

Purpose-Driven Churches (Part 2)

Men's Estimation of Themselves

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to Proverbs 14:12, which is a very familiar scripture to all of us. To those of us who are older in the faith, we heard this verse quoted over and over again. It also appears in Proverbs 16:25.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

I think that these verses express a warning to be careful regarding a popular religious movement that looks inviting and good at first glance, but upon closer examination reveals a dangerously flawed concept driving it. That of course is the outcome-based religious organization.

In the first sermon of this series I gave you the names which various authors are calling this latest religious revival that we are living through in our time. Some are calling it the "Emerging Church," which indicates a sort of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon after a period of more or less hidden development. I personally feel that this is an apt description. Others call it the "Purpose-Driven Church," which is somewhat deceptive, because all churches have a purpose; otherwise, why do they even exist? Thus its name is vague.

Then there are those who call it the "New Paradigm Church," also somewhat misleading, because it is not really new at all. Those of us who heard the sermonette ["The Beginning of Heresies"] know that Satan follows the same general pattern all the time, and this "New Paradigm Church" is simply a reconstruction of an ancient plan by one who was there when the original was assembled. Remember, though, that paradigm means "pattern," and the pattern they are using is somewhat new, at least to this age. They are simply redefining familiar religious-type words to mean something different from what they did in the past.

There are those who call it "Outcome-Based Religion," which is also a fairly good name once one understands what the outcome they are pursuing is. I will continue using all of those names, so be aware that I am always referring to the same entity.

In the first sermon we saw that mankind is without excuse before God for its failure to

live up to minimum moral standards. We also saw that unity cannot be achieved because of the problem of sin. Briefly stated, each person has the drive within himself to go his own way, thus Proverbs 14:12. Directly tied to this is that Adam and Eve's failure, all the way back at the beginning, reflects all of mankind's failure to believe God's simple clear instruction. And finally, Jesus stated those following the narrow way that leads to life would never ever be a large group. These new Paradigm Churches are growing to an enormous size.

One of the central features of these New Paradigm groups is growth in numbers for the very sake of growth in numbers. They inevitably install a wide variety of programs and schemes in order to meet their established goals, very much like a commercial business. In fact, one of the major guiding lights of the Emerging Church is one Dr. Rick Warren. He is pastor of the Saddleback Community Church that is in the vicinity of Santa Ana, California. Warren was closely associated with Peter Drucker—the business guru, author and counselor on how to be successful in business—and that association is readily admitted by them. One result of this is that these people are using sharp business marketing psychology to first hook, and then hold people in.

The Outcome-Based religion's name is borrowed from an educational program established in the government schools about a generation ago. This educational program's purpose is to condition our children attending those schools for whatever outcome the designers of a specific program desired. That program was called "Outcome-Based Education." In the school system, its ultimate goal was to wrest control of childhood training for life from parents and to place it in the hands of governmental officials, school boards, and teachers' unions who believed that they knew better than the parents what was good for their children.

That purpose, I have to admit, was somewhat justifiable, because it is clear that American parents are, over all, not doing a great job in rearing their children. But a question remains: Were those who led the Outcome-Based Education program any better qualified than the parents to lead the next generation? The answer to that is "No." They just had a different outcome in mind.

The following definition is taken from a pamphlet titled "Outcome-Based Education: What Is It, and Why Should We Be Concerned?" It was written by a lady named Debbie Marks, and it was published in Columbia, South Carolina in 1994. I am going to read the following paragraph from this pamphlet. Listen carefully to this:

"Outcome-Based Education is a philosophy that promulgates the end justifies the means. Content is not specifically defined, but chosen on

teacher perception. Education under this philosophy is a continuous life-long experience, not a preparation for life. It is a process for government telling our children how to live, what to say, what to think, what to know, and what not to know."

This program is one of those things that look good on the surface, but once the fruit begins to appear we find that it is a rather dangerous confusion-producing program designed to turn the next generation into New World Order Socialist-thinking secularists. You know that they would not put that down as the outcome, but nonetheless, examination and evaluation and research show that is exactly where it was and is headed. It is still being used. A clear example of this philosophy's use in public schools is the government's persistence in teaching political correctness, toleration of evil, and alternative life styles such as the acceptance of homosexuality, lesbianism, and gay marriage as normal rather than perversion. And next on the list appears to be polygamy.

Two major keys for understanding the application of Outcome-Based Education principles to religion are **(1) content is not specifically defined**. This will become important later in the sermon, and **(2) the term philosophy**. We are going to consider philosophy first. This definition of philosophy I am going to give you was taken from *The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*: Philosophy's simple definition is "the love of wisdom and the search for it."

