into befuddlement. There is no question where our president stands. At least two *Master’s Seminary* chapel Q & As in the past two years have been devoted largely to

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions: Humor (session 2)” (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, July 13, 2008), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/religionsaves>, (accessed March 2, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

warning future ministers of the ills of contextualizing the gospel with unholy methods, namely carnality and vulgarity. Driscoll's name was mentioned numerous times in both chapels.<sup>10</sup> If aspiring pastors attending seminary can disagree so heartily on Driscoll, he is certainly worthy of more analytical assessment, particularly in light of postmodernist influences that have saturated millions of minds in recent times.

The major concern with Driscoll is not the doctrine of his preaching (his theology), but the character of his content. Willingly or unwittingly, Driscoll's tongue has become a frequent stumbling block to both Christians and non-Christians.

#### Positions and Perspectives

At least three positions exist towards Driscoll: those who agree with him, those who disagree with him, and those who are somewhere in between. In the first group, many doubt highly that Driscoll's good qualities (i.e., right doctrine, true gospel, passionate evangelistic preaching) are so good that they sort of plaster over his weaknesses (i.e., dirty language, frequent sarcasm, and low-brow humor). This camp is convinced that his bad language is so pervasive that it discredits everything he does. In short, they disagree with Driscoll and Mars Hill Church.

The second group is people who agree with Driscoll. These see his questionable methods as a means to an end. They justify his antics and language as necessary to remaining relevant to a godless culture. For example, some take what I call the

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<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur, president of *The Master's Seminary*, has devoted *at least three* unrecorded seminary chapels to the dangers of "contextualization," carnality, and crass language in the pulpit. Two were Q & A's and the other a sermon. During these meetings, Driscoll has always been cited as a negative example in these areas, a man whom MacArthur has strongly cautioned future pastors *not* to imitate.

“postmodern cultural” approach to Driscoll’s defense. They argue, “You don’t know Seattle; what is offensive to you as a seminary student is not offensive to a young guy living on the streets of Seattle, the most unchurched city in America, you don’t understand who he is trying to reach.” Some take the “postmodern pragmatic” approach, “True, the man may be low-brow and foul, but look how many people he has won to Christ, look at the fruit of his ministry... like him or not, God is using Him, therefore who are you to judge him ... by the way, how many people have *you* won to Christ?” Still others take the “postmodern spiritual growth” approach to Driscoll, saying things like, “Give the guy a break, have you heard his testimony? He’s had a rough past, he has suffered a lot of pain in his childhood and youth, he may have some rough edges but give him some time ... he’ll grow out of *it*, God has been patient with you, why can’t you be patient with him? We’re all works in progress, aren’t we?”

Plainly, Driscoll has become a watershed personality. The dilemma can only be rightly assessed when examined not through the opinions of men, but through the pages of Scripture.

### **Driscoll: The King of Contextualization**

Driscoll believes that God has given us the right message to preach, but has forgotten to tell us how to preach it. In other words, God gave instruction without explanation. So as behavior rises and falls on belief, Driscoll defends his use of “a lot of information about sex and marriage” in his series on Song of Songs with, “The Bible



simply tells us to ‘preach the Word’ (2 Tim 4:2) and does not tell us exactly how this should be done.”<sup>11</sup>

The freedom to do ministry, according to Driscoll, is a liberty given by God, and comes down to a balancing act between what the Bible says and what one’s own culture and context (what Driscoll calls “The Regulative Principle”) demand. This ideology, according to Driscoll, is why he does and says the things he does. The goal is evangelism, the means is cultural relevance.

In his Humor sermon, Driscoll [speaking of humor] says, “Its missiological ... [I] do this all for the sake of the gospel ... I look at the culture and I do whatever is most effective to point people to Jesus.”<sup>12</sup> Driscoll believes that comedy is the language people speak, and that if he is going to be a good missionary, he will have to have a few good jokes to tell. “For me to be a good missionary, I need to tell a few good jokes ... if I need to be a fool for Christ, I’m okay with that ... we live in one of the least churching cities ...”<sup>13</sup>

#### When Humor is Appropriate / Inappropriate

Some guidelines on what specifically is forbidden by Scripture (cf. Eph 5:4) are offered. Snodgrass begins with specific instruction to pastors, “*Any* destructive and purposeless speech falls under the indictment of this text, including what is done from

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2006), 95.

<sup>12</sup> Driscoll, “Religion Saves: Humor.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

behind pulpits. When pastors use emotionalism, exaggeration, and bombastic verbal bullying rather than sustained argument, they are guilty. It does not fit with the Lord.”<sup>14</sup>

Patrick Morley offers insight into practical ways that holiness can be lost for the sake of a laugh. He writes,

Almost every beautiful gift from God can be distorted – gifts like sex, prosperity, power, and even humor. How can humor be denigrated? Humor that causes someone to blush in embarrassment, exploits someone’s weaknesses in order to obtain a laugh, invokes profanity, uses vulgarity, or excludes someone from joining in on the laughter can be considered inferior humor and in most cases inappropriate humor<sup>15</sup>

He closes with this practical guideline, “If someone can’t be present during times of laughter or joking, that humor is not holy.”<sup>16</sup> Lastly, Phil Johnson adds this reminder, “Don’t use any kind of words, you wouldn’t use in front of a 65-year old Sunday School teacher named prudence.”<sup>17</sup>

On the topic of humor (holy and unholy), a word from the prince of preachers will prove most instructive.

We need the divine influence to keep us back from saying many things which, if they actually left our tongue, would mar our message. Those of us who are endowed with the dangerous gift of humour have need, sometimes, to stop and take the word out of our mouth and look at it, and see whether it is quite to

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<sup>14</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, “Ephesians” in *NIVAC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996), 281.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Morley, *Ten Secrets for the Man in the Mirror* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), 161–162.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>17</sup> Phil Johnson, “Counterfeit Love,” (sermon presented at The Masters Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, September, 4, 2008). <http://www.tms.edu/Media.aspx>, (accessed March 3, 2009).

edification; and those whose previous lives have borne them among the coarse and the rough had need watch with lynx eyes against indelicacy.<sup>18</sup>

Driscoll's gift of humor can be easily discerned by his massive following and frequent feedback of approving laughter eagerly given him in every message this writer has listened to. Since Spurgeon is a beloved hero of Driscoll, these immortal words should bear down the more greatly on his soul. Spurgeon himself was gifted with a mighty sense of humor and speaks intelligently and authoritatively on the subject. He concludes:

Brethren, far be it from us to utter a syllable which would suggest an impure thought, or raise a questionable memory. We need the Spirit of God to put a bit and bridle upon us to keep us from saying that which would take the minds of our hearers away from the Christ and eternal realities, and set them thinking upon the groveling things of earth.

This writer thinks holy humor is a gift from God (Ja 1:17) and has its place in all of life, even in sermon illustrations. Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, felt the same. On one occasion, someone criticized him for including humor in his sermon. The clever preacher responded, "If only you knew how much I hold back, you would commend me."<sup>19</sup> But humor, like everything else, must be cultivated and most importantly—it must be controlled!

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (1874; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1954), 191.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

### Driscoll's Wholesome Humor

To God's glory, and his credit, Driscoll has exercised a good sense of humor in many honorable ways. In one sermon, when pointing toward the mammoth size of his mentor's family (eleven daughters and one son), Driscoll made this comment kind of off-the-cuff, "I don't think he [the little boy] ever gets to go to the bathroom ..."<sup>20</sup> His quick wit helped people feel like the boy who has eleven sisters, always standing in line, never getting his turn.

On another occasion, when Driscoll was introducing a new teaching curriculum to his church, he sold it with some healthy hyperbole,

This is a great book ... I promise, its wonderful, if your heavy, you'll lose weight [if] you read that, if you don't have hair, you'll grow hair, if your cars not running just put that under the hood, it will fix it, its really a wonderful piece of work it will help you with everything.<sup>21</sup>

This clever embellishment during the announcement section of the service, ridiculous as it was, produced the positive effect of releasing the tension of the audience. Oswald Sanders, writing to leaders about the positive uses of humor wrote, "Clean, wholesome humor will relax tension and relieve difficult situations."<sup>22</sup> Good humor has that effect, and for this purpose it is helpful, provided it is in good taste.

For example, in speculation of what Job's thoughts might have been when his bitter wife told him to curse God and die, Driscoll's wholesome words were quite

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Fear, Judgment, & Obedience," (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, August 3, 2003), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/ecclesiastes> (accessed March 2, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Driscoll, "The Revelation."

<sup>22</sup> Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 67.

comedic. He spun off, “Job’s wife ... she’s no help, ‘curse God and die,’ thanks baby that’s huge, that’s a great help, thanks Barnabus, what an encouragement you are.”<sup>23</sup>

In his humor sermon, Driscoll illustrated Proverbs 21:9, “Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman” by asking his audience to imagine themselves driving down the street at night, only to catch bizarre scene on your neighbor’s rooftop. Imagine, now a bunch of husbands, perched out on the roof of their homes. Doing what? Pitching a tent with Coleman lanterns, roasting hot dogs on a folding chair, saying, “... just being biblical ... she is driving me crazy!”<sup>24</sup> His audience applauded with laughter. This vivid scene is the biblical picture of what an argumentative woman can drive her husband to do; she can literally drive him through the roof!

In the same sermon, Driscoll responded to a ridiculous evolutionist (who believes nothing created everything) with an even more ridiculous analogy, “If I came home and found a new TV and 7 kids, I’d be like, ‘Wow, nothing did this ...’”<sup>25</sup> Using ad absurdum argumentation, Driscoll exposed the faulty presuppositions of the evolutionist- showing how silly this thinking is when carried out to its logical (or illogical rather) outcome.

This writer is sincerely praying that someday he can report that all the humor flowing from Driscoll’s mouth is as holy and wholesome as what was just reported. With

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<sup>23</sup> Driscoll, “Religion Saves: Humor .”

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

sincere remorse however, that day has not yet come. The tear-filled truth is that of the seven sermons assessed for this section of the project, six were poisoned with crass and corrupt speech (Eph 4:29). Sadly, many of the coarse jokes steaming out of his mouth, especially from the sermon on Humor, created a “he did not just say that ...” shock-effect.

Research indicates that of Driscoll’s antics, many fall below the line of holy propriety explicitly detailed in Ephesians 5:4. By and large, the biggest concern this writer has for Driscoll’s sermon content is his repeated failure to hold to the holy standard of speech outlined in Ephesians 5:4. The immediate context of this verse, along with a heightened emphasis on the prohibition of “coarse joking” will be the focal point of the next chapter. What this writer will provide is a deeper exposition of this verse in its context, along with some examples from Driscoll’s sermons that fall below the good behavior outlined in this text.

As an aside, though many more violations could be cited from the better than forty-six sermons listened to, this writer has chosen to limit the list to a few indiscretions drawn from the seven sermons critiqued specifically for chapters 2 and 3. The purpose is two-fold, first for the solidarity of this study and secondly for fairness to Driscoll.

CHAPTER 4  
BIBLICAL TEACHING ON THE TONGUE

**Introduction to Proverbs 10:30–32**

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate more of what Scripture teaches on the topic of the tongue. This is especially relevant in light of the previous chapter. This chapter includes a comparative analysis between the wise speech of the righteous with the perverse speech of the wicked, from Proverbs 10:30–32; as well as important instruction about the tongue addressed specifically to teachers in James 3:1–6.

Continuing in a series of great contrasts between the godly and the godless are the last three verses of Proverbs 10. In these final verses, great gaps separate the godly and godless in three significant arenas: first, their eternal *future* (v 30); second, their *fruit* (or lack of it) (v 31); and third, their *feedback* (v 32).

One must remember that words are our world. Speech and communication using words are not in the least bit unfamiliar. If you are a Christian, between morning and evening prayer falls a blizzard of words. Their sounds can be heard both echoing in our ears and, perhaps to a greater extent, shooting from our lips. From casual small talk to more formal conversation at work, we engage in the exchange of words on a daily basis. Once again, we live in a world of words.

One man said, “It has been estimated that from the first ‘good morning’ to the last ‘good night’ the average man engages in approximately 30 conversations a day.”<sup>1</sup> Men do talk, but woman talk *more*, statistically. “Astronaut Michael Collins, speaking at a banquet, quoted the estimate that the average man speaks 25,000 words a day and the average woman 30,000. Then he added: ‘Unfortunately, when I come home each day I’ve spoken my 25,000—and my wife hasn’t started her 30,000.’<sup>2</sup> I’m sure many of you have felt the same way!

The ability to speak is itself a gift from God to man (Ja 1:17), another aspect of mankind having been created in God’s own image (Gn 1:27). And inseparably linked to this unique privilege is mighty responsibility.

Commentator John Phillips observed,

God has given man no greater gift than the gift of speech. It sets man poles apart from the beasts. The difference is not that man can articulate sounds, but that he can clothe his thoughts in words. His words can express the most complex concepts and can soar on wings of poetry and oratory. His words can give shape to a sonnet or a sermon. They can give form and substance to a scientific principle or nursery rhyme. Words can send armies to war and they can give shape and substance to just laws. Words can inflame passions, invoke laughter, or reduce an audience to tears. No wonder God holds us responsible for the words we utter. No wonder Solomon came back to his them again and again.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus taught that our words bring consequences and culpability, whether for good or for evil. Lest we rest on our laurels, James reminds us of how much improvement is

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers* (1979, repr., Garland, TX: Bible Communications, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> John Phillips, “Exploring Proverbs” in *The John Phillips Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995), 259.



needed by all who we are pathetic and imperfect in speech. The apostle James claimed (under divine inspiration) that the only one not stumbling with his tongue is the perfect man (Ja 3:2), his brother Jesus Christ. Since none of us would be pompous enough to claim co-perfection with Christ, all must pay special attention to this message. Although we are not yet perfect like our Lord, believers should have speech patterns which are characteristically different from those who do not know Christ. We now explore this critical difference in speech between the godly and the godless in the wisdom book of Proverbs.

