

# Postmodernism

The 21st Century's Challenge to Evangelism in America

Slide –

Slide - John 15:1-2 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

This lesson is about evangelism, but not the usual one that describes the why and the how to carry out the important ministry of evangelism.

My remarks will be centered around the 21st century's greatest challenge to evangelism, to evangelizing our community our state our nation the world.

The obstacle to faith in our day is a multi-dimensional and competing belief system called postmodernism.

You see it's not sex and drugs and rock and roll that challenges Christianity's claim on the minds and hearts of our nation, if it were so it would not be that great a challenge;

no, what is **overtaking** our nation is a new way of thinking that seeks to replace the way we think about sex drugs and rock and roll as well as how we think about ourselves and about God.

The true challenge to evangelizing America in the 21st century is how will we answer the postmodern ideology that has through college campuses and most media established itself as a mainstream thought pattern for nearly half of the population in this country.

## The History of Thought

Before we describe post-modernism and its thinking, we need to take a look at what kind of thinking came before it and how it was formed,

So, for the purpose of briefness we can say that in the last 2,000 years the thinking pattern of Western civilization can be summarized into three main categories of belief systems:

### Slide - 1. Ethical Theism

This term describes the view of truth and morality which formed the basis for much of the Western world.

Ethical theism believes that there are absolute truths, that there are standards for right and wrong which are unchanging and which apply to everyone.

This belief system can be traced from the prophets of the Old Testament all the way to the framers of the Declaration of Independence who wrote Slide - “**We hold these truths these absolute truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.**”

Ethical theism believes that there is absolute truth, absolute good and these are revealed to men by God Himself.

The next thought system to develop:

### Slide - 2. Modernism

Modernism began to eclipse ethical theism during the **Renaissance period** 1300 1600,

when the shift away from ethical theism as artists and thinkers exalted man and not God in their works;

**Then the Enlightenment age** (1600s and forward) saw writers and philosophers build on the humanism of the Renaissance movement,

they began to speculate that if man was at the center, then man's ideas should be the determining factor in understanding what is true and what is good and what is moral.

**The Industrial Revolution** of the 17th and 18th hundreds saw great strides forward in technology,

man, no longer needed to look to God for answers because he was solving all sorts of problems by himself and only had to look within in order to find solutions and happiness.

**Theory of Evolution** - The final blow to ethical theism came when Charles Darwin provided an alternative theory to the origin of man which did not factor in a divine source and so with the popularization of Darwin's theory of the origin of man Modernism officially displaced as ethical theism as the Western world's basic belief system.

### **Slide - Characteristics of Modernism**

So as a belief system Modernism had the following characteristics:

**man was the arbiter of truth,**

**modernism placed its faith in rational and empirical science to solve all the problems of mankind.**

For modernists any **truth that cannot be experienced and measured was relative** in other words your experience of truth may be different from my experience of truth but they are both nevertheless true.

This worldview held sway into the middle of the 20th century but in the 60s a new form of thought began to replace modernism and this is what we call **Postmodernism**.

**Slide - Postmodernism** established itself more quickly than modernism perhaps because the way to communicate became much faster in the 20th century than ever before.

**Postmodernism** is a complex thought system and the best way to explain it may be simply to list what it believes.

**Slide -** For example, Postmodernism believes that **truth is a product of a person's culture,**

for example, there is truth from the Afro-American perspective there is truth from a French perspective from a Russian perspective, truth is what your cultural life experience is that's what truth is.

**Slide -** Human beings are simply a product of evolution and specific culture and experience, there is no divine spiritual component to human beings according to Postmodernism.

**Slide -** Some other features of this thinking: people are part of the ecosystem not above the ecosystem.

**Slide -** Another thought: there is no universal truth there is no absolute right or wrong, right and wrong depends solely on your cultural experience and values.

So, unlike ethical theists who believe that humanity is not progressing but rather waiting for deliverance,

modernists who believe that through science and technology we can make the world better,

**Slide -** Postmodernists believe that things are **not** getting better but the fault lies with the oppressive values of past Western civilization.

So, if you want to summarize this little history of thinking we could say that these three lines of thinking are embodied by recent politicians. For example,

George W Bush he was an ethical theist, moral clarity, you go to his library in Dallas he has a room dedicated to decision points how he made decisions.

Bill Clinton represented modernist thinking isn't he the one who said well it depends on what is is, that's modernist thinking.

Al Gore spoke the postmodern language of environmentalism.

Barack Obama also followed postmodern thinking in his rejection of the traditional Western value in favor of a new world order structured around globalism, that's postmodern thinking.

Donald Trump is a pragmatist poorly disguised as an ethical theist and you have to unravel that one on your own.

### **Postmodern Dilemma**

I said that Postmodernism is Christianity's biggest challenge but at the moment Christianity is not Postmodernism's biggest challenger.

Postmodernist thinkers are grappling with a different problem today a problem that has arisen as is the result of the 9/11 attacks in New York City several years back.