A second and more specific definition and appropriate to this sermon is going to be given to you from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*: Philosophy is "the search for a general understanding of values and reality through speculation rather than observational methods." This definition is especially interesting when applied to Christianity, because human philosophy is speculative. Understand that human philosophy is *speculative*. It is not even observational. Its principles cannot be weighed, measured, or otherwise tested in a laboratory. This means that philosophy is not science-based, even in the absolutes of nature, let alone the Bible. Understanding this is very important.

The people attending these Purpose-Driven churches do not take this into consideration. They attend, sincerely believing that they are attending a true Christian church because services contain religious aspects within them, but this careless ignoring can have devastating effects. For example, many a young person graduates from high school as a nice morally clean person, goes off to college, and in his first or second year innocently takes Philosophy 101. If he pays any attention to it, from that point on he begins to become psychologically and morally maimed. Understand that it is

just speculation of *men*, but it is taught as though it is somehow or another absolute truth that you can take to the bank. The poor kid just accepts it because he does not know any better. He has nothing to fight back with unless he has received a pretty good training in the church he is attending. But never forget that proverb which says, "There is a way that seems right."

Anyone's philosophy, in the guise of religion, may appear to be reasonable and logical on the surface, but it is most certainly **not** absolute as God's Word is. Philosophy, at its very base and at its end, is speculative human reason and therefore deceptive, and not to be trusted. Mere men's knowledge, understanding, and logic is limited indeed, unlike God, who knows the end from the beginning. This places philosophy on shaky ground with any group which believes that principles be precise and absolute.

I am going to give another definition of philosophy. This is also from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. I think maybe this one fits the sermon best. Philosophy: "The general belief, concept, and attitude of an individual or a group." For instance, we might say that a person is living according to the Hippy philosophy. That is just their idea, their concept, of how life ought to be lived. That is their philosophy, and so they live it.

What I am saying is that the underlying support—the philosophy of the Outcome-Based religion—is nothing more substantial than a generally-accepted concept that has been attached to commonly-held "Christian" thought, not the Bible's absolutes. We will see more evidence of this as we go along.

In my notes I have quotation marks around that term "Christian," because once one begins to look more closely at these Outcome-Based Religions, much of their so-called Christian thought is not biblical Christianity in the least. It is simply traditional religious thought blended with the outcome-based philosophy.

Now I am going to make this very plain. This Emerging Church is clever business-marketing psychology combined with traditional religious practices and beliefs drawn from this world's Christianity. I have to admit that on the surface it is very appealing to people who do not know, do not understand, and who do not somehow grasp that they are being emotionally manipulated into a movement that is very spiritually dangerous. Hang onto that word *emotionally* manipulated.

We just read a quote from Debbie Marks that Outcome-Based Education promulgates the concept that the end justifies the means. Since Outcome-Based Religion is following the same general pattern as Outcome-Based Education, this sets up a dangerous conception at the very foundation of the movement.

Isaiah 55:6-9 Seek you the LORD while he may be found, call you upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

There is indeed a way that seems right, but God says that His thoughts and His ways are not the same as ours. They are exceedingly higher. They are, as we might say, "out of sight" compared to the wisest of human beings. The New Paradigm religions are not primarily based in the absolute of God's Word. Now more specifically, what is the problem?

I want you to turn your attention to verse 7 and the word "wicked." In this context, who are the wicked? In fact, we might expand this to the entire book. It is addressed to the Israelitish people. These are the people who made the Old Covenant with God, and the wicked in this context are Israelite sinners who should have had at least a basic knowledge of God. They knew of the Old Covenant. They had basic knowledge of God, and in this chapter God is calling upon "everyday Joe Israelite" to turn from his way, as He says, "Return to your God, and I will pardon you." That presupposes that these people knew things about God—things that were right and true—but they were not living by them, and so God is calling upon them to repent and to seek forgiveness.

The sinning Israelites are people who, despite their basic knowledge of God, are so immersed in their own affairs that God's claim upon them is not even thought upon. That is why He sent Isaiah to them. I want you to understand, because this fits what is presently going on in the United States.

These people who are participating and being led on by these New Paradigm Churches are *not* in this context. They are not atheists, despite the fact that God is calling them wicked. They are simply people who have turned away from their covenant obligations to God; and God, through Isaiah, is urging them to come back to Him. These people are not atheists. In fact it is entirely possible that these people of whom He is speaking may be quite religious, but they are oblivious to their obligations to God. Their obligations to God simply are not coming to mind.