### **Exposition of Proverbs 10:30–32**

The book of Proverbs as a whole is best understood by grasping its literary form—“Proverb.” “The term for ‘proverb’ ... comes from a root idea meaning ‘parallel’ or ‘similar,’ signifying ‘a description by way of comparison.’<sup>4</sup> One writer suggests that Proverbs are characterized by “shortness, sense, and salt.”<sup>5</sup> Proverbs speak with timeless sense, flavoring people’s lives with gems of wisdom. Proverbs are so practical because though short in length, they are long in experience. According to Lord John Russell, Proverbs combine the wisdom of many with the wit of one.<sup>6</sup> “As is the case in modern conversations, proverbs in ancient times functioned as a colloquial means of getting a point across.”<sup>7</sup> With the practical helpfulness of Proverbs laid bare, keep in mind also the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> A. K. Helmbold, “Proverbs,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 vols., ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975), 4:915.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 4:919.

gnomic nature of this genre. Proverbs are more like guidelines than guarantees; more like principles than promises. Proverbs are memorable statements containing general truths.

The book of Proverbs is a treasure trove of Solomonic wisdom, containing 513 of Solomon's 3,000 or so proverbs. The book's purpose is to impart this wisdom (1:3), not simply to young men (1:4) but to all who will accept it (ch 9). Wisdom is the grand theme (1:7, 9:10) of the book. A bird's eye view of the first seven verses reveals the author of most of the Proverbs (Solomon in 1:1), the purpose (1:2–6) and theme (1:7) of the book.

The first nine chapters praise wisdom as the preeminent pursuit for young men (especially 2:1–5). In this section, wisdom is extended to the naïve (1:20–33; 9). Its value is unsurpassed by every earthly treasure (chs 2–4). Since her existence is itself before the foundations of the world, the eternity of wisdom is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ (ch 8).

Wisdom's enemy, folly, is likewise revealed though wholly disparaged. The fruits of folly fall similarly into disrepute. For example, stealing is shunned (1:8–19), adultery is repeatedly warned against (5; 6:20–7:27) as the destroyer of one's soul. Co-signing, laziness, and lying (6:1–19) are also forbidden, the feed for hungry fools.

Lastly, polar paths are presented at the crossroads of decision (ch 9). Speaking poetically, both lady wisdom (9:1–6) and lady folly (9:13–18) roll out their feasts, and invite all the naïve to wine and dine. The first offers life (v 6a), the end of darkness and beginning of light (v 6). The other is not so nice—she hides a knife, she hunts for life.

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<sup>7</sup> John Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, eds, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 651.

The unwise, do not catch her guise, paying mercilessly with their lives. Hers is deceptive bread, her guests are at rest in the depths of the dead (v 18). Two paths are offered; just one can be taken (9). Chapter ten shows the divergence, as two paths unravel.

Proverbs 10:30–32 is the “book end” of chapter 10. Proverbs 10 commences the Solomonic section of the book. The theme of chapter 10 then, is the antithetical relationship (or stark contrast) between the righteous and the wicked, the wise and unwise. In this chapter, these conflicting groups flesh out their differences in key areas of life (i.e. relationships, material possessions, lifestyle, and speech).

This section was certainly penned by Solomon (10:1; 25:1). This section is composed almost entirely of concise, two-phrased parallel lines (“bicola”). As much as 90% is composed of antithetical parallelism,<sup>8</sup> in which the same truth is looked at from opposite angles. There are a few synonymous parallelisms present as well (cf. 11:7, 25, 30; 12:14, 28; 14:19).<sup>9</sup> There are 375 randomly arranged maxims in this section, though

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<sup>8</sup> Two kinds of parallel word pairs in Proverbs 10:30–32 are apparent. At this juncture, it appears that *synonymous* and *antonymic* word pairs are featured; thus far it appears that these fulfill the criteria for parallel word-pairs. Watson sets off three criteria for word-pairs, “a) each must belong to the same grammatical class (verb, noun, etc.), b) the components must occur in parallel lines, c) such word-pairs must be relatively frequent.” Speaking of synonymous word-pairs, Watson writes, “Its components are synonyms or near-synonyms and therefore almost interchangeable in character (hence the possibility of reversal, on which see later on).” In v 31, “mouth” // “tongue” and in v. 32, “lips” // “mouth.” *Antonymic word-pairs* appear to be present in Prv 10:30–32. “Antonymic word-pairs are made up of words opposite in meaning and are normally used, not surprisingly, in antithetic parallelism.” Two pairs are found in vv 30–32, ‘righteous // wicked’ (vv 30, 32), and ‘righteous // perverse’ (v 31). See Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, 2nd Rev. ed. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 128, 131.

<sup>9</sup> Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of the Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), 515.

some are linked together by common characteristics or analogies,<sup>10</sup> as in 10:31–32 in where the tongue is the common characteristic.

### Their Future (v 30)

First, note the opposite ends for the godly and the godless. First, the godly are rewarded forever. In this verse, the godly are called “righteous,<sup>11</sup>” and function as the subject of the first line of the antithetical parallelism.<sup>12</sup> The righteous will enjoy a state of never-ending safety and security, eternally free from slips or stumbles. Unlike their wicked counterparts, the righteous remain in the land as their reward.

The forever future of the righteous’ reward is encapsulated by the prepositional phrase “to eternity” or “for all time” (עַלְמֵי־עוֹלָם).<sup>13</sup> In this case, the temporal preposition (עַל) “functions to indicate movement toward a moment in time, or the duration of an action / situation ‘until’ a moment in time.”<sup>14</sup> The prepositional phrase (עַלְמֵי־עוֹלָם) functions adverbially, indicating the duration of the verb, duration without terminus. The temporal

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Anarthrous adjective *ms* (קִיָּם) is functioning substantively. As such it functions much the same as a nominative noun, doubling as the subject of the verbal clause.

<sup>12</sup> This section of Hebrew poetry presents the dichotomy between the wicked and the righteous in regard to both their end (v 30) and their speech (vv 31–32). This dichotomy is visible in the text via the three-fold repetition of the disjunctive *waw* (vv 30–32). Each major verse division occurs just before the disjunctive *waw*, and is tipped off by the ‘*atnah*’ accent marking on the preceding word.

<sup>13</sup> William L. Holladay, “עַלְמֵי־עוֹלָם” in *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 267

<sup>14</sup> Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003) § 3.1.2.

aspect of this adverb brings into visibility the forever future; it is used most often as “an unlimited duration of time, usually with a focus on the future.”<sup>15</sup>

How wonderful to know that the righteous man, though fumble and falter he will in this life, his frailty and failures are not final, they are gloriously passing. “The verb (טוּקַ) means ‘to shake, slip.’ It may poetically indicate insecurity (cf. 12:3; 24:11). The negative of (טוּקַ) here denotes great security, achieved only by the righteous.”<sup>16</sup> Waltke adds, “[טוּקַ] signifies ‘to rock or shake and to fall off a base.’ The passive’s implied agent is the Lord’s final judgment. The final judgment also explains why the wicked will not dwell in the earth.”<sup>17</sup>

Far from the wicked (v 30b), the future of the righteous is big and bright like the morning’s light, outshining this present darkness. Emboldened by the knowledge that he will inherit “the land,” his soul can rest in safety and security. Since “the land” is a figure in Scripture of safety and security, the righteous man can know that though his reward may be postponed, it will not be forgotten. This is true for him even in his darkest hour. Someone once said that hope shines brightest when the hour is darkest. This is true for the righteous one, both in Solomon’s day as well is in ours. George Lawson waxes eloquent concerning the safety and security of the righteous,

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<sup>15</sup>James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), DBLH 6409, #1.

<sup>16</sup>Peter A. Stevenson, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2001), 143.

<sup>17</sup>Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 1–15*, in *NICOT 11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann’s Publishing, 2004), 480.

The righteous man is founded upon the Rock of ages ... He is guarded by Omnipotence. Death and hell may rage, and seem to prevail, but he is safe from every real evil. He may be removed to another land, or to another world; but heaven is his country, and the mightiest of his enemies are unable to prevent his entrance into it, or to banish him from it.<sup>18</sup>

In his final doxology, Jude wrote of our glorious future before the presence of Jesus Christ in heaven, “Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).

The second line of verse 30 speaks of the unstable, unshakable end of the wicked, it turns completely the opposite way from what precedes it. The disjunctive clause is introduced by the conjunction (וַ).<sup>19</sup> Unlike the righteous one, all the wicked ones will be swept away in judgment. The dreadful end of the wicked is pictured repeatedly by Solomon as well as other wisdom writers through the figure of disinheriting “the land.” For example, Proverbs 2:21–22 carries the same idea. “For the upright will dwell in the land, And the blameless will remain in it; But the wicked will be cut off from the earth, And the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.” The word (אֶרֶץ) is translated “land,” and “earth,” primarily. The preferred translation is “land.”<sup>20</sup> Psalm 37:9, 10, 22 read, “For

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<sup>18</sup> George Lawson, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), 189

<sup>19</sup> A *waw* conjunction (וַ) affixed to a plural adjective (אֲשֵׁר). The conjunction (וַ) introduces a disjunctive clause. “Clauses or sentences commencing with the conjunction *waw* + non-verb are often called disjunctive clauses.” William D. Barrick, “OT 603 Introduction to Hebrew Exegesis” (unpublished syllabus, *The Master’s Seminary*, 2008), 89. The construction (*waw* + non-verb) is generally either adversative or explanatory; here the adversative is expressed, underscoring contrast. Chisholm utilizes the term *contrastive* to describe this kind of construction, “introducing a statement that stands in contrast to the preceding statement.” Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 126.

<sup>20</sup> Diverse interpretations exist concerning the nuance of “land,” in this verse. View 1— “The land may not only be the familiar ‘vine and fig tree’ of the ancient Israelite, but also may suggest being among the living, as opposed to the shades who inhabit the depths.” Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs in Word Biblical Commentary 22* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 76.

evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.

For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more ... For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, But those cursed by Him shall be cut off.”

The ancient custom of inheriting the land has several implications. Toy explains,

The general idea is the same as that of v. 25, but there is special reference to the privileges of citizenship. The sentiment of love of country was reinforced among the Israelites by a definite view of the relation between deity, the citizen, and the land. The favor of the deity was confined to his own land and people, and the prosperity of the man was inseparably connected with his share in the soul. In ancient times this view was held in a crude, unethical way (1 Sm 26:19); in Israel it was gradually purified by intellectual and moral growth, but never wholly given up— it was always in the land of Canaan that the final blessing was to come to the people. The prophets interpreted exile as a temporary cessation of privilege, a preparation for a higher destiny. Thus possession of the soil, dwelling in the land, came to be the synonym of the highest blessing (Ps 37:9–11, cf. Mt 5:5), and is so

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View 2—“The phrase is better, ‘dwell in the land.’ It is an eschatological reference to the judgment of wicked men, v. 30.” Peter A. Stevenson, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2001), 143.

View 3— “Although dwelling in the land is also meant physically, it comes to have a metaphorical meaning to designate security and peace.” R. Murphy and E. Huwiler, “Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs,” in *New International Biblical Commentary* 12, Edited by Robert Hubbard and Robert Johnston (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 52.

View 4—“The general idea is the same as that of v. 25, but there is special reference to the privileges of citizenship. The sentiment of love of country was reinforced among the Israelites by a definite view of the relation between deity, the citizen, and the land. The favor of the deity was confined to his own land and people, and the prosperity of the man was inseparably connected with his share in the soul. In ancient times this view was held in a crude, unethical way (1 Sam 26:19); in Israel it was gradually purified by intellectual and moral growth, but never wholly given up— it was always in the land of Canaan that the final blessing was to come to the people. The prophets interpreted exile as a temporary cessation of privilege, a preparation for a higher destiny. Thus possession of the soil, dwelling in the land, came to be the synonym of the highest blessing (Ps 37:9–11, cf. Mt 5:5), and is so used here ... the reference in the first cl. (as the parallelism shows) is to physical permanence, not to the maintenance of moral integrity.” C.H. Toy, “Proverbs” in *The International Critical Commentary*, Edited by Samuel R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Briggs, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 218. Toy also picks up this theme in Prv 2:21, “The ancient Israelitish conception (found also in other peoples) was that gods and men were attached to the soil. The god protected his own land and no other, and the citizen as such enjoyed the benefits of his protection. To leave the land was to lose one’s connection with its deity and to give up the rewards which his favor promised ... Israel, and not any other nation, was Yahweh’s own possession and property. Thus the expression *dwell in the land* came to be equivalent to *enjoy the divine favor and all the blessing of life*, and such is its sense here.” C.H. Toy, “Proverbs,” 52.

used here ... the reference in the first cl. (as the parallelism shows) is to physical permanence, not to the maintenance of moral integrity.<sup>21</sup>

More than some will readily admit to, the godly grow weary of daily seeing the prosperity of the godless, especially when they appear to flaunt their prosperity in the face of suffering onlookers, or in the face of the righteous. This was certainly the case with Job. Lawson comments, “Is Job mistaken when he says, ‘The earth is given into the hand of the wicked?’ No. It is given into their hand for a little moment, but they are not unfrequently driven out of it by visible judgments. At best, when a few years are gone, the king of terrors shall chase them away to hell ...”<sup>22</sup>

The truth garnered from v 30b is that what the wicked enjoy is at best, “seasonal success” (Ps 73:3, 12). The day of reckoning will come (Ps 73:17–19). Proverbs 23:17 and 18 recap the sure-fire truth that the outward prosperity of the wicked is at best only temporary; their feet shall soon slide. “Do not let your heart envy sinners, But be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day; For surely there is a hereafter, And your hope will not be cut off.” While the hope of the wicked will be snuffed out, the hope of the righteous will be totally satisfied. Proverbs 10:28 reads, “The hope of the righteous will be gladness, But the expectation of the wicked will perish.” Proverbs 11:7 and 8 connote the same idea. “When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, And the hope of the unjust perishes. The righteous is delivered from trouble, And it comes to the wicked instead.”