See part of the reason I've used up so much time explaining the different thought patterns is that this knowledge helps us understand the main issue facing serious Postmodern thinkers today,

**Slide - the problem can be stated in the following way **how will Postmodern America deal with absolute evil?****

You see some are saying that the 9/11 attacks rang the death bell of Postmodernism because the attacks were so evil they were so enormous they were so depraved that no one could justify them under any terms any system of thought,

in other words, it was so obvious to Americans to the West that this attack was so wrong that no appeal to Postmodern mumbo-jumbo about what's wrong for you can be right for me could make this horrific act right in some way.

Some people tried it I remember reading articles where people were saying well you know the United States deserved to be attacked because of what it had done in the past that was Postmodern hogwash trying to make sense of the horrible thing that had happened.

But no appeal to the idea that in one culture something can be good but, in another culture, it can be wrong and we just have to tolerate each other's differences

but we couldn't get to the point of just tolerating 5,000 people being murdered in a single day

because murdering thousands of innocent people in cold blood was so atrocious that it couldn't be defended under the Postmodern banner of tolerance.

So since then the United States has had a problem larger than the issue of executing justice on the 9/11 attackers, I mean this was decided by invading Afghanistan and Iraq.

No, since then the issue has been how will we now think about right and wrong or how are we going to think about good and evil in the future?

### **Filling the Void**

And so, in pursuing the solution to this moral dilemma America can eventually go one of three ways:

**Slide - 1. We can lose hope**

The nation can choke on its collective pride and refused to acknowledge the obvious: that there is absolute good and absolute evil.

We can wring our hands and obsess over the awfulness of it all and retreat into depression and just roll ourselves up and die, we can do that.

## Slide - 2. We can learn to live with it

You quickly heard the voices after 9/11 President Bush at the time saying hey let's just get back to normal let's show these guys they didn't hurt us, let's say let's go shopping go travel, fix your house, go out and spend some money it's the patriotic thing to do, consumerism.

Let's just adjust to the new normal and pretend that everything is OK.

I don't know but psychologists call this solution denial.

## Slide - 3. We can experience spiritual revival

Now that Postmodernisms concept of moral relativism has been exposed as a fraud as weak as corrupt what moral standards shall we use?

The answer to this is easy for us as Christians but not so for American society in general,

the main lesson of the bombing is that there is intrinsic absolute evil and if this is so there must also be intrinsic absolute good you see the issue here.

Slide - If there is **absolute good and evil** then there has to be a **superior moral authority** you can't have one without the other;

and if this is so, then this **truth must be encoded somehow**; and if this is so then this **code can be known**;

and if so **it has authority over us**; and if this is so **we are then accountable to this code**;

and if this is so **we will then be judged by this code**; and if this is so **we will be condemned** because we all have violated this code;

Slide - and if this is so **we need help**; and if this is so we **need a helper and a savior**; and if this is so then Christianity must be true because it is the only faith in the world that deals with the moral failure of man through mercy and not through law; and **this is true because mercy is a higher virtue than lawfulness**.

And so, America is in a dilemma because the most promising road out of the ruins of Postmodernism is spiritual revival and spiritual revival leads you straight to Christianity the very thing that had been rejected and denigrated as being irrelevant to the Postmodern man has now become his best option.

So there's a moral crisis in America a red-alert if you wish for everyone but it's not the cries of a decline in our morality **it's the intense struggle of a nation coming to grip with the brutal reality that evil does exist** and that evils counterpart **goodness righteousness justice** has a divine source that demands to be acknowledged and this demand is the basis for the very first commandment from Him:

Slide – “I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me.” - Exodus 20:2-3

The real danger for us is not that of another bomb or a poisoning attack or maybe losing a war

Slide - the real danger facing this nation is that America refuses to turn to the true God and the source of goodness and refused to acknowledge the true incarnation into human reality and that is Jesus Christ, that's the great danger.

Two False Choices

The real threat before us is that we are being presented two choices both of which are false and lead to destruction by different means.

Choice #1:

Slide - **We are in danger of making patriotism our God**

Does that have a ring of truth to it?

The seduction of worshipping at the altar of nationalism and putting the true God into the service of our politics.

There's nothing wrong with a policy of national self-interest until it compromises the higher laws of justice and mercy before God,

the danger with this choice is the belief that American can be great without faith in God and without obedience to God.

**Slide** - Psalm 127:1b "Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain."

**Slide** - President Dwight D Eisenhower struck the correct balance of unity and faith as the basis for this nation's greatness and survival when in 1954 he urged Congress to add the words 'under God'

**Slide** - so the Pledge of Allegiance would read 'One nation under God' he's the one that said you put under God after one nation.

**The only way to make America great again** is to find a way to make it one nation under God again, otherwise choice number two will become a reality.

Choice #2:

**Slide - We risk making government our God**

There are some today that are pushing this.

You see with choice number one we trust our collective identity as Americans to save us to keep us safe and prosperous, we're number one we're the best we're the strongest we're the richest we're the smartest.

The sin here is **pride** the audacity to think that we are sufficient unto ourselves.