Human nature is such that in order to obey God, there must be a deliberate effort made on the part of each of us to keep Him and His absolute truth in mind, because there is

so much to distract us, and them.

In the whole context of this chapter, God is accusing them of not seriously thinking about Him. A man's way is the routine of his life, and that, brethren, is what their mind was on. God was not central to their thinking. The routine of their life was central to their thinking. Now what do people do under that kind of circumstance? They keep drifting further and further away, and if it is allowed to go on for any length of time, the absolute of God's Word becomes less and less important to them until God is not much thought of.

We are going to look at some advice from David in Psalm 10.

Psalm 10:3-4 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire [the routine of his life is leading to his heart's desire], and blesses the covetous whom the LORD abhors. The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

This does not mean that the person never thinks of God. It does not mean that God is never part of this person's life, but the overwhelming majority of his time and energy is going to the routine of his life. In such a case, God gradually slips into the background. That is why I said earlier that there must be deliberate effort made on the part of all of us to keep God in mind, or we too will drift. It happens so subtly.

With most people, brethren, there is not an obdurate obstinacy against God as much as there exists an indifferent apathy revealed in the willing acceptance of what is being said to them as true spiritually. The members of these New Paradigm Churches are being conned by familiar-sounding terminology and their feelings by means of how the message is packaged to influence them emotionally. The reason this is successful in a New Paradigm religion is that people will not make the effort to search into what the message really is.

I repeat that the Outcome-Based Religions are founded on nothing more than human philosophy, but unseen in the background is nothing more than a similar kind of demonism that Paul described in Galatians 4:8-9 and Colossians 2:6-9, 18, 19, and 23. I want you to turn back to Galatians. We will read this just to touch on it so that you will know that Paul wrote on this concept at least twice.

Galatians 4:8-9 Howbeit then, when you knew not God [that is, before conversion, at a time in the past], you did service unto them which by nature

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are no gods. [Those people in a sense did that innocently. In their views of things they thought they were worshiping the true God, but they were not. They were deceived.] But now, after that you have known God [God revealed Himself], or rather are known of God, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto you desire again to be in bondage?

You look into a Protestant commentary and they are going to tell you that those "weak and beggarly elements" was Judaism. No it was not! Where did the things of the Old Covenant come from? They came from God. Would Paul, in his wildest imagination, ever say that anything that came from God was weak and beggarly? That is totally illogical.

The key term here to help us identify what Paul is talking about is the word *elements*. We are going to go to Colossians 2:6-9.

Colossians 2:6-9 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him: [Live your life according to what He says.] Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Just briefly, for our purposes in this sermon, the key to understanding this is in the phrase "the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." That word "rudiments" could have been translated "the *elemental* things of the world" because it is the same as what Paul mentions in Galatians 4. Do you know what he is talking about? That term "elemental" indicates "the first things in order"—like things are 1, 2, 3, 4. The elemental things are those that came at the very beginning and established by God in order. Now in terms of this Earth, who possessed and lived on this Earth first? Angels. They were *first* in the order of things that pertains to life on this Earth. I could give a much bigger explanation, but that will be enough for right now.

It is obvious when Paul says "and not after Christ" that these *rudiments of the world* were anti-Christ, anti-God. These *first* elementary things are those angels that rebelled against God. You know of course that they left their first estate, and they attacked God, and God cast them down. They know now that they are not going to hang onto this Earth a great deal longer—that it is going to be given to the sons of God.

In verse 18 the same subject is still being spoken of here. Paul says:

Colossians 2:18-20 Let no man beguile you [defraud you] of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels [demons—which is the subject here], intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head [Christ], from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God. Wherefore if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances

Brethren, "the rudiments of the world" are things we have repented of, worshipping from within religions that are in reality nothing more than demon worship. Satan is the ruler of this world, and he has established the overwhelming majority of religions on Earth—in one way, all but one. Verse 21 gives us a little bit more insight into the way of which Paul is writing here: "Touch not; taste not; handle not." It is an ascetic religion. Verse 23 is really important.

Colossians 2:23 Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.

The Emerging Church is neither doctrinally nor in practice exactly identical to what Paul writes of here. It has been designed in mind with the times in which we live. On the surface it is a religion that has a show of wisdom, but at its base is nothing more than a deceptive demonism, not the truth of God. It does not promote a relationship with Christ. In verse 19 Paul says, "not holding the Head." The religion in Paul's day was actually turning people away from Christ; and this religion, which is the subject of these two sermons, uses the name of Christ. It uses the Bible in some cases, but it is actually turning people away from Christ. It does not hold to the Head.