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<sup>21</sup> C.H. Toy, “Proverbs” in *ICC*, Edited by Samuel R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Briggs (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 218.

<sup>22</sup> Lawson, *Proverbs*, 189.



### Their Fruit (v 31)

Second, notice the difference in the fruit of their lips (v 31). The righteous one brings forth the good fruit of wisdom. Following the antithetical parallelism pattern, it is no surprise that the tongues of the wicked produce rotten fruit, and will be cut out. Concerning the quantity of wisdom brought forth, Stevenson observed, “The verb (יָגִיב), ‘to bear fruit,’ occurs only three times in the qal, all in poetic material and all picturing an increase.”<sup>23</sup> The lips of the righteous bring forth wisdom in increasing increments over time. By observation, the imperfect verb (יָגִיב) with an accusative direct object only occurs here in the OT.<sup>24</sup> In the Qal, the verb means, “to bring forth, bear fruit, thrive, i.e., have a plant be fruitful, implying vitality and life.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, based on context, the accusative direct object shows what is coming forth from the righteous one’s mouth, namely the ripe, right fruit of wisdom. The imperfect here is most likely habitual/customary, “referring to something done regularly or repeatedly.”<sup>26</sup> “The talk of a good man, likened to buds of wisdom, is controlled by uncompromising righteousness and is always full of godly wisdom.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Stevenson, *A Commentary on Proverbs*, 143.

<sup>24</sup>Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Volumes 1–4 Combined in One Electronic Edition., electronic ed. (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999, c1994–1996), 677.

<sup>25</sup>James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew*, DBLH 5649, #1.

<sup>26</sup> Frederic Clarke Putnam. *Hebrew Bible Insert: A Student's Guide to the Syntax of Biblical Hebrew* (Quakertown, Penn.: Stylus Publishing, 1996), § 2.3.2a.

<sup>27</sup> Phillips, *Exploring Proverbs*, 259.

The English word “wisdom” can mean many things in the Hebrew language.<sup>28</sup>

The kind of wisdom spoken of here is wisdom in religious affairs.<sup>29</sup> The righteous one speaks the truth about God, learned from the Word of God. Wisdom, in biblical poetry, is taught by God (Ps 51:8) and apart from His word, this wisdom cannot be obtained (Jer 8:9). Therefore, if one rejects the word of God, he will be bankrupt of wisdom and will remain a fool (morally evil) until he turns away from his error. Since wisdom’s source is God Himself, mediated through His word, it is always proper, pleasing, fitting, and acceptable to Him and to His people (Prv 10:31a).

Wisdom holds a place of great significance to God, which accounts for its prominent place in the teachings of the Old Testament as well as in the person and teachings of Christ. Wisdom literature (and Proverbs in particular) finds many parallels outside the Bible in other ancient cultures as well.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* cites at least six different uses: “1. skill in technical matters Ex 28:3; 2. experience, shrewdness:—3. the worldly wisdom of the חָכְמַי קְדָמַי and of Egypt 1K 5:10 4. the pious wisdom of Israel Ps 90:12–5. God’s wisdom 1K 3:28–6. wisdom personified Jb 28:12 — Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Volumes 1–4 Combined in One Electronic Edition., electronic ed. (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999, c1994–1996), 314. Francis Brown and his co-editors define it this way, *wisdom, prudence* in religious affairs Dt 4:6 ψ 37:30; 51:8; 90:12 Pr 10:31 Is 33:6 Je 8:9— Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Strong’s, TWOT, and GK References Copyright 2000 by Logos Research Systems, Inc., electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> *Exegetically*, of the lexicons consulted, *Brown, Driver, Briggs* is the only lexicon that mentions Prv 10:31. Wisdom here is a reference to “*wisdom, prudence* in religious affairs, see also Dt 4:6 ψ 37:30; 51:8; 90:12 Pr 10:31 Is 33:6 Je 8:9. Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *Archaeological* manuscript evidence show that though learning styles differed, writing styles most certainly did not. “Several pieces of Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature contain parallels (linguistic, stylistic, and content) with the book of Proverbs. From ancient Egypt this includes (in chronological order) the *Teaching of Ptah–Hotep* (c. 2500 B.C.), the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* (c. 2000 B.C.) the *Instruction of Amenemope* (c. 1200 B.C.) and the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* (c. 200 B.C.). There are also some echoes in the *Memphite Theology of Creation* (c. 2200 B.C.) and the *Dispute over Suicide* (c. 2000 B.C.). Similar proverbial sayings may also be found in the Assyrian *Words of Ahīqar* (c. 700 B.C.) and in the Ugaritic epics of *Baal and Anat* and of *Aquat* (c. 1400 B.C.)” John Walton, Victor H.

In the Old Testament, the Torah shares affinity with the wisdom of Proverbs. While the Torah expresses truth by divine demand (command), Proverbs expresses it less directly through experience and observation. “It is torah tested in the crucible of experience, and one can draw from that crucible example of how wisdom works in real life.”<sup>31</sup> For instance, the Torah said by command, “Honor your father and mother” (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16), Proverbs says by observation, “A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother (Prv 10:1)”.

In the New Testament, all divine wisdom finds its fullest expression in the person of Jesus Christ. Speaking of His incarnation, Paul wrote, “He became to us wisdom from God” (1 Cor 1:30). Though He was in every way the fullness of the godhead bodily (Col 2:10), as a man, he had to grow in wisdom (Lk 2:52). Even a cursory read of the gospels, will reveal that Jesus Christ is the wisest of all men, even “wiser than Solomon” (Mt 12:32). For in him are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). Therefore if one desires to know what wisdom looks like in all matters of life, both spiritual and practical matters (especially speech), look no further than the Lord Jesus Christ himself. MacArthur writes, “All of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge expressed in Proverbs are hidden in Christ (Col 2:3).”<sup>32</sup> He is personified in the Proverbs, (see Proverbs 8), prophesied in the prophets (Isaiah 11:1–5) incarnate in the

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Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, eds. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 560.

<sup>31</sup> Paul E. Koptak, *Proverbs*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2003), 39.

<sup>32</sup> John MacArthur, ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), 876.

epistles (1 Cor 1:30), and personal in the gospels through the life and work of Jesus Christ (Lk 2:52).

The speaking and teaching of wisdom, find fullest expression in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the greatest of teachers, taught similarly to the sages. He too, “used proverbs and comparisons to drive his point home.”<sup>33</sup> The gospel of Matthew contains many references to wisdom in its didactic sections. For instance, at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls his hearers to make a verdict. Addressing two types of people, He compares the obedient listener to a “wise man,” who “built his house on the rock.” He said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Mt 7:24). Jesus set obedience to Him as tantamount to wisdom. In correspondence, Jesus taught that wisdom is validated by her actions. He said, “Wisdom is proved right by her actions” (Mt 11:19).

Most probably borrowing from proverbial wisdom, Jesus spoke in paradoxes (“the first shall be last,” “whoever loses his life will find it,”) and hyperbole (“if your eye offends you cut it out”) to communicate his doctrines. His principal teaching form was parable- a wisdom form which can also be translated “proverb.”<sup>34</sup> As his teachings reveal, Jesus is a “wise teacher” (Mt 13:52), one even “wiser than Solomon” (Mt 12:42).

Synonyms of this word include ( חָכָם be wise, act wise(ly)) Derivatives include: חָכְמָה wisdom, חָכָם wise (man); cunning (man).<sup>35</sup> The verb is used more widely to mean

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<sup>33</sup> Koptak, *Proverbs*, 44.

<sup>34</sup> Tremper Longman III, and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 277.

<sup>35</sup> Louis Goldberg, “חָכְמָה,” *TWOT* 282, eds. Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. 2:282–284 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:282.

“consider,” “discern” “perceive,” but the nouns are close synonyms and are used especially in Proverbs and Job.<sup>36</sup> More synonyms include: “knowledge, discernment, shrewd, wisdom ... (become wise, act wisely).”<sup>37</sup> Antonyms include: “folly, fool, madness, shameless, be stupid, be confused, foolish, behave like mad, behave like a madman, act disdainfully, behave foolishly, make foolish, be inexperienced, naïve, deceive, persuade, raving, crazy, talk nonsense.”<sup>38</sup>

By application,

A prudent Christian has so much grace in his speech, that his reproofs and rebukes often gain him more favour and esteem, than others gain from their insinuating address. But the wicked man speaketh the words of deceit and folly, for what can be expected from a bad tree but corrupt fruit? And what shall be the end of a corrupt tree, but to be cut down, and cast into the fire?<sup>39</sup>

In sum, “The proverb in full form would be: the righteous speaks wisdom, obeys God, and lives—the wicked speaks folly, disobeys, and dies.”<sup>40</sup>

The second line of v 30 speaks of the perverse tongue. Dissimilar to the wisdom produced by the righteous, wicked mens’ tongues are characterized by perversity, or crookedness. Perversity (הַתְּקֵפָה) is a twisted up perversion, a crooked deviation from God’s moral standard. Wisdom is the theme of Proverbs (Prv 1:7; 9:10), and the principle thing Solomon instructs his son to pursue (Prv 2:1–5). Because the theme of

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, “הַתְּקֵפָה,” *NIDOTE*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1997), 2:134.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Lawson, *Proverbs*, 190–191.

<sup>40</sup> Toy, *Proverbs*, 218.

Proverbs 10 is the contrast between the righteous and the wicked, wisdom is tantamount to the righteous, the wicked are wisdom's antithesis- they know perversity only. The end of the perverse tongue is the same as that of an unfruitful tree; it will be cut out in judgment. "The talk of a wicked man, on the other hand, is false; he breaths out malice. His tongue is like a rotten tree that will be cut down. He speaks what is willful and contrary."<sup>41</sup>

The blood curdling end of the perverse tongue is graphically pictured. "Froward speeches may escape punishment from man, but they shall not escape God's righteous judgment, who will cut out their tongues, and make them fall upon themselves."<sup>42</sup> Such is the lethally destructive end of the wicked.

#### Their Feedback (v 32)

Third, notice the feedback from their speech in v 32. The wisdom of the righteous (v 31a) is warmly received (v 32a), antithetically, the perversity of the froward is wholly rejected. In v 32, speech issues are juxtaposed with sources (i.e. differing hearts). Lawson explains,

"How is knowledge ascribed to the lips of the righteous? Because their lips are directed by their hearts. They speak not thoughtlessly, but intelligently. Their lips are not devoted to flattery, nor do they slavishly comply with the sentiments and humours of men. But they know when it is fit to speak, and what is fit to be spoken. They know how to address persons of different dispositions, in a different manner, so as to please them, or what is of more importance in their estimation, so as to serve their best interests."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Phillips, *Exploring Proverbs*, 259.

<sup>42</sup> Lawson, *Proverbs*, 190.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The word “acceptable” is significant. “Acceptable is that which gives content, pleasure, to man (Et1:8) or to God (Prv 8:35; 11:1; 12:2 etc). In the latter case the divine name is always expressed elsewhere in the Proverb, the reference here must be to man. Good men, the proverb says, employ the sincere and kindly speech that gives men pleasure.”<sup>44</sup> Waltke adds, “It connotes that the speaker seeks favor and that, having found favor, he finds a blessing from the Lord.”<sup>45</sup>

There are many applications for acceptable speech. George Santa writes, “This gift needs to be deeply pondered, and carefully cultivated, to give it a free scope, while we jealously confine it to its own sphere of influence. There is evidently many kinds of application. The same statement of truth does not satisfy everyone. And how–what–when–to whom–to speak–is a matter of great wisdom.”<sup>46</sup> He adds this cautionary note, “Yet this consideration of acceptableness must involve no compromise of principle. Let it be a thoughtful adjustment of manner to the many kinds of tastes; a patience with lesser prejudices and inborn infirmities; avoiding–not all offense (which faithfulness to our Lord forbids), but all needless offense; uncalled-for occasions of scheming and impatience.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Toy, *Proverbs*, 219.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 1–15*, 480.

<sup>46</sup> George Santa, *A Modern Study in The Book of Proverbs: Charles Bridge’s Classic Revised for Today’s Reader* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1978), 135.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

Santa offers another application for ministers, “But most of all—let the minister of God study to clothe his most unwelcome message in acceptable dress. Let him mold it in all the sweetness of persuasion, compassion, and sympathy ... He must weigh carefully his statements without diluting them ... he must always gain his people’s ears, that he may win their hearts.”<sup>48</sup>

The Hebrew word “perversity” (תְּהַפְּזוּת) is found nine times; eight of its uses are in Proverbs (and cf. Deut 32:20). “This substantive is always translated ‘froward’ or ‘frowardness’ except Prv 23:33 and in the RSV by “perverse, perverted, perverseness.” It is a sin connected mostly with the mouth (Prv 2:12; 10:31–32; 16:30) and also with the heart (Prv 6:14); the eyes (Prv 16:30); and the mind (Prv 23:33).<sup>49</sup>

“The word translated ‘frowardness’ here is in the plural and can be rendered ‘great perverseness.’<sup>50</sup> Toy describes it as, “the false language of bad men ... [it] stirs up strife.”<sup>51</sup> Unlike acceptable speech which is constructive, this is destructive in nature. Perverse words tear down and tear up, these destroys and do not edify. Derek Kidner observes this difference between acceptable and perverse speech, “Here is speech with grace as well as truth [v 32a], while perversity is seen as opposed to not only what is wise (v 31) but what is pleasant.”<sup>52</sup> The former do not engage in what is perverse, and the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Victor P. Hamilton “תְּהַפְּזוּת” in *TWOT*, Edited by Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, 2:222, electronic ed (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980), 222.

