

Discernment Study

Week 6: PRAGMATISM

Intro

- This morning is the FINAL CLASS in our 6 week study on DISCERNMENT
- Including TODAY, we'll have looked at 5 DIFFERENT MOVEMENTS that have had an IMPACT on the CONTEMPORARY CHURCH
- EACH was different from the OTHERS, but they ALL has ONE THING in COMMON. They ALL MINIMIZED DOCTRINE in some way.
- And in many ways, that's been a recurring THEME in EVANGELICALISM, ESPECIALLY in the last 50 YEARS or so
- Around that time, NEW EVANGELICALISM tried to re-engage in the battle to SPEAK TRUTH to the CULTURE when FUNDAMENTALISM WITHDREW in the 1950's.
- Their aim was to HOLD FAST to the ESSENTIALS of the FAITH, while being charitable and not making too great an ISSUE of what they considered to be SECONDARY DOCTRINES.
- And that's FINE to an EXTENT. We SHOULD ENGAGE with the CULTURE, and certainly we should be able to DEBATE secondary doctrines within the HOUSEHOLD of FAITH without DIS-FELLOWSHIPING ONE ANOTHER over them
- But as is OFTEN the case, the movement to CORRECT the errors of FUNDAMENTALISM ending up OVERCORRECTING and going TOO FAR. The intent of being charitable on SECONDARY matters in a short time translated into a MINIMALIST approach to BIBLICAL DOCTRINE.
- As a RESULT, many EVANGELICAL CHURCHES became more EMOTIONAL and SENSUAL than DOCTRINAL in their approach to the Christian life, and more SELF-FOCUSED than CHRIST-FOCUSED. And as that's happened, they have become less able to THINK BIBLICALLY.
- In that kind of environment, God becomes SMALL. In our daily lives He's no longer SUPREME and HOLY. He's no longer to be REVERED and OBEYED. Now He becomes the God who just wants you to be HAPPY. The God who exists to help you live the life YOU WANT.
- And when that LIFE doesn't MATERIALIZE, or when God in His providence allows some GREAT DIFFICULTY to occur, they are UNPREPARED to deal

with it because they have no THEOLOGICAL BASIS to understand their own SUFFERING.

- Another consequence is that the LORD'S PRIORITIES for the CHURCH become SUBSUMED into OURS. BIBLICAL principles for growing the Church give way to MARKETING and BUSINESS practices, and godly, biblically QUALIFIED LEADERSHIP is traded for dynamic PERSONALITIES who can draw a crowd.
- And the gospel itself becomes a means to a FULFILLED LIFE, where WE determine what fulfillment looks like, rather than God transforming us so that we find our fulfillment IN HIM.
- What I'm describing is the encroachment of PRAGMATISM in the Church.
- And PRAGMATISM is basically this: When VALUE is determined by RESULTS, rather than FAITHFULNESS to the SCRIPTURES.
- So this morning, we are going to review 3 aspects of Pragmatism that made an enormous IMPACT on the CHURCH.
- And I'll gently FOREWARN you, that in at least 2 of the 3 things we are going to cover today, a few of you may have SIGNIFICANT disagreement with me. Understand that I am not calling YOU a pragmatist. I'm just saying that these things can lead us to make pragmatic decisions instead of biblical ones.
- So, here's what we will be going over today:
- **1) Pragmatism in EVANGELISM**
- Here we are going to compare the FREE GRACE and LORDSHIP views of SALVATION.
- We'll examine the BIBLICAL relationship between faith and works
- And we will answer the question: What does it mean to FOLLOW Christ?
- **2) Pragmatism in Church Life: The Church Growth Movement**
- And we will answer these questions: What is the PURPOSE of the Church?
- How is the Church Built?
- How do we measure the success of the Church in its purpose?

