

## **False Prophets Neglect Essential Orthodoxy**

Many experts call him the greatest professional football coach in history. (1) Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach of the Green Bay Packers and the Washington Redskins, enjoyed many victories in his career.

While head coach of Green Bay, he won 5 NFL Championships and the first two Super Bowls before retiring from the Packers in 1967. (2) He never had a losing season as an NFL coach.

One Lombardi quotation pinpoints his foundation for success: “Excellence is achieved by the mastery of the fundamentals.”

A typical story from his coaching era at Green Bay explains this philosophy vividly. After a bitter loss to the Chicago Bears, the Packers’ archrival, Lombardi hustled his players from the locker room after the game onto the team buses. He took them from Chicago back to their practice field in Green Bay, still in their dirty, sweaty game uniforms. He gathered them around himself with a football in his hands.

He held the football in front of them and said to them, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” He then directed his team through a grueling practice session with particular emphasis upon the fundamentals of football. The team performed them poorly in their loss to Chicago, and he reviewed them with the team to remind the players of the importance of the fundamentals in successful football.

This story from the victorious career of Vince Lombardi holds significance for life as well. Life has a way of clouding our eyes to its fundamentals. We get distracted by the latest fads and excitements which lead to disastrous results.

Lombardi’s lesson describes the desperate need facing the professing Church of Jesus Christ today. The Church and its leadership have lost sight of Biblical fundamentals and flounders in perilous times. Although exceptions exist, they prove the rule.

For too long, the Church followed the mantra, “Doctrine does not matter” and forsook the fundamentals. Then, to the bewilderment of many, a rudderless, spiritually weakened Church ensued. In vain attempts to “fix” the difficulties, it flits from one new idea to another, hoping to find the mysterious, evasive plan that will correct the decline.

Church leadership has failed. Whether from ignorance or by deliberate choice, the Church of Jesus Christ has succumbed to the siren call of false prophets and abandoned the old fundamentals from the Bible.

The Apostle Paul feared this pattern would befall the churches he labored so hard to develop. On his last trip to Jerusalem, where he knew trouble awaited him, he called together the church leaders from the Church at Ephesus.

He wanted to give his friends instruction about his future, though somewhat unknown. His message combined a warning and directions on how to face the coming problems. (Acts 20.28-31) He warned them that grievous wolves, false prophets, would come into their Church and draw many aside.

In his message, Paul compared these Church leaders to shepherds. God had entrusted them with the responsibilities as shepherds over His flock, the Church. They had a duty to feed the people of God, not with physical food, but with spiritual food.

God required these shepherds to protect their flocks from their enemies, who wanted to destroy them. God expected these spiritual leaders to give direction to their flock. Paul emphasized these obligations, because he knew that dangers lay ahead, and he made clear the responsibilities of these spiritual leaders as shepherds.

That which Paul feared would happen at Ephesus describes the condition of the Church today. Wolves in sheep’s clothing, false prophets, have infiltrated the Church. They twist the Scriptures to their own benefit and, consequently, the Church has declined.

We live in perilous times. False leaders victimize the Church. Faulty leadership of our day evades, attacks, and undermines Biblical doctrines. They teach that doctrine is not essential to Christian life. Even more dangerous, they say that no one can really know the truth.

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Seven Biblical doctrines serve as the old fundamentals of the Church of Jesus Christ and of our faith in Christ.

Church leaders, the shepherds of Christ's flock, must defend these truths against those who proclaim otherwise. False prophets ignore them which identifies them as false prophets, the grievous wolves against which Paul warned.

**#1: False prophets neglect the fundamental doctrine of God, His person and works.**

God has existed from all eternity in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the only true and living God, He sovereignly created and controls all things according to His plan and purposes. Through His appointed Judge, Jesus Christ His Son, God will pronounce justice upon all who fail to trust and obey His word as revealed in the Bible.

This brief comment does not, of course, state the full doctrine(s). It does, however, identify a primary basic belief for God's people but lacking in today's Christian Church.

**#2: False prophets neglect the fundamental teaching of the nature of Jesus Christ.**

True shepherds of the Church must believe and defend the person and works of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Without eradicating His deity, He set aside His rightful claim to His form with God, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became incarnate in human flesh, born of the Virgin Mary.

He became the God-man, God in the flesh, in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. His works would fill volumes describing His supernatural miracles. His greatest work came when He gave His life on the cross as atonement to God for the sins of people like you and me.