<sup>50</sup> Phillips, *Exploring Proverbs*, 259.

<sup>51</sup> Toy, *Proverbs*, 219.

<sup>52</sup> Derek Kidner, “Proverbs” in *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, Edited by D.J. Wiseman (London: The Tyndale Press, 1964), 90.



latter do not offer pleasing or pleasurable speech. Examples of perverse speech from the book of Proverbs include: arguing or strife (10:12), boasting (25:27), complaining, gossip (20:19), lying and flattery (26:28).

Though the English word “knowing” is not in the text, it is implied by the previous line. This italicized insertion of “knowing” into the English translation is a legitimate way that the Hebrew language can be translated smoothly into the receptor language, this insertion is called gapping.<sup>53</sup>

### Conclusion

“Good men generally use few words (vv 19, 20) which are appropriate as well as pleasing. Evil men, by contrast, talk too much; their speech which is basically worthless or deceitful often hurts others.”<sup>54</sup> To conclude his thought, Alden gives this practical advice, “So if you don’t want to be hurt, don’t listen to an evil man, and if you find yourself hurting others by what you say perhaps you should ask yourself if what you say reflects folly or wisdom.”<sup>55</sup>

The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart (see Prv 10:30–32). “It all goes to show that ‘righteousness’ is ultimately an inward condition. Our words give us away;

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<sup>53</sup> The first noun (הַפֶּה) is in construct to the adjective (יָדָעַת), the adjective is functioning substantively as a possessive genitive (see above comment). The final noun is functioning adverbially as the direct object of the implied verb. Like in v 31, the noun provides specification, further clarifying the unstated verbal action. Because this is a verbless clause, the verb supplied in the previous clause is *implied* in the final clause as well. When translating into English, the helping words *what is* should be inserted to provide the sense of the first part of the verse, likewise, helping words *knows only* should be supplied to the second part. “The lips of the righteous know *what is* fitting, but the mouth of the wicked *knows only* perversity.”

<sup>54</sup> Robert Alden, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), 90–91.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

they are what we are. ‘The good man brings good things out of the good things stored up in him’ (Mt 12:35). This is why Jesus went on to say, ‘By your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned’ (v 37). It is not that God is trying to pick us up on everything we say, but that our words are our barometer and record what we truly are.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Introduction to James 3:1–6**

James is a most practical and enjoyable book. Some have referred to it as the “Proverbs” of the New Testament because of it is filled with timeless truth tucked in memorable statements. James is about living heavenly while still on earth (3:13–17), or heavenly wisdom for down-to-earth people. Although James is a Jewish writing (1:1), written by a Jew (1:1), to a Jewish audience (1:1b), its timeless truth pertains just as much to Christianity on the contemporary scene as it did to Jews in the first century.

James was written by James (Ἰάκωβος, actually named Jacob but translated James), the half-brother of our Lord. James, himself a late-coming believer, penned this writing very early, around A.D. 48, making it the earliest book in the New Testament canon.

The book is addressed to believing Jews who have been scattered in the “Diaspora” (from the Greek word διασπορᾶ meaning “to scatter like seed”). Writing to distressed saints, this lead elder (also called a “pillar” in the church (see Gal 2:9)), is writing with the intent of his hearers’ transformation through obedience to what he is

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<sup>56</sup> Eric Lane. “Proverbs” in *Focus on the Bible Commentaries* 9 (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 92.

writing (1:4, 22). He knows, by divine inspiration, that the right attitude in trials will produce completeness and wholeness (1:4) and that is what he wants his readers to cling to in troubling times. He knows that the only way to attain heavenly wholeness is to follow heavenly wisdom (1:4, 3:13–17). With this in the background, James writes concerning timeless matters that are just as relevant today as in the first century.

James deals with practical matters in an orderly fashion, always heralding heavenly wisdom (3:13–17) over and against its demonic opposite (3:15), the wisdom of the world. This is the wisdom from below; it is “earthly, sensual, and demonic in origin” (3:15). Because the book pertains to every matter of trial a believer faces, he sets off in chapter 1 exhorting believers (mostly in the form of imperative voice, implying a strong command) to have heavenly wisdom in regard to one’s attitude concerning inward trials (1:2–8). These trials can come in many forms (e.g., physical, spiritual, social, emotional, or financial). Regardless of the form, no trial is without a purpose. It is wrought by God to produce maturity and wholeness in the Christian being tested.

James also expounds on truth pertaining to: poverty and wealth (1:9–11), outward temptations (1:13–15), the goodness of God (1:16–17), attitudes toward the Word of God (1:18–25), bridling the tongue (1:26), and true religion’s expression of compassion toward the underprivileged of society (i.e. “widows and orphans”) (1:27). James maintains his course in chapter 2 in regard to one’s attitude toward the poor (2:1–9), the law of God (2:10–13), and toward the works of faith (2:14–26).

In chapter 3, the writer signifies a new section in his signature style, a vocative of address (“My brothers”), followed by an imperative command. In this chapter James takes up the topic of the tongue once again, but in much heavier detail.

This pericope is the longest section of the book on the tongue (3:1–12). From a macro perspective, James 3:1–12 is also the most graphic treatment on the tongue in the Bible, making it the *locus classicus* (classic passage) on the tongue in the New Testament as well. The tongue is so important in the book of James that it is referenced explicitly or implicitly in every chapter of the book (1:5, 19, 26; 2:2,3, 18; 3:1–12, 4:1–3; 14, 16, 17, 5:9, 12, 13, 16–18, 19–20).

Here, as in every section of James, James is commanding believers toward choosing heavenly wisdom instead of earthly wisdom. He cares for his people, desiring them to be whole and sturdy instead of double-minded and unstable (1:8). This higher wisdom of which James writes is always juxtaposed to the lower wisdom of the world (see 3:13–17)

In regard to the tongue, wisdom is expressed in several ways: asking for wisdom during a time of trial (1:5), being slow to speak against the Word of God (1:19), bridling one's tongue (1:26), speaking equally warm and hospitable words to the rich and the poor alike (2:2–3), praising God (3:10), saying “Lord willing” without presuming on God in matters pertaining to the unknown future (4:16), praying in times of trouble (5:13), singing in times of rejoicing (5:13), confessing after and during times of sin (even to another believer) (5:16), praying with faith like Elijah (5:17–18), and confronting a wayward brother (5:19–20).

As an aside, a bridled tongue cannot be attained independent of the Holy Spirit's aid. Though the Spirit is not mentioned explicitly in the text, James says emphatically, “No man can tame the tongue” (3:8a), implying that there is need of another to come alongside and help. He and He alone is able to keep men's tongue from cursing other

men (3:10). If man cannot tame his own tongue, and James is commanding the tongue to be used solely for edifying, never for cursing (3:10), then the missing strength to accomplish this command is the Spirit of God, He who indwells (Eph 1:13), and continuously controls believers (Eph 5:18) who yield themselves to Him.

By contrast, the lower nature, (which is demonic, 3:15), only does what is wrong, it simply cannot be tamed or contained (3:7). “We can tame tigers, but we cannot tame our tongue.”<sup>57</sup> This odious and out of control member of the body is likened to deathly destructive things like fire (vv 5–6), poison (v 6), and even hell itself (3:6). These metaphors draw out intensely the sobering nature of this topic.

### **Exposition of James 3:1–6**

#### Teachers and Judgment (v 1)

James begins chapter three with a strong negative. Μὴ πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι γίνεσθε ἀδελφοί μου, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brothers.” The negative particle (Μὴ) is at the front of the sentence for emphasis. James is emphatic here; the wooden literal is, “Not many teachers are there to be, my brothers!”

Why is James so negative? Is not teaching a wonderful calling (1 Cor 12:28), and are not gifted teachers gifts to the church (Eph 4:11)? Of course, James is not coming down on the office of teaching, instead he is clamping down on selfishly ambitious teachers who are in the ministry for all the wrong reasons.

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<sup>57</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), Ja 3:7.

James is coming down hard on teachers for two reasons: first because they will incur a more severe sentencing on Judgment Day (3:1); second, because they “will repeatedly stumble in many ways” (3:2). It is with these two reasons in mind, that James covers the perils of the teaching office.

First, it is likely that the “stricter judgment” (μείζον κρίμα) of teachers addresses a particular situation in the first-century church, a situation prevalent in our day as well. Evidently, James had false teachers in mind as he wrote. As in every age since the first-century, false teachers have always sprung up like thorns and briars in the flower garden of God. The presence of spiritual counterfeits was not new (Mt 23:1–33), but it appears that “the authority of the Jacobean tradition needed to be reasserted in a situation where it was evidently under fire and where the teaching office was devalued.”<sup>58</sup> Jesus also spoke of there being many “tares amidst the wheat,” many of whom masquerade around God’s people in the respectable office of teachers, when in reality they are wolves wearing sheep’s wool.

“It seems it was popular to be a teacher, and unqualified, self-righteous people were appointing themselves to this role.”<sup>59</sup> “In the early church to be a teacher brought high status ... the problem of ‘unfit’ teachers appears to have been acute in the early church (1 Jn 3:7; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 4:3) ... persons were putting themselves

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<sup>58</sup> Ralph Martin, *James*, in WBC, David Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds., (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 108.

<sup>59</sup> Ralph W. Harris, ed., *James*, The Complete Bible Library (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley and Sons and Company, 1986), 221.

forward as teachers without having paused to reckon with the high standard of behavior required ...”<sup>60</sup>

By application, this knowledge of “stricter judgment” on teachers is also a sobering reminder not just to purveyors of error, but for those who display a nonchalant attitude toward the teaching office. James could also be warning the immature and ill-prepared. James’ reminder imparts the weightiness of the office. Teaching is not something that should be entered into lightly, or without seriousness and sobriety. “Laymen should not enter lightly upon this office, since serious risks are entailed in offering public testimony to the faith.”<sup>61</sup>

In light of this sobering wake up call, all who teach must not slumber, but remember that an account of their teaching ministries before the judgment seat of Christ (Heb 13:17; 2 Cor 5:10) is ahead of them, and their judgment will be severe. James 3:1b states clearly, “we [teachers] shall receive the greater condemnation.” Be assured, teachers will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10), and that “more strictly” (Ja 3:1).

Hughes adds a scathing warning to preachers in light of the revealing fire of God’s judgment upon every word they utter. He writes, “The preacher who prayerlessly prepares his sermon on Saturday night as he watches TV and on Sunday delivers short, anecdote-loaded topical homilies which have nothing to do with the text, and indeed are

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<sup>60</sup> Martin, *James*, 108.

<sup>61</sup> Bo Reicke, *Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, AB (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 37.

often unsound, will have his work torched!”<sup>62</sup> Riecke adds, “Being a preacher involves a grave responsibility, and as his privilege is greater, so his condemnation will be the more severe.”<sup>63</sup> The principle from Jesus’ parable of the foolish manager also applies, “To whom much is given, much will be required” (Lk 12:48).

John MacArthur writes, “It is my conviction that there are far too many people teaching God's Word who are ill-advised to be doing it, who are ill-equipped, who are ill-prepared and by virtue of the errors in their teaching are bringing upon themselves a stricter judgment than they would ever experience if they never taught at all. We need less teachers.”<sup>64</sup>

The second reason for James’ warning to the teacher is the tendency of the tongue to get the teacher into trouble. Πολλὰ γὰρ πταίομεν ἅπαντες, “For we all stumble in many ways ...” (3:2). “The [postpositive] γὰρ would suggest that 3:2 is linked to the thought of 3:1,”<sup>65</sup> showing that it is teachers primarily, that James is addressing. James modestly includes himself in this truism, using the pronoun “we” in v 2. It is apparent that James felt the application of his teaching “to teachers,” in a personal way. He includes himself in vv 1–3 and again in v 9. This passage was particularly personal to James; he uses the first person plural (“we”) more here (in 3:1–12) than in any other

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<sup>62</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works*, Preaching the Word Series (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 129.

<sup>63</sup> Reicke, *Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, 37.”

<sup>64</sup> John MacArthur, “Taming the Tongue Part 2,” <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/59-18>. (accessed April 2, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Martin, *James*, 109.



section of the book. Though a lead elder and pillar in the church of Jerusalem (Gal 2:9; Acts 15), James stands modestly as a fellow-teacher.

The word “stumble” (παίω), literally means “to lose one’s footing, stumble, trip,”<sup>66</sup> and is always used in a metaphorical sense (i.e. “be ruined, defeated”<sup>67</sup>) in the Bible. In the spiritual sense, it has the idea of stumbling into sin. That is how it is used here. The word can be translated “sin, offend, stray, or make a mistake.” James is talking here about speech sins. “The present tense suggests repeated stumbling—‘we all sin many times in many ways.’”<sup>68</sup> Solomon had it right when he said, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable [not lacking, or not absent]” (Prv 10:19a, NASB). Someone once said, “The tongue is in a wet place, and can slip easily.” Oh how much better we would be if we followed the pattern of speech prescribed earlier in James 1:19—“swift to hear, slow to speak.”

“A person who does not cause stumbling by the wrong use of the tongue ‘is a perfect man.’”<sup>69</sup> It appears James is speaking hypothetically here—for the sake of argument, for it is ubiquitous that no one can tame the tongue on his own. James reinforces the impossibility of keeping one’s tongue in check on his own in v 8, “no man can tame the tongue.” Again, one might sooner tame a wild tiger than his own tongue!