- **3) Pragmatism in Spiritual Growth: The Mixture of Psychology and Scripture**
- Are the Scriptures really SUFFICIENT for all of our needs?
- What principles are important in helping us to KNOW real CHANGE and PEACE?
- Alright, so let's jump right in and begin with the comparison between FREE GRACE and LORDSHIP SALVATION.

Free Grace Theology

- So, what is FREE GRACE theology?
- The DEFINING idea of FREE GRACE is in how it understands the Doctrine of Justification by Faith ALONE. The KEY WORD here being "ALONE".
- The position of the FREE GRACE Gospel is that SAVING FAITH only includes BELIEF in the FACTS of the GOSPEL. It doesn't NECESSARILY include 1) REPENTANCE from SIN, as far as an INWARD COMMITMENT and DESIRE to FORSAKE sin, AND
- 2) It opposes the IDEA that GOOD WORKS are an INEVITABLE FRUIT of GENUINE saving faith.
- Before we go on, I want to be clear on something. I'm NOT classifying FREE GRACE theology itself as PRAGMATISM. I DO think that FREE GRACE theology is wrong. I think it is a MISUNDERSTANDING of what is meant when we say that we are justified by FAITH ALONE.
- But I do believe it opens the door to Pragmatism in Evangelism. And I'll tell you WHY.
- First, because I don't think it holds to a biblical view of CONVERSION. I believe the CLEAR testimony of Scripture is that genuine SAVING FAITH produces good WORKS because we are made NEW CREATIONS in CHRIST.
- And SECOND, because I believe that denying the necessity of SUBMISSION to CHRIST as LORD contributes to 3 problems in the CHURCH. 1) It TEMPTS us to present a pragmatic gospel where we feel FREE to remove or at least downplay the need to REPENT and FORSAKE SIN.
- 2) When the LORDSHIP of CHRIST is not given its proper place, I think it is more LIKELY that we will produce FALSE CONVERTS, and we bring into the

church people who by NATURE are GIVEN to Pragmatism over trust in the SCRIPTURES.

- 3) Paradoxically, I believe it encourages us to FIND our ASSURANCE of SALVATION in something that WE DID, rather than the work that GOD IS DOING in us.
- That we prayed a PRAYER on a certain date asking Jesus to COME INTO OUR HEART, or that we walked an aisle or raised a hand in response to an INVITATION. It leads to have confidence in a TRANSACTION that WE MADE at a point in time.
- Now, can someone be SAVED after hearing an INADEQUATE presentation of the Gospel? Sure, I think they CAN. But regardless of how well or how poorly someone presents the gospel, everyone who is genuinely SAVED comes the same way.
- They understand that they are a sinner in NEED of FORGIVENESS, and each GENUINE BELIEVER, even those who hold to FREE GRACE, acknowledges CHRIST as LORD and produces SPIRITUAL FRUIT.
- But in the end, coming to theological conclusions for or against the FREE GRACE gospel by LOGIC or REASONING proves NOTHING. We have to go to the SCRIPTURES.
- So first, let's look at the passages that some say AFFIRM the FREE Grace position.
- **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."
- So, granted. It says that whoever BELIEVES in Jesus WILL NOT PERISH, but has ETERNAL LIFE. No mention here of forsaking sin or the necessity of perseverance in VERSE 16.
- Then there's the case of the **Philippian jailer in Acts 16:29-31**: ²⁹"And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, WHAT MUST I DO to be saved?" ³¹They said, "BELIEVE in the LORD Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."
- Again, it just says BELIEVE in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.
- And finally, there's **John 5:24**. ²⁴"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and BELIEVES Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come