Everyone who comes to God by faith upon what Jesus Christ accomplished on his/her behalf on the cross will experience forgiveness and peace with God. Justification by faith alone in Christ alone provides salvation for all who believe. His resurrection on the third day after His death and His ascension into the Father's presence confirmed it.

**#3: False prophets neglect the teaching of the fundamental doctrine of the person and works of the Holy Spirit.**

An equal member of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit does not possess a physical form. Although a spirit, He possesses the attributes of a person. Even though He is deity, He inhabits the lives of believers and works in them.

Jesus taught in John 14-16 many of the works of the Holy Spirit, Who empowers believers with His supernatural authority and ability to serve God, to worship and glorify Christ, and to walk in holiness. He molds our lives into the image of Christ.

We do not hear very much about the Holy Spirit in our day. We have grieved Him, and in that process, we have quenched His work among us. The shepherds of Christ's Church must exhort Christ followers in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His works in believers.

**#4: False prophets neglect the fundamental teaching of the several doctrines of salvation.**

Today, the phrase "born again" carries little meaning. Some professing Christian teachers have taught this truth incorrectly to the confusion of many. Multitudes of people have done exactly what Paul said would occur. These wolves in sheep's clothing have come to destroy peoples' faith, and to guide them away from Jesus, the only Savior of sinners.

For this reason, I will discuss briefly several important doctrines of salvation, which we must believe in order to follow the Scriptures faithfully.

**Depravity:** Every human being, beginning at conception, is birthed with a totally depraved nature which alienates and separates us from God. Each of us inherit the sinful nature that Adam and Eve received when they disobeyed God's command and ate of the forbidden fruit.

This sinful nature so thoroughly permeates our natures that it renders us completely helpless to satisfy God or to reconcile ourselves to Him. The Bible describes humanity as dead in trespasses and sins. Therefore, we have no desire to seek and know God, have any power to please God, or to reconcile us back to God. We are spiritually dead, helpless. (Romans 3.10-18; Ephesians 2.1-3) All sinners need a Savior Who can pay for our

sin and reconcile us back to God.

**Regeneration:** You cannot make yourself born again spiritually any more than you can physically birth yourself. However, God made provision to reconcile sinners back to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ, whose death brought reconciliation between God and people like you and me.

You had nothing to do with your physical birth, and you have nothing to do with your spiritual birth. You can do nothing to deserve it, prepare the way for it, or produce it in your life. Religious actions though earnestly and faithfully performed, contribute nothing to your spiritual new birth.

The Holy Spirit produces the new birth through an experience called regeneration. It is a sovereign, gracious gift of new life from above from God to sinners like you and me by the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life.

**Holiness:** Once the Holy Spirit regenerates a person, He produces changes in those whom He regenerates, always. He causes the regenerated one(s) to repent from his/her sins. You turn from them and no longer follow your sinful lifestyle.

Furthermore, He gives you faith to trust Christ and Christ alone for your salvation. When you trust Christ, you become justified before a holy and just God. As the Holy Spirit works in your life, He produces a desire to follow Christ and obey Him.

The Holy Spirit then leads the child of God into a holy life. It does not occur all at once, but each one grows in holiness under the Spirit's direction.

These short statements identify the basic doctrines of salvation: helpless depravity of sinners without Christ, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, repentance from sin, and personal holiness. By no means do they describe the totality of these doctrines.

Volumes of books describe them in detail. As a Christian grows in faith in Christ, the fullness of salvation will stagger the mind. The miracle of regeneration includes the nature of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, as well as what you become in Christ...literally a new creature.

#### **#5: False prophets neglect the fundamental doctrine of the Bible.**

The Holy Spirit moved upon human instruments to record faithfully God's inspired message to humanity. Because of its inspiration by God, it is inerrant, infallible, and authoritative for life and practice. It describes the nature of God and the responsibilities of humanity to Him.

When you believe and obey it, the Holy Spirit brings into your experience the reality of the Bible's message as it presents it. It reveals how you can know God and experience Him your daily life.

Down through history, the enemy of the souls of humanity has attempted to destroy the Bible. Governments continue to outlaw it, and religious leaders misuse it. Elitists mock it as something you cannot trust. While they admit that it contains good moral teaching, they contend that it contains errors and is nothing more than a good book, unworthy of trust for eternal salvation.

Despite these challenges, God's word endures. The Bible offers trustworthy evidence and revelation of God.