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<sup>66</sup>William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, “Based on Walter Bauer’s Griechisch–Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Frhchristlichen [Sic] Literatur, Sixth Edition, Ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, With Viktor Reichmann and on Previous English Editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker.” 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 894.

<sup>67</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC, Ed., D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 150.

<sup>68</sup> Hughes, *James: Faith that Works*, 130.

<sup>69</sup> Harris, *James*, 221.

It is important to recognize what James is not saying here. He is not saying that we all sin in “many ways,” referring to a large number of sins as the NRSV suggests: “all of us make many mistakes.”<sup>70</sup> The idea here is in the *variety* of sins. Moo writes, “The context favors the NIV interpretation, James’ argument requiring reference not to the number but the variety of sins.”<sup>71</sup> This fact is no less true in regards to speech ethics.

Have you ever thought about how many ways your tongue can lead you to sin?

MacArthur explains,

The Bible refers directly or indirectly to a wicked tongue, a deceitful tongue, a lying tongue, a perverse tongue, a filthy tongue, a corrupt tongue, a bitter tongue, an angry tongue, a crafty tongue, a flattering tongue, a slanderous tongue, a gossiping tongue, a back-biting tongue, a blaspheming tongue, a foolish tongue, a boasting tongue, a murmuring tongue, a complaining tongue, a cursing tongue, a contentious tongue, a sensual tongue, a vile tongue, a tale-bearing tongue, a whispering tongue, an exaggerating tongue ...<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Moo, *The Letter of James*, 150.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> MacArthur, “Taming the Tongue,” 1.

### The Need to Control the Tongue (v 2b–4)

In v 2b, James is informing his readers of the importance of not underestimating the tongue and its powerful influence upon one's entire person. Drawing on some common modes of travel in the ancient world (e.g., the "horse" for land travel and the "ship" for sea faring, vv 3–4), James illustrates the unassuming power of something small determining the direction of something much larger. To capture the attention of his readers, James employs an attention arrester (ἰδοῦ in Greek, in v 4). James uses this demonstrative "to draw attention to what follows,"<sup>73</sup> he is telling his readers in essence, "Look! Stop! See!" Vying for the eyes of his readers, the Lord's brother does not want them to miss the powerful word pictures he is about to create. He is about to turn their ears into eyes.

The two traveling illustrations are simply two ways of illustrating the idea of v 2, "the man who does not sin with his tongue ... is able also to bridle his whole body." The two illustrations share the same main verb (μετάγω), meaning "to direct or bring from one area/direction to another, to guide."<sup>74</sup> The horse and its thousands of pounds of galloping power, are guided meticulously by a tiny bit. Similarly, a mighty ship is steered along by a tiny rudder, wherever its pilot delights.

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<sup>73</sup>Arndt, Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 468.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 638.

Will Varner provides insight into these illustrations which could easily go unnoticed. He writes, “We should be careful not to think that it is the bridle and the rudder that control the horse and the ship. It is actually the rider ... and the pilot of the ship. This is consistent with James’s recognition that the forces of one’s actions are the inward hearts and motives (1:14, 15; 2:2–18; 3:13–17; 4:1, 2).”<sup>75</sup> He concludes, “Our actions are simply the outward manifestations that emerge from within.”<sup>76</sup> Varner’s observations reveal this penetrating truth, our words betray who we really are. Our heart is expressed through our mouth. The mouth is the mirror for the heart. Jesus taught the same principle using roots and fruits. Jesus taught that good trees produce good fruit and bad trees produce bad fruit. For the teacher, the fruit of his lips will either make him or break him.

Rounding out his opening section, James makes reference to the tongue (γλῶσσα) for the first time (v 5). The tongue is used here as a metonymy for the heart. James centers his focus not on the tongue’s small size (illustrated in vv 3–4), but on its ability to make great boasts. The main verb “boast” of v 5 is from the root word αὐχέω and is used only here in the New Testament. One would naturally think of “boasting” in the negative sense of 4:16 (where a different word for boasting is used (καυχάομαι), with the idea of self-glorying presumption, arrogant bragging or God-ignoring rivaling). This rivaling pride is a gross misuse of speech. James rightly denounces (v 17) it. That is not

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<sup>75</sup> William Varner, “A Linguistic Commentary on James,” unpublished class notes, *The Master’s College*, 2009, 140.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

the sense here however, Moo writes, “it is used more neutrally: the tongue can legitimately make the claim to have considerable power.”<sup>77</sup> Phillips paraphrases, “the human tongue is physically small, but what tremendous effects it can boast of!”<sup>78</sup>

#### The Destruction of an Uncontrolled Tongue (vv 5b–6)

To what can James liken the tongue? He already compared it to a bit and a rudder, now he heats things up a bit—comparing it to fire! The boasts of the tongue are like sparks, says James, resulting disastrously into a forest of fire! The vast potential for damage in the tongue is captured in the word ὄλην (v 5b), translated “forest.”

Kistemacker translates this phrase, “Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.”<sup>79</sup> Once again is the idea of something small influencing something larger (cf. Ja 3:3, 4). Kistemacker illustrates, “One spark is sufficient to set a whole forest ablaze: stately oaks, majestic cedars, and tall pine trees are reduced to unsightly stumps of blackened wood. And that one spark usually can be attributed to human carelessness and neglect.”<sup>80</sup>

In verse 5, James switches from simile to metaphor. In verse 4, James purports, “the tongue is *like* ... a bit ... a rudder” (vv 3–4). In verse 5 he switches, “the tongue *is* fire ...” (literally). Ropes offers this rendering, “the tongue is as dangerous as fire.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Moo, *The Letter of James*, 155.

<sup>78</sup> Phillips was quoted by Moo in his commentary. See *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Simon. J. Kistemacker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 110.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Ropes, *The Epistle of St. James*, 232.

Fire (πῦρ in Greek), is doubtless the main word picture James employs for the tongue in this passage, particularly in vv 5–6.

James refers to the tongue as having the spreading power of fire. Therefore its ability to spread is virtually unlimited. So inexhaustible is the tongue’s ability to destroy, that James uses one of the most devastating forces of nature—fire—to describe its deadening effects. In the same way that a tiny spark ignites a little timber into a blazing inferno (like the famous Chicago Fire of the 1860s), a talking teacher can set forest –level fires wherever he goes. Fires that burns and destroys lives all along its course, and its effects extend to all spheres and segments of life (see v 6). The uncontrolled words of a man’s tongue are like fire (πῦρ in Greek), this is stated clearly in v 6, “the tongue is a fire,” and magnified in v 5 (“great fire,” carrying the idea of a “forest fire”).

James adds a further and more intense description than simply “fire” or “forest fire.” He completes the fire word–picture in v 6e with the worst fire of all, the fires of hell! The source of the tongue’s fire is the pit of hell itself (γεέννης, used only here outside of the gospels, is translated “hell”). Traditionally, Gehenna was an burning garbage dump outside Jerusalem, in the historic valley of Hinnom.

Historically, the word–picture adds a measure of horror to the text because gehenna is the site of barbarous child sacrifices as well. Part of the burning smokestacks was the burning flesh of little babies’ bodies burned in human sacrifices to the false god Molech. It later became an ever burning garbage dump where trash of all kinds and even human refuse was consumed. Gehenna was a dirty, vile, and horrifically despicable spot.

Later, the term took on the symbolic meaning of death and judgment.

“Symbolically, the word refers to the place where the devil resides and to which the

doomed are banished. The implication in this verse is that Satan himself sets man's tongue on fire."<sup>82</sup> If Satan was the first sinner, it is not surprising that he is present here as the one behind sinful talk. Interesting, behind all the evils in the human heart, gushing forth from the mouth is none other than Satan himself!

Martin explains,

It is quite apparent that by the time of the letter cosmic evil was traced to Satan. Thus, James contends that the devil lies behind the poison that is emitted from the mouth of the teacher who cannot control the tongue ... In short, v 6 pronounces the tongue as evil—quite capable of doing deadly (i.e., Satanic) harm to the body of believers—because it emanates from the evil one ...<sup>83</sup>

Peter Davids adds, “the evil in a person, already spoken of as the world or evil impulse, is now traced for the first time to its ultimate source in Satan.”<sup>84</sup> Some might think it over-spiritualizing the text, to assume that evil speech is actually Satanic, but this verse sure corrects that false notion.

Consider, are we acting like God or Satan when we gossip, tell dirty jokes, flatter, criticize, or worst of all—blaspheme? Speaking of blasphemy, Hughes writes, “There are many other ways the tongue can destroy: meanness, sarcastic humor, boasting, but at the very bottom is *blasphemy*. When one attributes the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan, he does it not with his hands or feet but with his tongue (cf. Mt 12:31, 32).<sup>85</sup>

It is no wonder that James later commands believers “to resist the devil” (Ja 4:8)! Watching the mouth and yielding to the Spirit in all matters of speech are ways to

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<sup>82</sup> Kistemaker, *James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 111–112.

<sup>83</sup> Martin, *James*, 116.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Davids, *James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 143.

<sup>85</sup> Hughes, *James: Faith that Works*, 139–141.

accomplish this. Though the detailed parts of v 6 are “extremely complex and difficult”<sup>86</sup> for interpreters, a few things are clear. First, the main word picture is fire; second, the main idea is dangerous destruction; and third, the overall tone is negative, even Satanic!

### Conclusion

In sum, God is warning teachers that within all wicked hearts (Jer 17:9–10) is lethal, dangerous, and highly flammable material. Imagine James saying, “Each of you should look in the mirror every morning and tape a sticker over your mouth that reads, “Caution, inside is highly flammable material, use only as directed by the Spirit of God.” The reason is because since only perfect men have tame tongues (vv 2, 8) and since no one is perfect (v 2), there remains good reason to acknowledge that only One can control the tongue, God! This reality should breakdown believers to the point of continual yieldedness to the Spirit of God (Eph 5:18; Rom 8:13; Gal 5:25).

The tongue is a troublesome thing? Its avenues for destruction are virtually uncountable. According to James, “the man who controls his mouth can control his whole body (v 2)” (my paraphrase). The NASB says, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle [keep in check] the whole body as well.” (3:2b). The word translated “perfect” (τέλειος) is better “mature, complete, and whole” (as in 1:4), not absolute perfection. Indeed, the muzzled mouth belongs to the mature man.

This truism should be all the more alarming for the teacher because for him, his tongue is his trade. Teachers must take special and specific care to keep their tongues in

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<sup>86</sup> Martin, *James*, 113.



check because of the great many hours their tongues are in use. It is said that the average person speaks 20,000 words a day, if this is true we must double that figure for teachers, even triple it for some. With this in mind, is not the words of one's mouth a terrifically helpful gauge for measuring spiritual maturity?

According to James, the controlled tongue belongs to the controlled life, the tongue "in check" belongs to the life that's in check (see 3:2)! So to check your spiritual pulse, just listen to yourself. If you want to diagnose your spiritual health, use the thermometer that's already in your mouth, your tongue!

### **An Exposition of Ephesians 5:4bc**

#### *An Explication of the First Speech Sin of Ephesians 5:4: "Foolish Talk"*

What exactly is "foolish talk?" This word (μωρολογία in Greek) does not occur in the LXX and like "coarse joking," occurs only here in the New Testament. "Foolish talk" (μωρολογία) is a compound word, made from an elision of μωρός (meaning silly, stupid, or foolish, from which we get the English word "moron") and λεγω, (meaning to speak). For that reason, it is best translated "foolish talk."

Hendriksen writes, "*Silly talk* is the kind of conversation one could expect to hear from the lips of a fool or a drunkard."<sup>87</sup> Hoehner adds, "It is at least likely to refer to futile talk that detracts from the issues of faith and edifying discussion."<sup>88</sup> Wiersbe writes, "Foolish talking does not mean innocent humor but rather senseless conversation

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<sup>87</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, in *New Testament Commentary 9* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 228.

<sup>88</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 655.

that cheapens the man and does not edify or minister grace to the hearers (Eph 4:29).

Paul is not condemning small talk because much conversation falls into that classification. He is condemning foolish talk that accomplishes no good purpose.”<sup>89</sup>

Bruce adds, “‘Foolish speech’ is at best a waste of time, but it can lead to grave trouble. Life is a serious matter, and provides ample material for serious and profitable discussion.”<sup>90</sup>

Like the sexual sins mentioned in v 3, Snodgrass views this speech sin as akin to sexual sin, he calls it “pornography of the mouth.”<sup>91</sup> He writes, “‘Foolish talk’ seems primarily concerned with foolish talk of a sexual nature, but application of the text requires rejecting *any* talk appropriate to fools (i.e. those who are morally and spiritually perverse).”<sup>92</sup> Phil Johnson was specific about the kind of speech that God forbids. He said,

[This] principle is not murky. This rules out frivolous speech, casual pointless talk ... suggestive stories, off-color banter, ridicule, teasing, wise-cracks when inappropriate and unwelcome, flippancy about sacred and serious things, all vulgar and scatological speech, anything that would make light of or amusement about subject matter that is shameful, it shameful even to speak of these things ...  
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<sup>89</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1976), 124–125.

<sup>90</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 370.

<sup>91</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, “Ephesians” in *NIVAC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996), 281.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Johnson, “Counterfeit Love.”

*An Explication of the Second Speech Sin of Ephesians 5:4: “Coarse Jestng”*

What is coarse jestng anyway? Coarse jestng (εὐτραπελία in Greek) appears only one time in Scripture (Eph 5:4). The speech sins of Ephesians 5:4 (“foolish talking” and “coarse jestng”) are situated subsequent to greed and sexual sins, the whole of which are outside the sphere of edification (Eph 4:29) and biblical love (Eph 5:2) and are therefore unfitting and forbidden for the believer. Paul writes plainly, “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor *coarse jestng*, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks (Eph 5:3–4, emphasis added).”