into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

- And again, it says simply that whomever BELIEVES HAS ETERNAL LIFE in verse 24.
- But let’s go back to each of those passages and have a SECOND LOOK. First, go back to **John 3:16**. Now let’s keep reading down through verse 21. What does it SAY?
- **John 3:16-21:** “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever BELIEVES in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ He who BELIEVES in Him is not judged; he who DOES NOT BELIEVE has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ THIS IS THE JUDGMENT, that the Light has come into the world, and MEN LOVED THE DARKNESS rather than the Light, for their DEEDS WERE EVIL. ²⁰ **For EVERYONE WHO DOES EVIL hates the Light, and DOES NOT COME TO THE LIGHT for fear that his deeds will be exposed.** ²¹ But he who PRACTICES THE TRUTH COMES TO THE LIGHT, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been WROUGHT IN GOD.”
- If you hold that someone can believe and be SAVED and yet there be NO DIFFERENCE between that person and an UTTERLY worldly person, then you’re left to EXPLAIN what exactly John means in the statements he makes in verses 19-21.
- In verses 19-20 it’s clear that those who DO NOT BELIEVE are marked by a life of EVIL. They avoid the LIGHT because this EXPOSES their EVIL DEEDS.
- And in contrast in verse 21, those who DO BELIEVE come to the LIGHT and PRACTICE the TRUTH.
- Now let’s go to the passage in **Acts 16** about the Philippian jailer. We’ll begin in VERSE 29 again, but we will continue on through VERSE 33. ²⁹ “And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰ and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, WHAT MUST I DO to be saved?” ³¹ They said, “BELIEVE in the LORD Jesus, and YOU WILL BE SAVED, you and your household.” ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household*.”
- It’s often said that the Philippian jailer was saved on an incredibly simple gospel. Simply, “Believe in the LORD JESUS, and you will be saved. You and

your whole household.”

- There are a few things that are important to POINT OUT here. 1) I don't think ANYONE could seriously make a case for salvation based ONLY on the words “Believe in the LORD JESUS”. There had at least to be an understanding not only of WHO JESUS IS, but also WHAT HE DID. That Jesus DIED for HIS SIN and ROSE AGAIN.
- 2) We see right here IN THE PASSAGE that more WAS EXPLAINED to the Philippian jailer and his household. Because in verse VERSE 32 it says that Paul and SILAS spoke the Word of the LORD to the jailer and his household, and THEN they were baptized.
- So to argue that Paul's SILENCE about the need to REPENT and TURN from SIN in verse 31 means that Paul didn't consider this as essential to the Gospel message is PROBLEMATIC.
- Because it IGNORES the fact that in verse 32 Paul said MORE to HIM about the WORD of the LORD.
- 3) And there's one more thing. You'll notice that Paul IN FACT, even in his initial words to the jailer about the GOSPEL, declares JESUS TO BE LORD. He said, “Believe in the LORD JESUS”
- The word “LORD” is the Greek word “Kurios”. Words have meaning. The word kurios can mean different things in different contexts. But it is ALWAYS a REFERENCE to AUTHORITY. So even in those first words, Paul was proclaiming BELIEF in the AUTHORITY of JESUS.
- Finally, let's go back to **John 5. Verse 24** clearly says whomever BELIEVES in Jesus HAS ETERNAL LIFE. But if you continue to read, just a few verses later in verse 28, we come to this same basis on which people are JUDGED.
- **Verses 28-29 say**, “²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the GOOD DEEDS to a resurrection of life, those who committed the EVIL DEEDS to a resurrection of JUDGMENT.
- So at THIS point, someone might say: In **John 3** and **John 5**, when you quote the passages that say those who DO GOOD will receive LIFE and those WHO DO EVIL will be judged, it SOUNDS like you're saying that WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY OUR WORKS...
- ...Obviously, we KNOW from passages like ROMANS 4, and many others, that WE ARE IN NO WAY SAVED by OUR WORKS. So that CANNOT BE what the

SCRIPTURES Mean. Paul actually calls a WORKS-BASED GOSPEL ACCURSED in his epistle to the GALATIANS.