#### **#6: False prophets neglect the fundamental doctrine of holiness.**

Many people revolt at this doctrine because they personally fall short of God's demands, and do not want to think about it. Christ followers must become increasingly holy. Our lives should show development from the day that we first trusted Christ.

As we have grown older physically and our lives have changed, so our spiritual lives should also show growth. As believers examine themselves today in contrast to when they first trusted Christ, they should see a difference in their lifestyles and their thinking.

They will find that they have lost former desires and interests, and they will experience a growth in holiness.

All believers in Christ experience spiritual growth. Not all grow at the same rate or in the same fashion. However, they become increasingly like Christ.

Let me ask you a question. Can you honestly say that you have greater interest today in pursuing after God and obeying Him than when you first trusted Christ? You should see a difference as the Holy Spirit works in your life. You will not attain ultimate perfection, but you should grow and develop spiritually.

Complacent pastors today do not emphasize personal holiness. People in their congregations do not want to hear sermons which remind them of their sins. They do not want to review their spiritual failures. However, Paul reminded his friends from Ephesus of their responsibilities as teachers and as leaders to feed and tend their sheep. That work involves corrective ministry as much as any other aspect.

### **#7: False prophets neglect the doctrine of the Church.**

The Bible describes how the Church should function. It tells how to identify spiritual leaders and explains how those shepherds should function. It reveals what we should do when we encounter leaders who lead people astray from Biblical teaching. It describes the Church as the body of Christ, a living organism.

However, the Church has developed into nothing more than a business organization, and it follows all the patterns of secular structures. The professing Church experiences very little of God's supernatural activity. One can explain it all in terms of management and business styles.

The Church is not an organization, nor should it function like one. We need to return to the Scriptures and examine them for the fundamentals vital to the Church and Christianity. They are living and vital. Moreover, as members of the body of Christ, Christ followers serve Jesus as their King. He is in charge of the Church. We need to counsel with the King to find out how He wants His body to function.

Most Churches do not do that today. They disregard the kingship of Christ in these matters. When you hear Christian teachers counsel the people of God away from the Lordship of Christ in issues of the Church, they identify themselves as false leaders.

As wolves in sheep's clothing, they pretend to follow Christ but in fact deny His authority as enemies of Christ.

## **Implications**

These seven doctrines comprise the foundational truths essential to true biblical Christianity:

- the doctrine of God;
- the nature of Jesus Christ;
- the person and works of the Holy Spirit;
- the doctrines of salvation: depravity, regeneration, holiness;
- the doctrine of the Bible: inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative;
- the doctrine of holiness; and
- the doctrine of the Church.

False pastors and Church leaders prevalent today neglect and attack these truths, as Paul warned. The Church reels under their evil influence. The failure to proclaim these basic beliefs produces spiritual decline.

We desperately need a spiritual revival in the body of Christ.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see the truth of these doctrines, their absence in today's Church, and their necessity in Christian congregations. May He lead you to pursue the truth and to conform your life to it.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will bring about a spiritual revival in your life and the life of the Church of Jesus Christ that we may once again experience God's glorious presence in our lives.

## **References**

1. Wikipedia, "Vince Lombardi"

2. Ibid.

## Questions For Reflection And Application

01. Who is God and how does He work?
02. Who is the Holy Spirit and how does He work?
03. Who is Jesus Christ and how does He work?
04. Describe how they differ.
05. What does “regeneration” mean?
06. What does “holiness” mean?
07. Which comes first, regeneration or holiness?
08. If you study this article with another person or in a group, perform a short play in which one person shows the plan of salvation to another person. If you do this quiz alone, write the major points you would share if you could lead another to Jesus Christ.
09. How did the Bible come to exist? What does “inerrant” mean? What does “infallible” mean? How does the Bible differ from any excellent history book?
10. How does the Bible show the organization of the Church as different from business or charitable organizations? How does the Church organization differ from democracy?

*Thank You, heavenly Father, for these wondrous truths that we have examined in a brief fashion. They outline the truth as presented in your Word about Yourself and the things You want us to believe and to defend. When we examine others about us who teach things contrary to these truths, may You open our eyes to see their errors, to turn aside from them, and to pursue the truth.*

*I ask You, Holy Spirit of God, to open our eyes to understand the truths that we have examined, to believe them, and to commit our lives to them. May the belief of these truths ultimately bring a change in the way we live and act as we conform our lives to the truth. We will give to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit honor, glory, and praise for all that You accomplish. I ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ.*

*Amen.*