In classical times, this word was used in a good way, suggesting “wit or wittiness,” according to Plato.<sup>94</sup> Aristotle perceived it to be the midpoint between “buffoonery and boorishness,”<sup>95</sup> yet as Aristotle notes, coarse jestng seldom stops at this midpoint because people almost always push the limits for another laugh. With this in mind, Hoehner describes the biblical term as “jestng that has gone too far,”<sup>96</sup> or humor that is “in bad taste.”<sup>97</sup>

One lexicon defines coarse joking by examining its constituent parts.

“Εὐτραπελία is from εὖ (easily) and τρέπω (turn); (1) in a good sense pleasantry,

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<sup>94</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 655.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 656.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 656.

wittiness, urbanity; (2) in a bad sense coarse joking, clowning around, vulgar talk.<sup>98</sup> “It suggests something easily turned, a double entendre—speech innocuous in itself but turned to have an indecent intent.”<sup>99</sup> Similarly, it is what happens when one twists what is innocent and makes it indecent, or manipulates what is pure into something perverse.

In the ancient world, religious Jews did not take uncontrolled speech lightly. Lincoln explains, “There were rigorous regulations about uncontrolled speech at Qumran with various penances attached: ‘whoever has spoken foolishly: three months ... whoever has guffawed foolishly shall do penance for thirty days’ (1 QS 7.14–18).”<sup>100</sup> Capturing both the positive and negative elements of Eph 5:4 is this close parallel from Qumran (1QS 10.21–23): “In my mouth shall be heard no folly ... The fruit of holiness shall be on my tongue and no abominations shall be found upon it. I will open my mouth in songs of Thanksgiving.”<sup>101</sup>

*Driscoll's Explanation of "Coarse Jesting" (Ephesians 5:4)*

Driscoll, in “Stopping Self-Indulgence,” correctly correlates “coarse joking” as a step down from “foolish talk” (Eph 5:4). He said,

Foolish talk ends up going to coarse joking [he writes], it ends up vulgar, gets foul, gets sexual innuendos, all kinds of double entendres, and all kinds of inappropriate things ... making fun or poking fun or making light of the human

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<sup>98</sup> Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 181.

<sup>99</sup> Snodgrass, “Ephesians,” 269.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, in *Word Biblical Commentary* 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 323.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

body, when a lot of guys refer to woman insofar as parts go, with very pejorative implications ... talking in crude, crass, vulgar, vile ways.<sup>102</sup>

### **An Exposition of 1 Timothy 3:1**

In Paul's list of 16 elder qualifications in 1 Tim 3:1–7, blamelessness heads the list. To be "blameless" is to have unquestionable character. This is a non-negotiable for an elder, a prerequisite for this most honorable position in Christ's church (1 Tim 5:18). Paul clearly writes, "An elder then *must be* blameless" (emphasis added) (1 Tim 3:2). The Greek tense is in the present, indicating that an elder is to be presently, habitually, and continuously blameless.

Practically, a blameless man lives his life in such an upright and honest way, that there are no fingers pointing at him. He is a model man and a model Christian. He is worthy of emulation, honor and respect because his reputation is good at home, in the church, and in the world. He is the man whose words can be trusted because they are faithful and true.

A blameless man is a servant, mentor, confidant, and friend. He has integrity. His actions match his teaching; his lips match his life. He has wholeness and soundness to him; he is uncompromising and without guile. He is a man of uncompromising integrity matched with undiminished dignity, a man among men. He is steady, sturdy, steadfast and sincere. Such is the description of every man who holds the office of elder in God's economy.

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<sup>102</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Stopping Self Indulgence," (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, December 8, 2002), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/ephesians>, (accessed March 2, 2009).

Unlike disreputable men, a blameless man has no spot or blotch on his life. There are no cracks in his foundation, no hidden sins, no flagrant disqualifications, no obvious slip or shortfall in his character, no continuing pattern of sin, no besetting sin or stubborn habit. As a result, no legitimate accusation can be brought against him as to his qualification for ministry; his heart is at peace, resting safely beyond the blame of false-accusers.

His character is unassailable, unquestioned, consistent and credible. His reputation is solid, his name is good. Proverbs 22:1 is a good description of this man. “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold.” He has “a good name,” and therefore his worth among wise men is much greater than even great piles of gold or silver. He is a man among men, a true man of God. There is no contradiction between his public life and his private life, his character is unchanging, regardless of where he is or who he is with. His heart is pure before God and His speech does not belie that purity.

This does not mean of course, that a blameless man is a sinless man. If “blameless” meant sinless, no one could be an elder. The universality of original sin has left every man a sinner (Rm 5:12; 1 Jn 1:8), no one is sinless except Jesus Christ (1 Jn 3:5). When a blameless man sins however, he does not try to hide it or ignore it, he confesses it before God and man if necessary.

In the Old Testament, Daniel (meaning “God is my judge”) was blameless. With Daniel no fault could be found, though his accusers sought hard to find fault with him. All his conspiring accusers could fault him for was his consistent prayer life, he prayed with religious regularity. Daniel was a blameless man of prayer.

## **Conclusion**

Scripture is the purest and most objective source of instruction. Proverbs delineates the difference between a righteous tongue and a perverse tongue; James instructs on the high accountability of teachers in their speech; Ephesians instructs on what is strictly forbidden (“foolish joking,” and “coarse jesting”) and what is to replace this (“thanksgiving), and 1 Tim 3:1 prescribes the character and reputation of an elder. These passages are a trustworthy grid for all speech ethics.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of this conclusion is to provide biblical responses to 1) McLaren's Postmodern philosophy, 2) Driscoll's Homiletics, and 3) Driscoll's language.

### **A Biblical Response to the Emerging Church Movement**

As far as the EC is concerned, there is more than one stream to respond to. Due to the focus upon McLaren and Driscoll, this writer will limit his conclusions to the Liberal and Radical Reformer streams.

As for the Liberal stream (i.e., McLaren, Bell, and Padgett), their postmodern worldview (Col 2:8; 1 Jn 2:15–17) and its unbiblical underpinnings (Col 2:8), this writer concludes that the whole philosophy behind it is based more on the culture than on the Bible. The reason is not that these men have abandoned the Bible altogether, but that McLaren and other EC Liberals have allowed themselves to drift too near to the culture and too far from the Bible.

The result is that they are straying further and further away from the high ground of sound hermeneutics and theology to the “no ground” of Postmodernity and relevance. Such spiritual compromise has ensnared many young people, even Pastors. This writer has personal friends that have been seduced by EC Liberal teachers. Biblically, it is no less than a travesty of righteousness (1 Jn 2:29), and a departure from the way of truth (Ja 5:19).



James 4:4 speaks plainly about the double mindedness of desiring friendship with the world and friendship with God (as the EC Liberals do). The desire to please both sides is the easy path into the undertow of a culture lost at sea. Make no mistake, our culture can be characterized as: sex-crazed, drug-induced, brain-stained, poorly-nurtured, liberally-educated, God-hating, and biblically-illiterate. So it comes down to two options, it is the world or it is Christ, there is no mixture of both squeezed conveniently in between. This is where Liberal EC gets off track. Again, writing to believing Jews (Ja 1:1), James states in no uncertain terms, “Whoever desires to be a friend of the world, makes himself an enemy of God” (Ja 4:4).

### **A Biblical Response to Postmodernism**

Doubtless, Postmodernism is the spirit of this age, a philosophy to beware of, according to Colossians 2:8. Postmodernism is a sure-fire way to tail-spin the mind into reckless uncertainty, erratic behavior, radical inconsistency, and a celebration of both mystery and hypocrisy. Postmodernism is a dualistic matrix which makes wrong appear right and right appear wrong. In Postmodernism, black does not appear black and white does not appear white, everything is broad-brushed in shades of grey. Truth is held in question, nothing is certain, and everything is subject to immediate revision. This entrapping philosophy holds its adherents in a circular maze, leaving them to wander in a fog of confusion, at the mercy of the latest “wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14).

Make no mistake, Postmodernism accommodates *the lusts of the flesh*, shouting loudly, “Know the culture ... know the culture ... You need to know your culture.” Postmodernism is a carefully-crafted, culturally-relevant, biblically-inaccurate, post-Christian philosophy. It is a smokescreen for something much larger—that is—an

inordinate impulse to indulge one's own individual appetites on the hedonistic treats of a self-glorifying society. Pursuing pleasures and the pride of life, Postmoderns have lost their way, adrift from the protective safety of the truth.

Postmodern thinking is not the result of "being transformed" by the renewing of the mind, but the result of conforming to the patterns, values, and thinking of this world (Rom 12:2). Their cry is not "flee youthful lusts" like Paul instructed Timothy, but instead, "familiarize, saturate, know, learn, feel, explore, experience, imagine, let go, release, go for it, relate, converse, join the dialogue/movement/conversation." The operating principles and presuppositions of this philosophy are drawn not from God above but are the wisdom of the world, and as such are "earthly, sensual, and demonic" (Ja 3:15).

### **The Homiletics of Driscoll Evaluated**

The unstable ground of EC reformers, like Driscoll, trumpets the truth of God, but with the indecent trappings of a decadent culture. Albeit, Driscoll has not yielded his hermeneutic or theology. He has however, yielded the high ground of reverence, integrity and incorruptibility (Titus 2:7–8) for the fickle approval of a culture gone mad without God. He has traded dignity for indecency, integrity for innuendo, righteousness for relevance.

In this conclusion, this writer will show how Driscoll's approach is even more deceptive than the EC Liberal approach, and therefore more dangerous. Under the guise of remaining "culturally liberal" though "doctrinally conservative," Driscoll's middle-ground approach is dangerously attractive. This model is pleasing on the surface but

dangerous and deceptive because many biblical passages have been ignored in order to justify it.

When it comes to the Christian's interaction with the culture, there are some things that Driscoll and this writer disagree on. Driscoll claims to keep culture within biblical limits, yet challenges his readers to turn off Christian radio and tune in to a sex-talk program with Tom Leykis or Howard Stern.<sup>1</sup> In part one of his "cultural-immersion project,"<sup>2</sup> Driscoll encourages readers to,

Try shopping at a new grocery store, reading magazines (especially their ads) you would never pick up (middle age plumbers could read Cosmo Girl), listening to new music (Christian-pop fans would do well to tune in the hardcore station), listening to new teachers (Christian radio fans should tune in to a sexual talk program like Tom Leykis or Howard Stern, talk to people who are not like you, etc.<sup>3</sup>

One wonders if this is a plug for cultural awareness or a license to sin (see Rm 6:1, 14). Should a believer stop listening to Christian radio, and tune in to the verbal pornography of Howard Stern instead? Is Driscoll advising people to defile themselves for the sake of being culturally up to date? This means that even if a man is vulnerable to sexual temptation, he should still put himself in harms way in order to be relevant. This writer submits that Driscoll is laying down stumbling blocks for men instead of protecting clearing them away (Mt 18:1-6; 1 Cor 8; Rm 14). According to Jesus, millstones are to adorn the necks of those who cause little ones to stumble into sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2004), 131.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

For example, Paul's commandment to young Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts!" (2 Tim 2:22a), has never been more relevant and applicable than today. With a proliferation of illicit and explicit material vying for attention, these are days of radical resistance for believers, not indulgence. "Flee youthful lusts ..." Paul warns young Timothy in the imperative mood. In light of this clear command, listening in to Stern's grossly immoral radio show is a clear violation of Paul's command. To do so would be the very *opposite of what* Paul commanded Timothy to do (2 Tim 2:22). "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn 3:4).

Driscoll is misguided in his advice for Christian men to listen to this radio program; this is blatantly rivaling the teachings of Scripture. In this advice, Driscoll has broken his own rules (his rules for relevance).

It is at this point that we are in disagreement. This writer cannot, in good conscience, repudiate the Word of God (2 Tim 2:22) for the sake of cultural relevance, as Driscoll does. Paul's strict command does not harmonize with Driscoll's argument, it defies it. Driscoll himself said, "Innovation, when not tethered to the truth of the gospel, leads to heresy. Every heretic in the history of the church who took relevance to the culture beyond the bounds of orthodoxy did what Paul, in the opening chapter of Romans, calls exchanging the truth of God for a lie."<sup>4</sup> That being said, tuning into Stern is in no way within the bounds of biblical orthodoxy? In the same way, listening in to Tom Leykis, a man who defames woman and encourages men to indulge their carnal lusts by womanizing, this too is unbiblical and a grief to the holiness of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 53.

Discovering who Driscoll has taken communication cues from early on in his ministry, adds significant light on why he might instruct (not just permit) men to listen to Leykis and Stern. Comedian Chris Rice, a most perverted personality, also served as Driscoll's homiletics coach. In the early years of preaching ministry, Driscoll tells candidly of a few things he did to improve his preaching craft. One commendable thing he was to read biographies of legendary preachers."<sup>5</sup> That was just the beginning, Driscoll writes,

I also started studying stand-up comedians because, besides preachers, they are the only people in our culture who stand on a stage and speak to an audience for an extended period of time. In my opinion, Christ Rock is the most skilled comedic communicator alive today, and some years later, my wife bought us good seats to see him live, which was a better study in homiletics than most classes on the subject.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that Driscoll at times blurs the line between culture and Scripture, shading over the "black and white" with hues of grey. I contend that God has told us how preaching and church should be done (2 Tim 4:2-4; Tit 2:7-8). This includes the virtues of "reverence," and "sound speech." Speech that is both pleasing to God and profitable to men. This is the crux of the conflict the Scriptures have with Driscoll.

