

# Under Threat!

## Seduction

There are many subtle enticements to abandon Evangelical ministry. They play on our own sinfulness for, deep down, there is a part of us that does not want to preach the gospel. As it says in James 1: "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."

Here are five examples.

### 1. Intellect

Evangelicals tend to have an intellectual inferiority complex. We want to be respected intellectually and we can be seduced by this into compromising our message.

Sometimes the seduction stems from a desire for better apologetics (ie. defending the Christian faith to outsiders). The Liberals tell us that modern man will not believe fairy stories about people parting the Red Sea or rising from the dead. They tell us that we need to strip the gospel of these 'mythical' First Century elements so that it is comprehensible to Twentieth Century Man.

We are keen, of course, to see Twentieth Century Man converted, and so we water down or leave out the miraculous element. We do not do it as blatantly as the Liberals—we still want to affirm the bodily resurrection of Christ, and so on. But it is interesting to note how this 'modernizing' influence has changed the way we speak. When we are discussing or teaching a passage Scripture, how often do we say, "What Paul is saying here...", or "I think what the Psalmist had in mind was...". And how often do we say, "What God is saying here...".

The subtle influence of Liberalism, along with our inferiority complex, has resulted in our emphasizing the human aspect of things. We refrain from language that sounds too

*You might not realise it, or you may be only too aware of it, but Biblical Christianity is under threat.*

*Whether you are a member of an Evangelical congregation, or one of its elders, or its pastor, you need to be aware of the threat and resist it at all costs.*

overtly supernatural because we feel awkward about it. "Thus says the Lord", as a concept, is disappearing from Evangelical preaching.

This is perhaps a small thing—the way we speak about the Bible—but it is a revealing symptom. Would you feel happy talking to your non-Christian friend about angels? If you would feel embarrassed about it, have not the Liberals already begun to win you

over? Greeks demand wisdom, and so do Liberals, but we must preach the foolishness of Christ crucified—the wisdom of God.

Perhaps this problem is also caused by our reaction to the Charismatic controversy. There are some Christians who wear their supernatural God on their sleeve: "God told me... and then I said, 'Lord, just what do you mean?' And He said right back..." The very demonstrative Hallelujah-Praise-the-Lord

Christian seems a bit phoney to us. Charismatic Christianity tends to encourage being very demonstrative in this way, and this might not be a bad thing, although it can have its problems.

We, however, react against it by dropping God-talk altogether. We are reluctant to talk about the Holy Spirit, or to use phrases like 'renewal' or 'filled with the Spirit'. This reaction is understandable, but in the long run is a threat to authentic Evangelical ministry.

## Definitions:

This article uses some labels or jargon words to convey its point. It might be worth defining a few of the important ones, although in these brief definitions it is hard not to be simplistic.

### Evangelical ministry

Evangelicalism has a number of distinguishing marks. It holds fast to the Bible as the final and comprehensive authority in all matters of faith and life. Evangelical ministry concentrates on preaching the Biblical gospel—of faith in Christ crucified and repentance—and seeing people grow in holiness as we look forward in hope to Jesus' return.

### Liberals/liberalism

'Liberal' is a word that has been coined to describe those within Christendom who rely on Reason as a final authority. Things within the Bible that seem to be primitive or irrational are discarded—things like the Virgin Birth or the bodily resurrection of Christ. The miraculous element in general is eliminated from the Christian revelation. Liberals often emphasize social or political action as a means of ushering in Christ's kingdom on earth.

### Charismatics

This sector of Christianity seeks to be led by their experience of God, especially the movings and promptings of the Spirit. God is to be known and worshipped through our direct experience of him via mystical contact or supernatural events (like healings, miracles, speaking in tongues and so on). Most Charismatic groups encourage believers to seek a decisive spiritual experience subsequent to conversion—some call it the Baptism in the Spirit; others do not. Speaking in tongues is often seen as the sign that a believer has entered into this full experience of God.

## 2. Love of power

We all want power. Power is getting things done. Power is being recognized as a force in society, or failing that, in our denomination. We all want a larger, more high-profile church, that is admired by Christians and non-Christians alike.

On the strength of this desire, we are tempted to engage in socio-political action because it is more noticeable and is applauded by the media.

We want faster church growth and are prepared

to bend a little here and there theologically in order to achieve it. The 'church growth movement' is based on the assumption that a set of pragmatic techniques, rather than a certain kind of message or activity of God, will bring growth. While church growth theory certainly has important things to tell us, we must not be seduced into abandoning the unchanging gospel for the sake of our self-esteem (ie. for the sake of having more people in our church).

### 3. Love of popularity

We hate being disliked by anyone, least of all by fellow Christians. We are open to seduction on a number of fronts:

- when our denomination wants us to go a certain way to which we are opposed on Biblical grounds
- when we are called on to engage in ecumenical activities with churches that do not preach the gospel

- when other people in our church desire a course that we know to be wrong or distracting.

In each case, the easiest way is to go along with it. "After all, I don't want to be divisive", is the thought that goes through our minds, and, in one sense, it is a godly thought. But we **must** be divisive where the truth is concerned. Unity or friendship that is based on error is no unity at all.

"Woe to you," said Jesus, "when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets."

### 4. Worldliness

When we look at our lives—at our superannuation, and family car, and comfortable home, and respectable job, and holiday house, and private schooling, and financial security, and TV/radio/video/stereo, and white goods, and home computers, and European trips—is it any wonder that our

## S O N N E T S   F R O M   M A R K ' S   G O S P E L

### Demons

You stepped from the carpenter's shop and the demons knew you,  
As you brushed chips from your work clothes in the gesture  
You once used after finishing creation.  
Through you, matter itself was made, the very texture  
Of space and time. Thirty years before,  
You had entered your own work, lain in the womb  
Of that anonymous virgin, taken the war  
To the enemy. Victory will fill your empty tomb.