The people in Colossae thought they were sincerely right in what they were doing, and the New Paradigm Churches make people feel good about themselves. It has a show of wisdom, while at the same time is actually leading people away from having a relationship with Christ; thus it will prove of no help to the harnessing of the carnality in our nature. That is what Paul says at the end of verse 23.

Paul is telling these people that the religion they were involved in, even though it was

ascetic, and even though asceticism requires a great deal of self-control and discipline of the body, was not going to help them overcome. Do you understand why? It is because the power to overcome—that which enables us to do the right thing—is found in the relationship with Christ, not in human discipline, because Christ creates a new heart in us. We have to have the relationship with Him, and if we are not holding to the Head, the relationship is broken and the enabling to overcome is not going to be given to us despite how good we look on the surface. It may have a show of wisdom, but it is not godly.

In the first century, the Colossian heritage produced what theologians call *legalism*. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the New Paradigm philosophy inevitably produces *pragmatism*—that is on the other end of the spiritual moral scale from liberalism. Pragmatics came out of business. This concept came out of politics. Pragmatism is a concept.

Pragmatism is a system of thinking which leads one to seek the practical means of resolving problems. On the surface this seems to be good, just like legalism seemed to be good to the Colossians. Pragmatism is indeed a way that seems right; but, in dealing with God, is definitely not good when applied to a circumstance involving absolutes. That is what we are involved in. It is not good in the least because the principles of pragmatics force one to compromise on one's position or standards in order to produce the outcome in vision. In other words, it becomes, "I will give up this if you will give up that, and we will both gain."

Now with your child involved in Outcome-Based Education, it might go something like this: "If you will allow us to teach your child modern math, and regardless of the fact that he does not know that two plus two equals four, we will nonetheless advance him from the third to the fourth grade." So, you see, everybody gains. It looks like your child is succeeding, and we get to keep this thing. "You get your way, and we get ours." I understand that this is a far-out illustration, but sometimes we have to exaggerate an illustration to understand the concept that is involved.

Unfortunately, the goal involved in Outcome-Based Religion is, for the most part, church membership and income growth, combined with what they call *unity*. However, when the standards of Scripture are perceived as a deterrent to membership growth, the Scriptures either become secondary to the church's thrust, or they are discarded altogether. Thus God gives up His truth so the church can grow numerically and in income, and a little bit of religion is added into the mix for good measure.

Jude 3-4 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common

salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember what Paul said in Colossians 2:19: "not holding to the Head." The leaders of these churches are claiming to be ministers of Christ, and they will indeed mention Him in their sermons. They will make reference to Him in their writings, and they will quote verses from the Bible in support of their thought, but the reality regarding the Bible is much different in actual practice.

For example, last year Evangelist Joel Osteen came through Charlotte with his entourage. Joel Osteen is a handsome man, a captivating speaker, and one of the very popular Outcome-Based religion preachers. It was his headquarters church, in Houston that I mentioned in the first sermon, where forty thousand people attend on any given weekend. When he was asked by a reporter what biblical doctrines he adhered to, he simply said, "I do not pay much attention to doctrine." You see, that is the reality. That was a disingenuous answer, because he *does* pay attention to doctrine, but it is the doctrine of the Outcome-Based Religion that he pays strict attention to.

These men are supposed to be representatives of Christ, deriving their teaching from the Book that He inspired to be written which contains the teaching that His representatives are to take all over the world and teach to others in order that the hearers may understand *precisely* what God requires of them. I want you to contrast what Joel Osteen said with what Jude (an apostle and flesh and blood brother of Jesus Christ) said applies to the ministry of Joel Osteen and all of those others. The phrase "contend for the faith which was once delivered" is actually better understood as "contend for the faith once for *all* delivered," meaning "once for all time entrusted to the saints."

That proper translation shows that Jude clearly concedes Christian doctrine as not merely a trust that has been given to those who would preach it, but having a definite unchanging and unchangeable content. The doctrines of the Bible cannot be improved upon. Anything that men may add is actually probably going to take away from what God actually said, and the minister of God is required to be very, very careful in how he handles things.