Driscoll's philosophy of language is pragmatic and cultural; the question remains, "Is it biblical?" The Scripture teaches that a man of God must be "an example in speech" (1 Tim 4:12), and must garner and maintain a "blameless" (1 Tim 3:1) reputation. Failure here equals disqualification for ministry (see 1 Tim 3:1-8). Driscoll argues that

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2006), 70.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

his use of harsh and off-color language is what it takes to reach the Grunge culture. Conversely, Scriptures affirm a higher reality, namely that “self control” and “a good reputation among those who are outside” are what it takes to reach God’s standard for ministry according to 1 Timothy 3.

### **Driscoll’s Public Confessions Surveyed**

Driscoll is obedient to James 5:16a, “Confess your sins to one another.”

Frequent confessions and acknowledgements of personal weakness Driscoll has publicly and repeatedly brought forth, and that with specific reference to his slippery tongue. In many of the sermons listened to, an opening prayer for pure and uplifting speech was offered. Therefore, it is apparent that the desire of Driscoll’s heart is to please the Lord in his speech (Ps 19:14). Though often he falls below the holy standard he prays for in his prayer, his prayers convey the desire for holiness.

Many times Driscoll prays before delivering a sermon, asking God to be the guide of his tongue and sanctifier of his speech. For example, before his Ecclesiastes message, Driscoll made this request, “God I ask that you would control my words and my tone tonight that I would go no further then you go, but that I would not out of cowardice back off when things that are hard need to be said.”<sup>7</sup> Consider this prayer in another sermon, showing a sincere desire to please God in His speech, “... that I would have freedom, but that I would not be reckless, I pray that I would be biblical but in a way that is faithful, and ... when all is said and done that I would learn along with your people as we

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Fear, Judgment, & Obedience,” (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, August 3, 2003), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/ecclesiastes> (accessed March 2, 2009).

examine your Word ...”<sup>8</sup> Driscoll’s confession was also evident from an earlier clip of the same sermon, in which Driscoll divulges his ultimate weakness as a person,

I have sinned a lot, I have said things I totally regret, in my past ... I have crossed the line, I have gone too far, I am deeply convicted over sin in my past, I am being sanctified by the grace of God, what I have said will live with me forever, and I am deeply sorrowful to Jesus and this message for me is incredibly painful because it hits on one of the greatest weaknesses in my ministry and some of the greatest failures in my life, but I also don’t want to be that cowardly guy who just gets up every Sunday and feeds the sheep ... and the wolves ... this message is painful to me because it hits me in one of the greatest weaknesses in my life.<sup>9</sup>

In a similar vein, when teaching Ephesians 5:1–12, Driscoll noted,

I don’t struggle with strip clubs, prostitution, pornography, me its my mouth, right it is my mouth, I mean I say things and I think to myself, golly, I shouldn’t have said that, its like I’m throwing grenades out of my own mouth ... we say things we shouldn’t say to people we shouldn’t say it to, in ways that it shouldn’t be said ... its just cussing, and yelling, and screaming, and saying what shouldn’t be said, its just sewage coming up out of the heart, through the mouth.<sup>10</sup>

Suffice to say, Driscoll’s problem with speech is not something he is unaware that he has. The challenge is to find confessions of repentance followed by evidence of change.

As for Driscoll, his hermeneutics are tolerable, his homiletics however, are unbiblical and therefore indefensible. Jesus himself taught that words are the wellspring of the heart. Distasteful speech then, is the outpouring of a defiled heart (Mk 7:21); and is egged on by the itching ears of prurient listeners (2 Tim 4:1–4).

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<sup>8</sup> Driscoll, “How sharp the Edge? Christ, Controversy, and Cutting Words.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> “Stopping Self Indulgence,” (sermon presented at Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, December 8, 2002), <http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/ephesians>, (accessed March 2, 2009).

Driscoll has demonstrated a continual pattern of obscenities and sexually deviant remarks (see chapter 3), and since no marked changes have taken place thus far in his speech (he used Ecclesiastes 9:10 to quote a coarse joke at least two times this year on national media interviews), this writer questions his integrity.

The truth is, Driscoll is not free from accusation, his life invites it. Because of his habitually unclean speech, Driscoll remains a reproach to the office of elder, a reproach to the church, and a reproach to the head of the church most especially—the Lord Jesus Christ. Tragically, his sinful habits are being laughed at, mimicked and perpetuated by his disciples. This writer agrees with the position of his pastor, John MacArthur concerning Driscoll. In a blog article, MacArthur wrote,

This is the first time I have ever posted anything critical of Driscoll. I have appreciated his defense of the atonement and his willingness to confront the neo-liberalism of other Emerging leaders honestly. But I don't think his perpetually coarse language in the pulpit and his apparent preoccupation with off-color terms and ribald subject matter are merely minor flaws in an otherwise healthy ministry. It is a *serious* shortcoming. No, it's actually worse than that, because it blatantly violates the clear principle of Ephesians 5:3–4. It is shameful (v. 12) and therefore a reproach. It's characteristic of the old man and one of the fleshly behaviors we are expressly commanded to put aside (Colossians 3:8). Scripture even seems to indicate that unwholesome language signals an impure mind (Matthew 12:34). And yet this seems to be a deliberate, calculated, and persistent practice of Driscoll's. It is practically the chief trademark of his style. That's troubling, and even more troubling when I see young Christians and older believers who ought to know better mimicking the practice. If this is the direction even the very *best* Emerging-style ministry is headed, it's not a trend any Christian ought to find encouraging; much less one we should follow.<sup>11</sup>

In a sermon addressed to pastors, Driscoll's sympathy and instruction to pastors in taking criticism is most noble. He called for lay people to pray for their pastors,

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<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, "Grunge Christianity?" *Pulpit Magazine Blog*, entry posted December 11, 2006, <http://www.sfpulpit.com/2006/12/11/grunge-christianity/> (accessed February 26, 2009).



particularly that they would respond right way to any wrong they have done. He instructed,

Pray that they would have a humble disposition that when criticisms are true, they would repent, that when people have negative things to say, that they would at least consider them to see that even if the intent is evil, and the motive is evil, and the delivery method is evil, if there is a kernel of truth in it then we need to receive it that we may be sanctified.<sup>12</sup>

In light of the research surveyed, this writer prays that Driscoll would answer his own prayer, and heed the message conveyed in this thesis.

### **Driscoll Evaluated through Ephesians 5:4**

#### *Illustration #1 of “Foolish Talk”*

In “Stopping Self Indulgence,” Driscoll concluded by pointing his people to what pleases God, the things that accord with “goodness, righteousness, and truth” (Eph 5:10). To accentuate the point, Driscoll considered the absurdity of sinning as a means of bringing pleasure to God. To illustrate what does not please the Lord (from Eph 5:10), Driscoll shocked his audience with verbal pornography. In mocking tones, Driscoll impersonated a ribald sinner who is in church, under the preaching of the Word, yet still deceived into thinking that fornication, drunkenness, and cussing actually pleases the Lord.

He said, “ ... Yea, Jesus loves it when we take our clothes off, he’s so happy, when we’re done, I say ‘Your welcome ... its all for you Jesus, I know your happy, I

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

know your happy, your welcome, your welcome Lord, I'm drunk for you, I'm cussing for you, man I have no pants on for you Lord Jesus, your welcome, anytime ..."<sup>13</sup>

*Illustration #2 of "Foolish Talk"*

In yet another desperate attempt at answering the question, "What pleases the Lord?" Driscoll practically insulted audience sensibilities with more absurdity. To teach people what to pray for, Driscoll again offered what *not* to pray for. He obscenely continued, "I want to be a pervert, Lord God, could I please be a ...no that's not going to work, um, Lord God, could I get a girl to . . . , no that's not going to work, Uh Lord Jesus could I get a quicker DSL line so I can download more photos quickly ..."<sup>14</sup>

*Illustration #3 of "Foolish Talk"*

With intention to impart the importance of wisdom to his people, Driscoll praised the value of reading as valid means of obtaining wisdom. His text was Ecclesiastes 12:9–14, elaborating on Eccl 12:12a, "And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end ... Driscoll illustrated his point with a story from his own life. In this story, Driscoll explained how after he got saved he got a job in a used bookstore. After a while, he positioned himself to be in charge of the theology section of used books, a section he vainly referred to as "the holy of holies."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Driscoll, "Stopping Self Indulgence."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Driscoll, "Fear, Judgment, & Obedience."

Response to Illustrations #1–2 of “Foolish Talk”

Driscoll concluded the aforementioned anecdotes with, “Does this please the Lord? This does not please the Lord.”<sup>16</sup> What does please the Lord, I think, is the next question Driscoll asked his audience. “Whatever your doing, ask yourself, ‘If Jesus were here, would I do this?’”<sup>17</sup> This question is legitimate, and has the support of Scripture (Eph 5:1; 1 Jn 2:6).

This writer is convinced Driscoll showed the absurdity of thinking this way, and is equally persuaded his people got the intent of his embellishment –You can’t please God by sinning. The drawback of this approach was the mental images that these statements left behind in the mind, and speaking as a guy, these were not helpful to my pursuit of purity (2 Tim 2:22). Instead, they opened the door to unholy mental pictures, causing this writer (an admittedly weaker brother in this area) to stumble. This banter falls easily into the biblical category marked “foolish,” (inappropriate and unhelpful).

Based on past justifications for his speech, it would not be an overstatement to surmise that if Driscoll were to explain why he uses these kinds of illustrations, the issue of culture and contextualization would quickly surface. In regard to this issue, Nathan Busenitz has clearly delineated the importance of biblical fidelity over contextualization for believers in speech. He writes,

Cultural contextualization is often cited as a justification for this kind of language, but contextualization is never justifiable if it takes us beyond the bounds of New Testament propriety. Moreover, the true power of any ministry is found not in

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<sup>16</sup> Driscoll, “Stopping Self Indulgence.”

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

clever speech (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1–5), but in the faithful proclamation of the gospel (cf. Rom. 1:16). As heralds of that gospel, we must watch our words carefully (cf. James 3). They represent not only us, but our holy Savior as well. Thus, we are called to conduct ourselves in a way that is honorable and above reproach. This includes modeling godly speech (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:16). As Paul told Titus: “In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us (Titus 2:7–8).”<sup>18</sup>

### Response to Illustration #3 of “Foolish Talk”

One might easily conclude, “Don’t overreact, this is not bad, he was just drawing a hyperbolic analogy. We know that he is not being literal here, he is using metaphor. Or, “we all know we are not to take this literally, it was just a joke, don’t you think your making a mountain out of a molehill?” Such was this writer’s knee-jerk response as well, but careful and prayerful reflection changed that view.

Such an irreverent wise-crack is actually a low blow to the holiness of God’s presence, and simultaneously a cheap shot to the person of God himself, the thrice holy God (cf. Is 6:3). To call a section of a used book store “the holy of holies” is to, at least in part, strip the “holy of holies” of its holiness. Compounding the indecency, Driscoll reused the metaphor again in a different context, the second time in reference to a different bookstore in Portland. He said, “In the Old Testament, God in His holiness would dwell in the temple, in the New Testament I think He’s at Powell’s [a used book store] down in Portland.”<sup>19</sup> This is taking the Lord’s holy name in vain, lowering Him

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<sup>18</sup> Busenitz, Nathan. “Clarifying ‘Harsh Language.’” *Pulpit Magazine Blog*, (September 23, 2008). <http://www.sfpulpit.com/2008/09/23/clarifying-words-about-harsh-language/>. (accessed November 3, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Driscoll, “Fear, Judgment, & Obedience.”

and cheapening His presence to the low level of a bookstore. It seems clear that Driscoll has invoked the holy name of God for cheap laughs. He has in essence, taken holy, sacred things and dragged them to the dingy level of an old bookstore.

What is holy or set apart about an old bookstore? How can that compare accurately to the most revered place on earth during the Old Testament dispensation, the very dwelling place of God on earth? This writer could see the bookstore being contrasted with “the holy of holies” on many fronts, but a parallel is simply impossible! This gross misuse of something sacred (again, the most sacred place on earth in the Old Testament), is an unfortunate example of “foolish talk.”

*Illustration #1 of “Coarse Jestings”*

To exhort his people to read, Driscoll told a personal story about introducing the “weirdest book” he ever bought—a biography on a “*Canadian Nudist Arsonist Cult*.”<sup>20</sup> He engaged his audience by elaborating how this random and provocative title so titillated his curiosity that he just had to pick it off the shelf and read it. He said, “Its like that bad light beer commercial where none of these things that belong together all come together, you’re like interesting, I gotta read that book ... ”<sup>21</sup> This provocative illustration, though certainly of bad repute (Phil 4:8), provoked a cheap laugh out of the audience.

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<sup>20</sup> Driscoll, “Fear, Judgment, & Obedience.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

*Illustration #2 of “Coarse Jestings”*

To inform his people about what not to listen to, Driscoll shelled out about a five-minute rehashing of what he listened to from a recent radio broadcast of the most popular (and most perverted) talk radio personality among single guys in their teens, twenties, and thirties. To protect the purity of his readers, this writer will not divulge (see Eph 5:8, 11, 12 for biblical support) the deviant content of the broadcast. Suffice to say, Tom Leykis<sup>22</sup> teaches young men more creative ways to commit fornication and adultery. He motivated his listeners to be creative and use women’s greed against them to gain advantage. He told men of a clever way to manipulate their own financial image in order to increase their attraction of the opposite sex. From what Driscoll reported in his sermon, Leykis is vile and degrading, both of women and of men.

*Illustration #3 of “Coarse Jestings”*

In order to illustrate the ridiculous response Aaron (the first high priest of Israel) had when the Lord confronted him about the golden calf (Ex 32:24), Driscoll easily turned the illustration into a joke, using teenage promiscuity as his contemporary parallel. He likened Aaron’s shocked response to God (“I threw it in the fire, and out came a calf”) to that of a shocked teenage girl who’s Dad just walked in on her and her boyfriend while doing things they should not be.<sup>23</sup> This writer’s rendition is mild; Driscoll’s was crude and explicit.

