



REFORMATION NEEDED TODAY!

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*Castle Church Tower where Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses, Wittenberg,
image taken from alamy.com*

Today's church is in desperate need of reformation. Tragically, Protestant churches are moving towards a total compromise with the world and the false ideologies of ancient heathen religions. Today, so-called "evangelical" churches are

embracing liberalism, worldliness, New Age doctrines, and other unbiblical beliefs and practices. It doesn't take too much intelligence to realise that the root cause of all these is a rather sceptical attitude towards the Word of God.

Spiritual Declension of the Churches of Our Day

Pursuit of Worldly Philosophy

Like the liberals of the past, modern evangelicals use the Bible's words, but give them new meanings. Sin becomes "dysfunctional behaviour". Salvation becomes "self-esteem" or "wholeness". Faith becomes "possibility thinking". Jesus becomes more of an example for right living than being our Saviour from sin. People are told how to succeed in business, have happy marriages and raise nice children, but not how to get right with an offended God. It appears that the "bottom line" of much evangelical preaching today is feeling good and accumulating wealth. The pastors are more focused on making people more earthly-minded than heavenly-minded. They preach to suit the passions of a worldly-minded crowd that flock to churches to be entertained!

Ashamedly, modern pastors have no confidence in the power of the Gospel and the sound doctrines of the Bible. They believe that the way to win the people of the world is to cater to their tastes. As a result, preachers are adapting their messages in order to tone down the offence of the cross (cf. Galatians 5:11) and accommodate the prevailing philosophy of the time. The churches of pastors who oppose these so-called innovative approaches and defend the unadulterated Gospel are derided as unsophisticated, provincial, or even brutish troublemakers.

Pursuit of Material Glory and Worldliness

The increasing worldliness of modern churches is undeniable, and is a sure sign of backsliding and even an outward, visible sign of their spiritual demise. Disturbingly, the prevailing mood among people in the

churches of our time is towards unity, cooperation and inclusivity. In the face of prevalent doctrinal liberalism sweeping over Christendom today, exclusive claims to the truth and exclusive demands for consecrated living are not only frowned upon, but are also labelled as arrogant and intolerant. Mergers with contemporary culture, worldliness, and even with Roman Catholicism (as manifested in the ECT or "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" movement), are considered worthy and compatible goals to aspire to. Ecumenical cooperation seems to be the way to go forward in this postmodern, advanced, sophisticated era. But this contravenes the apostolic injunction to the church, which is to be presented as "a chaste virgin to Christ", to separate herself, that she be not "beguiled ... (and) corrupted from the simplicity (or single-hearted faith) that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). All true believers, as the "bride of Christ", must surely cringe at any unchaste "flirtations" with the world!

Sadly, the spirit of the world controls the leaders and members of the modern churches. Their talk, dressing, mannerisms, appearances and activities are all fashioned by the world. Instead of walking in the opposite direction, most Christians go to worldly places to partake in worldly entertainment. Increasingly, Christians are being enslaved by the worldly philosophies because of their unchecked participation in worldly entertainment. The line of separation has been blurred between godliness and worldliness, between the church and the world, and between those who fear God and those who fear Him not.

Instead of the churches revolutionising the world, the reverse has happened. Churches have been converted to the world.

Many in our churches fail to recognise the deception and damnation of worldliness because they have presented themselves to the world without reservation. It appears that Christians have made many easy alliances with the modern culture of sin and materialism. Needless to say, within a few decades, many churches have moved into the devil's domain, even the world. Do not churches of our time need a reformation?

Cause of Spiritual Declension of the Churches of Our Day

To begin with, we must realise that the root cause of such a spiritual declension in our churches today is the lack of confidence in the accuracy, authority and appropriateness of the Bible. The Bible is doubted, criticised and even sidelined in the pulpits of most churches. This casual and disinterested attitude was succinctly captured in a Malaysian newspaper article, which had this damning thing to say of Christian pastors: while the Muslims believe that their scripture is preserved without error, many Christian pastors have no confidence about the Bible's perfect preservation! These "scholarly" pastors even teach their congregations to avoid men who preach that God has preserved every word of the Bible, labelling them as extremists and impractical men!

What irony! What contradiction! Evangelical pastors, on the one hand, preach about the authenticity of the Bible, but on the other hand, deny that God has preserved His Word. Have they not read in Deuteronomy 29:29, that "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law"? Now, how can we "do all the words

of this law (referring to God's Word)" if some words have been lost? Impossible! They are literally denying the words of Christ in Matthew 24:35 – "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Are these pastors conscious that they are leading their congregations down a slippery path from which they can never recover?

What's more, do they realise how confusing it can be when people are told that they must follow a Bible that has errors? Though they may argue that those errors only pertain to matters not essential to salvation, where do they draw the line? If the Bible has errors, then it may err when it speaks about the nature of man, family relationships, sexual lifestyles or other issues related to Christian living. It arbitrarily gives licence to people to question purportedly small details of Scripture, which would eventually lead them to doubt larger and vital doctrines as well, as evidenced by church history. Be that as it may, "let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). God's Word is unchangeable, for it is "For ever ... settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89).

Not only are modern churchgoers losing total confidence in the Scriptures, but they are also fed with worldly philosophies that the Scriptures expressly forbid. The inevitable result is, over time, modern churches have become a fertile ground for churchgoers' spiritual declension.

Need for Reformation in Our Churches Today

Oh, may the Spirit of God awaken men to proclaim God's Word without doubt and shame! May our hearts yield to His Word with faith and obedience. May we resist

the devil and the world. May the battle of Reformation rage on even today.

This battle must continue, firstly because the Bible commands believers to do so. “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). Attacks on the true doctrines of the Bible have been raging since the time of the

another, but we can never be friends with one another’s error. We cannot have any truce or treaty with divers errors that have crept into the church; nor would we regard them with complacency. Being one another’s “brother’s keeper” in the church, we must be prepared to give and receive open rebuke cheerfully if any of us “err from the truth” (James 5:19; cf. Proverbs 27:5). Let us all be true to one another by

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apostles, though in varying forms. It is no different today. Our adversary the devil is always on the prowl to “infest” the church with his deceptive and demonic doctrines. Hence, believers must always be vigilant and ready to fight the spiritual fight. In a sense, the Christian church today must be a militant church, ever ready to face the constant attack against the subversion of her precious faith. Only by being vigilant to expose and challenge every appearance of evil and false doctrines can the church keep herself pure for the Lord’s glory.

Alas, this battle must also continue because giant errors have entered evangelical as well as fundamental churches. We must fight the Lord’s battles against falsehood whichever shape it takes, and deal with every error that pollutes the church. We can be friends with one

being true to Christ and His Word. As soon as we perceive an error, even if it only manifests itself as a “shadow” of unbelief, let us root it out and drive it from us, lest it plague the whole body and put “leprosy” into the entire fabric of the church. Indeed, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9). Dear church of Christ, may we have no peace with sin or with falsehood – only war forever with error and deceit!

Oh, may “Christ (who) ... loved the church, and gave himself for it” be pleased to “sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Amen.