- QUESTION: So how do you RECONCILE Scripture saying in Romans 3:20 that NO FLESH will be JUSTIFIED by the WORKS of the LAW, and in James 2:24 where it says that a man is JUSTIFIED by WORKS and not BY FAITH ALONE?
- 1) Look back at the passage in **John 3**. Look at **verse 21**. It says: ²¹ But he who PRACTICES THE TRUTH COMES TO THE LIGHT, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been **WROUGHT IN GOD.**"
- The person who PRACTICES the TRUTH is not coming to the LIGHT so that he can be JUSTIFIED BY HIS OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS. He comes to the light so GOD's WORK IN HIM is MANIFESTED.
- Let's look at another passage and I'll show you what I mean. Look at **Ephesians 2:8-10**. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ NOT AS A RESULT OF WORKS, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS, which GOD PREPARED beforehand so that WE WOULD WALK IN THEM.
- The GOOD WORKS are not ours. We did them, but not apart from the WORK of the SPIRIT of GOD in US. This is the fruit of God's WORK carried out in us, not the fruit of our human efforts.
- Next, let's look at the Church Growth Movement, which is the very MODEL of PRAGMATISM in the CHURCH.

The Church Growth Movement

- We first began to see this in the 1970's and 1980's, when the "SEEKER-FRIENDLY" Mega-churches started to rise up in what was called the CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT.
- The BASIC IDEA was that in order to GROW and be SUCCESSFUL, that churches needed to organize their services around "THE UNCHURCHED", people who were UNACCUSTOMED to the Church environment.
- All of the SOCIAL SCIENCE and the POLLS told them that these unchurched people felt UNCOMFORTABLE in the Church. So everything in the church is RECAST to make them COMFORTABLE. So they DON'T FEEL like they are in a CHURCH.

- The sermons are SHORT, and light on talk of SIN or JUDGMENT. It's more like a POP PSYCHOLOGY PEP TALK, like DR. PHIL. The message is AUGMENTED with VIDEO and DRAMA, which is less threatening, less confrontational, and the MUSIC is more like a CONCERT than a CHURCH SERVICE.
- One FAMOUS Church Growth guru says that through these METHODS, that he could get people saved without them even KNOWING IT.
- The ENTIRE BASIS for the Church Growth Movement is PRAGMATIC, because it divorces METHODOLOGY from SOUND THEOLOGY.
- The TACTIC is to LURE people in with fleshly enticements. Give them PRACTICAL SELF-HELPS so they can have a better CAREER or HOME LIFE, let them JAM OUT to a GREAT CONCERT and LIGHT SHOW, and all the while making sure that they don't feel CONVICTED or CONDEMNED.
- And the HOPE is that as they RELAX, and let their GUARD DOWN, that they will begin to see that they have much to GAIN by applying biblical wisdom to their lives, and that they will also rub shoulders with God's people and begin to get DRAWN into CHURCH LIFE.
- So the Church is then in the BUSINESS of providing a MARKETABLE PRODUCT: Self-help, belonging, entertainment, and a network of friends. They're selling MEANING and PURPOSE in LIFE.
- So as we think this through, to help us avoid pragmatism in our own approach to Church life, some clarifying questions come to mind. 1) What is the purpose of the Church?
- 2) How is the Church built?
- 3) How do we measure success as a Church?
- Let's start with the first question: What is the purpose of the Church? But to arrive at a proper answer, we should probably begin with WHO the CHURCH IS.
- Turn to **Romans 8** and let's look at **verse 28** ²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, to THOSE WHO ARE CALLED according to *His* purpose."
- So the Church is NOT A BUILDING, and it's not necessarily even whatever GROUP OF PEOPLE HAPPEN to be IN THE SANCTUARY on Sunday morning.