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<sup>22</sup> Tom Leykis hosts *The Tom Leykis Show* out of Las Angeles. His show is syndicated nationally on CBS radio. He is 52-year-old, single atheist. He specializes in helping men womanize, with less time, effort, and money. Coincidentally, he has been married four times, and divorced four times.

<sup>23</sup> Driscoll, “Religion Saves, Humor.”

### Response to Illustration #1 of “Coarse Jesting”

Wayne Wilson, a pastor and graduate of *The Masters Seminary*, made this shocking observation. “Outside of marriage, nakedness—from the moment of the Fall onward—has always been connected to shame.” In the Garden of Eden, some 6,000 years ago, after Adam transgressed against the Lord, he realized his nakedness and ran away, hoping to hide from God. Shortly after, God paused and made clothes for Adam to cover his shameful state. “And from that point on,” writes Wayne Wilson,

... nakedness is always spoken of in the Bible as a shameful condition. There is only one exception: marriage where the innocence of Eden is remembered and the faithful intimacy of God with His covenant people is pictured. Outside marriage, nakedness—from the moment of the Fall onward—has always been connected to shame.<sup>24</sup>

Should this shameful subject be the source of anecdotal material? How about as comedic filler to help a pastor’s sermon go down easier? According to the Bible, this is classified as unfruitful (Eph 5:12) and is to be exposed for what it is (Eph 5:12). How inconsistent that coarse joking like this should be the content of a sermon entitled, “Fear, Obedience, Judgment?”

To add iniquity on top of iniquity, Driscoll never cast the book he “had to read” in a negative light. To the contrary, he audaciously praised the work! Astonishingly enough, by drudging up such a lewd title, Driscoll actually exhorted his people (directly and indirectly) to give in to their carnal desires when aroused with intrigue about a provocative book title. Because Driscoll failed to place biblical parameters around the reading of such questionable materials, he unwittingly endorsed them as acceptable for

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<sup>24</sup> Wayne Wilson, *Worldly Amusements* (Enumclaw, WA: Winepress Publishing, 1999), 97–98.

Christian consumption. This was more than a slip of the tongue, it was a stumble into sin (Ja 3:1–2).

Simply stated, pornographic language cleverly clothed in humor falls into the category of “unfruitful works of darkness,” something a believer is to have nothing in common with (Eph 5:12), but is to expose (Eph 5:13). Sadly, quite the opposite was modeled in this sermon.

What is seen here is a severe undermining of the high and holy calling of an elder (1 Tim 3:1), not to mention that holiness is a mandate for all matters (including speech) for all believers. Christians are commanded to live holy in all their lifestyle, this is clearly expressed in 1 Peter 1:14–16, “as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, so you also be holy in all your conduct, for it is written, “Be holy for I am holy.” Many today are feeding their baser nature, when God has clearly called His people to do the opposite, to pursue holiness (Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 1:16), and put “obscenity” (Col 3:8) away from you!

To be fair, Driscoll rightly cautioned his people at least once in the message as to what to read, “Be discerning in your book selection, read widely ...”<sup>25</sup> This caution’s effectiveness was severely compromised for two reasons, first because it was general and not specific, second and more potently, because it was blatantly contradicted in Driscoll’s humorous citation, recommendation and endorsement of the aforementioned title.

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<sup>25</sup> Driscoll, “Fear, Judgment, & Obedience.”



Response to Illustration #2 of “Coarse Jesting”

To be honest, when this writer first listened to Driscoll talk about who Leykis is, he thought, “Is this guy for real? I need to hear this guy ...” This writer was moving forward with carnal curiosity just as Driscoll had, which in hindsight, is nothing more than an illicit desire. Driscoll began this illustration by saying, “I was listening to him this week ... I was curious.”<sup>26</sup> The darkened nature of this perversion is certainly unsuitable for Christian consumption, the contents of which should never be discussed in Christ-honoring conversation, how much more in the holy pulpit (Eph. 5:11, 12).

Driscoll said bluntly of Leykis, “He encourages men to be sexual predators!”<sup>27</sup> Should the explicit content of Leykis (who falls into the reprobate “inventor of evil things” category of Rom 1:30) be the five-minute illustration for a pastor shepherding the flock of God as one who must give an account (Heb 13:17)? The sad reality is that the whole illustration was about one perverted mind (Leykis) telling other perverted minds (his avid listeners) how to increase deceit and creative style to their breaking of commandments.

On this point and in many others, Driscoll is guilty of speaking openly of what is shameful to speak about in public (Eph 5:12). For the record, the results for me were impure thoughts combined with increased temptation toward sexual sin. Was a stumbling block being set here (Mt 18:1–6) for this writer? I need not insult your intelligence.

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<sup>26</sup> Driscoll, “Stopping Self Indulgence.”

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## Response to Illustrations #1–3 of “Coarse Jesting”

Driscoll did not delve into the word’s lexical or syntactical meaning (which would have been best), he did nonetheless provide the essence of what the word encapsulates. He honored the text by drawing the line of propriety in accordance with the text. The ironic twist is that though he clearly cast “coarse jesting” in a sinful light (by definition), he nevertheless contradicted himself by using it repeatedly in his sermon. This writer would argue that Driscoll committed the transgression by saying (in explicit detail no less), what not to say. In other words, somehow he said what ought not to have been said, for the purpose of illustrating what not to say.

Think of it this way, providing graphic detail of what not to say is analogous to someone telling a bunch of junior high boys, 'Don't make a bomb from "x," "y," and "z" chemicals. Don't go to your local supermarket and make a bomb out of "x," "y," and "z" because you might hurt somebody that way.' See the futility of this? What are junior high boys tempted with? Playing pranks and blowing things up, right? They love this kind of stuff. See how nonsensical this is? In the same way, telling a bunch of men not to listen to pornography at such and such a radio program is like dangling chocolate candies in front of a child saying, "You can't have this cause its bad for you!"

This kind of “double-talk” reeks of double-mindedness and hypocrisy. How can one forbid the forbidden, and then indulge in it? By the end of the sermon, this writer felt defiled. It grieves this writer considerably that he observed principles taught by Driscoll, unwittingly eclipsed by shameful demonstration. The duplicity and hypocrisy of this cannot be overstated. At what point does an illustration lose its purpose, doing more harm than good? Driscoll traversed that point and beyond.

Like his Ecclesiastes message (“Fear, Judgment, & Obedience.”), it is ironic that the title of his message was the very opposite of its content. Illustration #2 was taken from a sermon on “Stopping Self-Indulgence.” Also, the context set for this kind of action is based on Ephesians 4:22–24 which reads, “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (ESV).

From a biblical perspective, Driscoll used shameful, low-brow illustrations to illustrate God’s command to steer clear of “even a hint” of sexual immorality (Eph 5:3). He introduced his sermon with this biblical observation, “Some people say, ‘How far can I go? Where is the line?’ The line is where there is a hint of impropriety. Probably a lot further back than most of you are willing to admit.”<sup>28</sup> Driscoll highlighted this theme several times throughout his discourse. He said, “Paul is saying that sexuality belongs to God, there shouldn’t even be a hint of sexual impropriety or immorality.”<sup>29</sup> Yet in a very real sense, these truthful statements were turned on their head by the foul and filthy anecdotes that were intended to illustrate them.

From the immediate context, the number of biblical violations Driscoll incurred in just Ephesians 5:1–14 are staggering,

- He spoke openly and repeatedly of what is not even to be named among children of God (v 3)
- He spoke openly and repeatedly of what is out of place (or unfitting) for a child of God (v 4)

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Driscoll, “Religion Saves: Humor.”

- He spoke openly and naturally of what is shameful even to make mention of (v 12)

In addition to “foolish talk” and “coarse jesting,” Driscoll has built a reputation for his frequent use of “harsh” language. This includes biting sarcasm, wise cracks, and cutting remarks.

Busenitz points out that sometimes severe and harsh language is necessary to carry out other biblical commands. This strong language is limited or reserved for the confrontation of sin and the condemnation of heresy. Busenitz explains,

There *is* a legitimate form of “harsh language” that Christians can and should use. Such language encompasses the courageous confrontation of sin and hypocrisy along with the clear denunciation of false religion and doctrinal error. It does not involve profanity, silliness, or reckless vulgarity, yet it might be rightly regarded as “harsh” because it is tenaciously intolerant of error. It speaks the truth directly and without apology—saying what needs to be said, even if doing so results in being unpopular or unliked. It means refuting those who contradict (Titus 1:9, 13); reproving the worldly deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:11); shunning false teachers (2 John 10–11); casting down false arguments (2 Cor. 10:5); exposing the doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1, 6); calling dissenters to repentance (2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 3:10); and warning apostates of the sure and terrible judgment that awaits them (cf. Matt. 23; Hebrews 6:4–8; Jude 8–13). Such speech was not only modeled by Christ, but by every Old Testament prophet and every New Testament writer. It is speech that contends earnestly for the faith (Jude 3–4), and as a result denounces every form of deception.<sup>30</sup>

That being said, there is also a form of harsh language that is forbidden for Christians. This is the kind that Ephesians 5:4 prohibits. Busenitz clearly explains,

But there is another kind of “harsh language” far different than the above. It is, as Wilson calls it, “pomo bad boy usage.” Such language encompasses sensuality, silly talk, and coarse jesting, and includes things like laughing at sin or jolting an audience with risqué images. It is unwholesome, distracting, degrading, and inappropriate. This kind of “harsh language” is explicitly prohibited by the New

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<sup>30</sup> Busenitz, “Clarifying ‘Harsh Language.’”

Testament in places like Ephesians 4:29; 5:3–4; Philippians 4:8; and Colossians 3:8. Charles Spurgeon included this kind of “lewd speaking” in his definition of “profane language,” about which he said: “I am unable to frame an excuse for profane language: it is needless willful wickedness.”<sup>31</sup>

It must be noted again that holy humor is a gift from God and must be uncompromisingly channeled (or controlled) to the standard of holiness God requires. Remember, it is usually the gaining of a good laugh that is the main goal of the sordid kind of talk mentioned in Ephesians 5:4. Profane speech is almost always “for the purpose of exciting mirth or laughter.”<sup>32</sup> Laughter of coarse, is not wrong, the Bible teaches that there is “a time for everything, a season for every activity under the sun” (Eccl 3:1), including “a time to laugh” (Eccl 3:4). God is not forbidding his people from having fun, yet He has lovingly (Eph 5:2) given guidelines to His beloved children with regard to how to speak (“with thanksgiving”), and how *not* to speak (using “foolish talk or coarse jesting”). Only in speaking honorably, can a believer accomplish the purpose for which speech was given. Paul outlines this purpose in Ephesians 4:29. “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” This speech most befits a Christian who is walking in imitation of Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:1, 4). Imitators of Christ do not have the right to “free speech,” only “fitting speech,” speech that most emanates the holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Iowa Falls, IA: 1992), 685.

R.C. Sproul rightly observes, “Paul is not against the use of witticisms; nor is he against the person who has a fine command and articulation with regard to language ... Paul speaks about a misuse of language; not about joking, but coarse joking.”<sup>33</sup> Warren Wiersbe observes, “The gift of wit is a blessing, but when it is attached to a filthy mind or a base motive, it becomes a curse.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Lloyd Jones observes this in relation to the place of humor for the preacher.

All of these things [speaking in regard to humor] have got to be considered and must not be brushed aside. All these things can be handmaidens, can be of very great value; but we must always be careful in our use of them. We must be equally careful not to over-correct their abuse to such an extent as to become dull, colourless, and lifeless. As long as we forget ourselves, and remember the devil, we shall never go wrong.<sup>35</sup>

In kind, Snodgrass writes in regard to “foolish talk” and “coarse jesting.” “This is not a rejection of humor, but of misguided humor. Humor is a gift, but it can be a form of egotism, escapism, or self-defense and can be used in harmful, belittling ways. Like all other gifts, the issue is how the gift is used. Is the humor creative, enlightening, and restorative, or destructive, debasing, and inane?”<sup>36</sup> Again it is not all humor, just unholy humor that Paul warns about in this passage.

The right kind of laughter is always encouraged, provided it is at the proper time (Eccl 3:1), and in proper taste (Eph 4:29). Laughter that is according to the need of the moment (Eph 4:29) and builds up is commended by Scripture. Holy humor is a foretaste

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<sup>33</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Ephesians* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 126.

<sup>34</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1976), 125.

<sup>35</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1972), 241.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

of heaven that heals our present hurts. Proverbs 17:22 reads, “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones” (ESV).

### **Conclusion**

One must consider whether or not Driscoll’s speech patterns are wise or foolish (i.e. Proverbs 10:30–32), fit or unfit for a teacher (James 3:1–6), biblical or unbiblical for a believer (i.e. Ephesians 5:4), and last of all, qualifying or disqualifying for an elder (1 Tim 3:1)? One must consider the dilemma Driscoll presents, and evaluate it biblically, neutrality is not an option.

1 Thessalonians 5:20 reminds believers to exercise discernment and sound judgment in all matters, and in matters of prophecy in particular. “Test all things, hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil.” This command is inextricably linked to the preceding command against “despising prophecy” (or preaching). Paul is stating that all preaching is to be tested. On the positive side, if it is found to be sound (wholesome and healthy truth) and fit for ingestion, the discerning believer is commanded to embrace it like sweet honey and follow in it with joyful obedience.

At the same time, the point at which it is found to be contaminated, the discerning believer is to avoid it like a poison. He may discard it or run away from it, but he dare not imbibe it. May discernment prevail in the pulpit as well as in the pew.

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