But that's three years away, and it is now,  
As you move from the bench to your real work, they see  
You as you were and as you are. They cry:  
"Here on earth the one we would not bow  
To in Heaven pursues us. Let us be,  
Here among our toys, you Son of the Most High!"

TONY MORPHETT  
1989

society sees Christianity as being irrelevant? After all, we are no different from them. We have the same values, the same lifestyle. We want a high standard of living, and an even higher one for our kids.

How can we challenge the world about the poverty of materialism when we are as impoverished as they? The lives of most Western Evangelicals seem to be a long way from the challenge of Jesus to leave all and follow him. We have adopted the world's values and it is crippling our Evangelical ministries.

We can see it most clearly in what we want for our children. If you have children, what is it that you want for them most of all? To go to the mission field and face hardship and even death for Christ? Or to become a doctor? Too few of us could honestly answer the former.

## 5. Lack of confidence in God

We lack confidence in two areas—prayer and the word—and both have a gradual negative effect on our church life.

We lack confidence that our prayers will be answered. Whatever else might be wrong with Mr Wimber's teaching, his accusation that Evangelicals have stopped looking for God to act in response to our prayers is probably fair. Is this another of the inroads of Liberalism?

For all our emphasis on the word, it is easy for us to begin to lose our faith in it. We say that the gospel is God's power for salvation, and that the Spirit applies the word to people's hearts and convicts them. Yet the temptation to depart from what the Bible is saying, to try to 'make it relevant', is strong. We springboard from the text into all kinds of modern issues in an effort to keep people interested. Another symptom is the infrequency with which we study, or preach from, the Old Testament.

But the Bible doesn't need to be 'made relevant'—it is relevant. It needs to be communicated clearly and in forms that are appropriate to our society (*see the last four issues! Ed.*) but the message is still the same. It was

given 'once for all to the saints' and its power has not waned over the centuries.

These five examples are just some of the subtle inducements to abandon Evangelical ministry. They creep up on us and untie our boat from its moorings and, before we realise it, we have drifted far out to sea. Let us take stock of our situation and, if necessary, do some emergency paddling.

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## Direct attack

Evangelical ministry comes under direct attack through contrary teaching and by the exercise of political, coercive power. There are many people—supposedly Christian people—who want us to stop what we are doing.

### 1. Our institutions

Within our institutions and denominations, pressure is applied for us to keep quiet and not to make a fuss. Denominational officials, who might once have been active Evangelicals but who are now far removed from the 'coal face' of ministry, want to keep the peace more than anything. They don't want to rock the boat.

Unfortunately, good Evangelical ministry almost always rocks the boat. Our allegiance is to the gospel first of all, and this leads us to challenge existing ways of doing things, to call on people to change, and to refuse to take part in activities that are inconsistent

with the gospel.

This upsets the peace-loving bureaucrats. They do not like difficult, challenging people. They want malleable people, who don't make a fuss, and who ensure good Public Relations with other denominations and with society. There are 'Protestant' institutions in Australia today who will refuse to license or ordain godly Evangelicals. Come to think of it, is there any contemporary, Protestant denomination that would have ordained John the Baptist?

Evangelicals are required to be constantly vigilant just to maintain our place within our institutions. Even institutions that were set up to be Evangelical have a depressing tendency to wander away from the truth. We have only to look at organizations like the Student Christian Movement, or the YMCA, or some of our own Protestant denominations here in Australia.

## 2. Liberalism

Liberalism remains a direct threat to Evangelical ministry. We have already touched on the subtle influence of Liberalism, but there is a more direct attack as well.

Liberals will tolerate many things, but they have no time for Evangelical ministry. They see our views as narrow and harmful and use their influence to silence Evangelical ministry or theology.

There is an interesting illustration of this. A leading, international, Evangelical scholar recently commented on the contents of theological libraries. The broad-minded, Liberal theological libraries own almost no Evangelical books. The narrow, obscurantist Evangelicals, on the other hand, have many Liberal theological works on their shelves, alongside the Evangelical ones.

The Liberals like to portray themselves as being very tolerant, but in fact they are quite censorious—especially when it comes to Evangelicalism.

## 3. The Charismatic movement

It may be controversial to suggest that the Charismatic movement constitutes an attack

on Evangelical ministry, but nevertheless it is true.

The Charismatic Christian has two mission fields: unbelievers and non-Charismatic Christians. It is quite understandable, even laudable, that they should regard other Christians as a mission field. They are convinced that the experience of the 'ordinary' Christian is lacking. After all, how could you come to a great new experience of God and not want other Christians to share it?! From their point of view, it would not be loving.

As Evangelicals, we must be under no illusion. We cannot hold Charismatics and Evangelicals together and not expect the Charismatics to encourage the Evangelicals to 'move on' to a higher experience. It is only natural that they do so. They will try to stay in relationship with us because they want us to change. They will be prepared to bend and adapt for our sake, because they want us to come into our full inheritance, as they have.

It is folly to think that we can hold the two views together in our congregation, or in our associations outside the congregation. We don't like to be difficult and so we take a tolerant line on the issue. But inevitably this leads to division within our congregation, to the watering down of the gospel, and to Evangelical ministry being hindered. During all of this, our fellow congregation members become confused, or are lead astray.

We must be clear in our minds that Charismatic theology and Evangelical theology are quite different and lead to quite different ministries. We must stop thinking that somehow we can combine the two.

If we take this stand, we will be unpopular. Pastors who refuse to take a soft line on the Charismatic issue have been denied places at 'Evangelical' conferences, have been refused spots on 'Evangelical' platforms, and cannot get their books published.

Yet if we do not take this stand, once can only guess at the consequences in ten years time.