- The CHURCH is the CALLED of GOD, those people in whom GOD is UNIQUELY WORKING for GOOD and for HIS PURPOSE. These are the ones, if you read further down through verse 30, who God FOREKNEW and PREDESTINED to be CONFORMED to the IMAGE of HIS SON.
- So the CHURCH is a PARTICULAR group, the CALLED of GOD. And God has a PARTICULAR PURPOSE in those people. He has CHOSEN and is SPIRITUALLY TRANSFORMING them into the IMAGE OF CHRIST as He prepares them for GLORY.
- So that would be the first PROBLEM I would point out with the Church Growth Movement. God's REDEMPTIVE priority is the WORK of conforming BELIEVERS into the IMAGE of CHRIST.
- And given that, I think that SHOULD be the PRIORITY of LEADERS in the CHURCH as WELL. And so that purpose should be the overwhelming DRIVE of all MINISTRY.
- Now, someone may say, hang on a minute. These SEEKER-FRIENDLY churches are all about DRAWING people in for the purpose of seeing them COME to FAITH. That's evangelistic. That's obviously a part of God's redemptive purpose.
- OK. But there's a PROBLEM or two there. 1) These kinds of churches AVOID talk of SIN and REPENTANCE in CLEAR terms. They often preach a gospel that is more about how Jesus can save you from aimlessness, rather than how He can save you from the Eternal WRATH your SIN deserves.
- 2) Where is the work of CONFORMING the SAINTS to CHRIST? The focus is so much on DRAWING Crowds and minimizing those things that SCARE or BORE UNBELIEVERS- like sermons filled doctrinal teaching and convicting exhortation- that genuinely EQUIPPING the SAINTS becomes an AFTERTHOUGHT.
- And speaking of equipping the Saints, let's answer the next question: How is the Church built?
- **Let's go to Ephesians 4. Starting in VERSES 1-2.** "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to WALK in a manner WORTHY OF THE CALLING with which YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT in the bond of peace."
- So Paul is FIRST reminding them of their UNITY, their ONENESS with Christ and with one another in the SPIRIT of GOD, that we talked about last week

from John 17.

- And that they preserve that UNITY by walking in ACCORDANCE with their CALLING as BELIEVERS.
- And then he goes on starting in VERSE 11 to show us how the CHURCH IS BUILT so that UNITY reaches its FULLEST EXPRESSION.
- In verse 11 Paul references the GIFTED men He has given to TEACH the CHURCH, and the purpose it says in VERSE 12 is to EQUIP the SAINTS for the work of SERVICE and BUILD UP the BODY of CHRIST,
- And now in VERSE 13 God's goal of CONFORMING us into the IMAGE of CHRIST comes in to view: "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a MATURE man, to the MEASURE and the STATURE which belongs to the FULLNESS OF CHRIST. "
- QUESTION: We often measure Church SUCCESS in the wrong ways. What are some of the wrong things we look to as measures of success?
- ANSWER: Numerical growth. Lots of activity. Members happy. Lots of money in the bank. Influence in the community or with other churches.
- QUESTION: So how do we measure SUCCESS as a Church? What sort of things should we be seeing?
- The very FIRST thing we should see is a PROPER VIEW of CHRIST. Look at **Colossians 1:15-18**: ¹⁵ "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him ALL THINGS WERE CREATED, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is BEFORE AL THINGS, and in Him ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER. ¹⁸ He is also HEAD OF THE BODY, the CHURCH; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have FIRST PLACE in everything."
- And if a church has a PROPER VIEW of Christ, it will understand 2 things. It will MEASURE ITSELF by what HE THINKS. What HE finds COMMENDABLE, and what He finds OBJECTIONABLE, and it will recognize that CHRIST is the ONE who BUILDS the CHURCH, NOT us, as HE says in Matthew 16:18.
- QUESTION: Where is ONE place you might turn to find Christ's SCRUTINY of some specific churches?