With choice number two making government our God we trade in personal freedom and responsibility and social mobility for the assurance of being cared for.

This choice has many names: collectivism, socialism, communism, but in the end, it's basically transferring the original responsibility for one's life from God to the government.

The obvious problem here is that God never fails us but the government who can give you everything can, as history has demonstrated, usually ends up taking everything,

and that's usually how it happens, just ask the Russians, ask the Chinese, ask the Cubans and more recently ask the Venezuelans about this particular truth.

The basics in choice number two is laziness and a low-grade type of greed where a person approves the force taking of another's wealth in order to even out everybody standard of living which usually declines anyways over time.

In the end the only people who have wealth and freedom in the government as God's system are the people who are in the government.

Now these things don't happen overnight but what we're seeing in our nation at the moment is a fight to the death between the factions that represent in one way or another these two choices.

You know no empires or nations lasts forever but a nation whose God is the Lord and where are found people who call on God through Jesus Christ that nation can receive divine help and direction that can guarantee its survival and its prosperity.

So there in a few brief moments a brief presentation is an explanation of the true challenge we face in evangelizing the Postmodern America.

Now the natural response to all of this is, well what can we do, what action can we as Christians take?

it's on us we're responsible for evangelizing the world beginning with our community and our nation and the world, we're responsible in this day and age this is on us

**Slide - So what do we do?**

A couple of things first of all let's **recognize exactly who we are.**

In this time of moral confusion, we need to remember our role in the world.

Paul says that the Lord's church is the pillar and the support of the truth (I Timothy 3:15).

The church is the only organization on earth that has been ordained by God to present His truth to the world,

If there was ever a time when the church needed to come to the forefront this is it.

The weakness and error of the Postmodern thinkers has been exposed.

There's a huge void in the minds in the hearts of men and women yearning for truth and the church has been divinely established to fill that void,

and so the time to be bold is now the time to let our community in our town in our state and our nation know about Christ and salvation is now.

If the church were a business, I would tell it to triple its advertising and marketing budget for the next few years because there are lots of new customers for what we want who are out there.

**Slide - A second thing we need to focus on let's **remember what we're here for****

in the Church of Christ in every age in good or bad times evangelism is always job number one.

In a world suddenly looking for answers for comfort for assurance for life beyond death the good news becomes the most refreshing and encouraging message of all.

Now let's not make the mistakes of the past where we substituted something else for the good news,

and what we were preaching the core of our message was well there's only one true church or that a cappella singing during public worship or in a New Testament church we have male spiritual leadership but that's not exactly what people are looking for.

These things are true and biblical but they are not the gospel itself, we can teach people these things but not before we preach the good news to them.

**Slide - **The good news that God forgives and grants eternal life to sinners who believe in Jesus Christ and express their faith in repentance and baptism that's great news.****

They may not listen now because they're enthralled with the choices that they've made but at some point the false promises of both the systems that I've talked about that try to rule America without God will become evident.

We need to maintain the voice and the light of the gospel even if it will only be heard by a broken people stripped of its glory and wealth by the one who bestows such things on nations.

Heaven forbid what if the Communist Chinese what if somehow you know that destroyed our Navy and they hacked our systems our military systems and somehow they took over the country what would we do?

We'd preach the gospel we wouldn't be able to do it this freely we'd have to have 30/40 people who decide to have another 10/12 people secretly meet in their homes to have communion to read the Bible the way they actually do it now in China but the job would be the same the work would be the same just a little more dangerous.

**Slide -** What else should we do? Let's **reach the next generation.**

People of my generation have pretty much made up their minds about these things but our young people they're still figuring things out.

Let's help children and grandchildren be well-versed in the scripture,

able to defend their faith and not intimidated by all the godless mumbo-jumbo parading as knowledge coming out of most universities or the media.

Where do you think all of this has come from? 90 percent of the universities, Postmodern thinking reigns supreme, you don't believe me look at the newspapers and look what's happening because of it.

Is your granddaughter or grandson prepared to face that kind of rejection and humiliation because I'm telling you it's out there and it's waiting?

Let's prepare them as best we can: home study, discussions, Christian school and college if possible, steady church attendance, meaningful involvement so that they can function successfully as Christians in a largely unbelieving society growing more and more hostile to the Christian faith as time goes by.

Remember it only a little while the Lord will come to bring us to the place that He has prepared for each of us,

**let's remain faithful let's remain busy in His work until that time, let's be fruitful.**

let's be a light in this world of darkness in this world of darkness where people consider themselves light and as Jesus said if the light that is in you is darkness how great is that darkness

This is the hand that has been dealt to us in our day in our age this is what we have to face let's be faithful nevertheless.

if you need to begin or continue your walk if you need help to respond to the indifference in disbelief in this world maybe you don't feel equipped enough that's okay, we're here to try to equip the church to live faithful productive lives in this in this dark world,

in any case if you are in need of prayer or encouragement at this time that we might provide and minister to you we do encourage you to come forward now as James leads us in our song of encouragement.

**Slide -**