- ANSWER: Go to Revelation 2, and let's pick out Christ's OBSERVATIONS and JUDGMENTS.
- Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7). Christ Commends: their PERSEVERENCE, ENDURANCE, that they cannot tolerate EVIL MEN, HATE false teaching (Nicolatians), TEST those who call themselves apostles.
- Christ Objects: LOVELESSNESS.
- Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11). Christ Commends: Faithfulness under persecution.
- Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17). Christ Commends: Holding fast to the name of Christ. Christ Objects: Allowing false teachers and false doctrines to go unchallenged.
- Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29). Christ Commends: LOVE, FAITH, SERVICE, and PERSEVERENCE. Christ objects: Toleration of IMMORALITY.
- Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6). Christ Commends: NOTHING, it was DEAD. Christ Objects: UNBELIEF.
- Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13). Christ Commends: Kept Christ's WORD, FAITHFULNESS. Christ Objects: NOTHING.
- Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22). Christ Commends: NOTHING, they are LUKEWARM. Christ Objects: Hypocrisy, self-righteousness.
- So, what are those things that CHRIST COMMENDS? Perseverance, Faithfulness, Love for God and one another, acts of SERVICE motivated by faith, hatred of sin and evil, Discernment.
- And what are those things that Christ CONDEMNS? Cold, loveless, orthodoxy. An unwillingness to confront false teaching. Toleration of immorality. Unbelief, hypocrisy, and self-sufficiency.
- The PRAGMATIC Church looks at EXTERNALS. How MANY people are coming, how MANY people raised their hands in response to an invitation, how MANY people participated in a program?
- The FAITHFUL Church looks at the INTERNALS. Are people GROWING in their knowledge of CHRIST, are people MATURING in the faith, are people exhibiting the LOVE of CHRIST?

- Okay, lastly, we will look at the mixture of Psychology and Scripture as a means of sanctification.

The Therapeutic Gospel: Christian Psychology

- I think a LOT of the ISSUE here can be SUMMED up in something I once observed in a Sunday morning fellowship group. Many years ago, and not in this Church.
- The teacher brought up the topic of the Scripture's SUFFICIENCY, that the Word of God has the answer to our EVERY spiritual or emotional need or PROBLEM.
- A woman in the back of the class, the wife of one of the STAFF, spoke up. She said that she TRUSTED the BIBLE, but that many of the struggles that people have today are COMPLEX. And that psychological principles were needed to address those things that the WORD of GOD did not ANTICIPATE.
- So while she professed TRUST in the Scriptures, it was CLEAR that this trust only went so far. And this highlights a REAL PROBLEM in the church. Because sooner or later, we are ALL going to encounter DIFFICULTIES, whether that's our own sin or just the CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE, that tempt us to discouragement, or even DEPRESSION.
- We are going to turn SOMEWHERE for help, and for RELIEF. Unfortunately, some people turn to PRIVATE SIN to DISTRACT themselves from the pain. But this only COMPOUNDS the problem with GUILT, and tightens the spiral of depression.
- Others turn to anti-depressant medications. And while there are sometimes PHYSIOLOGICAL, ORGANIC causes for depression, a study from just a few years back said that roughly 10% of the American population is on some kind of anti-depressant medication;
- That 25% of women in their 40's and 50's is on one of these medications, and that of the 5000 people involved in the study, an independent group of psychologists said that fully 2/3 of them did not meet the CRITERIA to be on medication at all.
- The problem here is that that the actual CAUSE of the depression may be going UNADDRESSED, and the medication only serves to make it more bearable.
- Still others turn to Christian counseling, which MIXES biblical and psychological principles, or they turn to secular psychological therapy. And

in this case, I think I have at least a BASIC level of understanding, because in my job I have to PARTICIPATE IN A WEEKLY 90 minute meeting with a group of licensed psychologists. I've done that for years.

- I've LISTENED to them, I've INTERACTED with them, and I know that most of them are truly interested in trying to HELP people with their problems. And here's what I've learned. The BEST that they are ever able to achieve is to help someone MODIFY their behavior.
- There can be SOME value in that. If someone's response to stress or sin or discontent is DESTRUCTIVE, getting them to stop the destructive behavior at least keeps them from making matters WORSE.
- But it doesn't FIX the problem, because they're in need of spiritual TRANSFORMATION, not behavior MODIFICATION.
- And here's something else I've learned. Most of the time, the people they see are simply UNHAPPY, because they are engaged in some kind of behavior that they WANT to continue, but which produces GUILT and PAIN and UNDESIRED consequences.
- OR, their life is subject to some set of CIRCUMSTANCES that they want to escape from. They feel that they've been WRONGED, and they despair because their only concept of relief is the hope that the circumstances CHANGE.
- And most psychologists generally can only offer them 4 things to help: 1) Reassurance and support, 2) To try and desensitize them to their distress, 3) To encourage them to adapt so they can function 4) To offer tools for coping with negative feelings
- Most of us understand these struggles personally. We understand the DESIRE to RUN from our problems, to DISTRACT ourselves from them, or even to just bear up under them with a kind of fleshly resolve or worldly wisdom.
- But those are pragmatic methods of COPING, not THE SPIRITUAL MEANS of SOLVING THE ROOT ISSUE. The truth is that the Scriptures DO have the answer to whatever spiritual or emotional struggle we may be going through.
- But those solutions are accessed by FAITH, which means you have to WALK in those solutions regardless of what your EMOTIONS are telling you. You have to TRUST GOD and His power and wisdom, even when you are tempted to walk by SIGHT and take hold of some OTHER, EASIER way.

- So we will just finish up this section by going over some biblical PRINCIPLES for change and dealing with our struggles biblically.
- WE'LL BEGIN with what these troubles really are. TRIALS ordained by God for our good. **Read James 1:2-5.** ²“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”
- Whatever we ARE going through is what God has providentially DESIGNED for us to go through. The purpose of these trials is to reveal genuine FAITH and to CONFORM us into the image of HIS SON.
- And if we lack the WISDOM to respond with JOY, then we are to SEEK that wisdom in GOD, not in the world. To do this, we must have trust that His Word is SUFFICIENT for every problem we encounter.
- Turn to **Psalm 19:7-10.** “The law of the Lord is PERFECT, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is SURE, making WISE the simple. ⁸The precepts of the Lord are RIGHT, REJOICING the heart; The commandment of the Lord is PURE, ENLIGHTENING the eyes. ⁹The fear of the Lord is CLEAN, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are TRUE; they are righteous altogether.”
- And then finally, we have to trust in God’s character and promises to lead us through the trials, and give us the GRACE we NEED to ENDURE.
- Turn to **Philippians 4:4-7:** ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
- We remember that the LORD is NEAR, and we CONFESS all of our ANXIETIES to HIM, and actively CHOOSE to TRUST HIM, and not to dwell on FEARS or SPECULATIONS, because that’s often the source of our emotional pain and spiritual instability.
- Instead, we see as we read further on down in that passage, we dwell on those things that are PURE, LOVELY, EXCELLENT and PRAISEWORTHY. By the way, that’s NOT the power of positive thinking. That’s the power of GOD to work in US when we are willing to fix our minds on knowing the truth and

fix our will on obeying it.

Conclusion

- I hope the last 6 weeks has edified you in some way. It's been helpful for me, this is actually a subject I've wanted to explore for some time, and this gave me a good excuse to spend the time.
- I do want to thank Marc for entrusting me with a large stack of books from his library. I now understand why you call them your friends! Now we have a few more friends in common.
- As for the movements we've studied, even today's, I think we have to recognize that each of them has left its deposit in the MODERN Church.
- My guess is that even some of us here most of us struggle with 1 or 2 of these deposits. My aim hasn't been to step on anyone's toes, though sometimes that's inevitable.
- And my aim hasn't even been that you ACCEPT my judgment on these things. My hope has been that we would better learn how to discern truth.
- So all that said, I'd just leave you with what we said on Week 1. To become more discerning, we have to 2 things. 1) We need to grow in our knowledge of the truth. We need to wrestle with those truths until they become hard-won convictions, and we need to make sure that our theology is always being reformed by the truth. 2) We need to identify the idols that bend our will away from the truth. We can have all the knowledge in the world, but if the flesh is still ruling, all that truth will do is accuse, not transform.