Christian faith is rooted in a very definite body of teaching derived from Christ Himself, collected and entrusted to the Church once for all time. But why would Joel Osteen tiptoe around the doctrine of Christ? You are going to get the answer, and in a way it is so simple, and you will see why it was disingenuous for him to say what he said. True Christian doctrine *a/ways* divides the one who believes it and practices it away from the many. They cannot stand that! They cannot permit it, because truth would ruin their congregations. People would stop listening to them, and they would peel off and abandon them in order to keep what God says rather than what these guys are teaching. They cannot risk it, and so the practical thing to do is to just skirt around it.

Let us read the Scripture in John 17:17. It is so important. It is such a simple statement, but its meaning is so important.

John 17:17 Sanctify them through your truth: Your word is truth.

Sanctify means "set them apart." "Separate them." "Divide the Christians away from others by means of truth which they will believe." And we believe it, brethren, because of the relationship with God, and in that relationship He has empowered us to believe it.

People really do not believe. They cannot put the truth of God together until God calls them. Without that calling, they keep coming up with confusing forms of religion—in all sincerity, but it is not put together correctly.

The Emerging Church is doing everything in its power to unify according to their doctrine, because that is the outcome that they hope to achieve, and numerically they are doing quite well. Unity almost always produces an increase in numbers, and therefore an increase in income.

Have you personally noted how huge their congregations are? It works! You see, they are making it work through pragmatism, and thus compromising the whole counsel of God. Do you remember what Paul said to the Ephesian elders? He said that he had not failed to give them the whole counsel of God. Regardless of what it cost him, he did not hold back the truth.

The people the Outcome-Based religion ministry are marketing themselves in order to have their own personally-held conceptions or perceptions of what *they* think Christianity is; and it is similar to what the prime movers of the Outcome-Based religion are. Now where do you think they got these mutually-held beliefs? They got them right out of the world.

Do those of the New Paradigm Religion keep the Sabbath? No, they do not. Do the people in the world keep the Sabbath? No, they do not. You see, they already have a point of agreement, and the New Paradigm religion preachers will not preach the keeping of the Sabbath, because if people believed it and began keeping it, it would make them turn away from the outcome the New Paradigm people want to accomplish.

What I am driving at here is, in one sense, the New Paradigm preachers are preaching to the choir. Do you know what that means? It means that they are preaching to people who already believe the message they are preaching. They are really doing it effectively because they, like Joel Osteen, are engaging and captivating in what they are doing. Everything is packaged in a way that seems so logical to the carnal mind. Well, logical it is, but absolutely right it is not.

The doctrine of keeping the Sabbath is a deterrent to the outcome they desire. The black and white guidelines of Scripture are perceived as a hindrance to their marketing efforts because they would never permit those people to reach their desired outcome; therefore the approach has to be more carnally practical—the giving of guidance, addressing everyday issues such as personal finance, relationships, parenting, and other social needs of those who respond to their outreach program.

Let me admit that there is nothing wrong with those subjects except that they are not being preached using God's truth—that the solution to their problems lies within the relationship with Christ. *Their* solutions are found in psychology and philosophy, not obedience to God. So rather than really quote and expound upon and expand upon Proverbs 22:6—"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"—they will quote some philosopher.

Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit whom God has given to them that obey *Him*.

God gives His spirit to those who obey Him, and the power to overcome life's problems lies within the connection with God, within the relationship with God, and those people are not obeying Him. Those people, like Paul said in Colossians 2, are going to have nothing but human effort to restrain the simple impulses of human nature. All of their programs, music and drama productions, must be choreographed with the notion of entertaining, combined with a positive but worldly religious message so as to entice

people to church services while alienating nobody. But sometimes, brethren, truth hurts, and teaching it must be risked by the ministry. These people are being duped and do not recognize it.

Let me illustrate through *The Da Vinci Code* book and the movie drawn from it. It is certainly true that the book and the movie are entertaining. The overwhelming majority knows that fiction works are not true, that they are simply the creation of some person's vivid imagination. But the central subject of this particular book and movie involves the nature of God, and because of that, the suppositions made are out and out blasphemy and are presented as if the entire package is true; and the Bible and its writers, including God Himself, are liars.

Maybe this will take you a little while to think through, but the Outcome-Based religion folks are following the same basic sort of script for numerical and financial success in religion. It is no doubt emotionally entertaining, but what people are being fed in terms of religion, like *The Da Vinci Code*, is poison pabulum. In short, the New Paradigm churches amount to little more than religious, social, do-gooder organizations that want to change the world according to *their* perception, not God's.

We are going to turn to a Psalm in which the subject material is similar in principle to what we just read in Isaiah 55.

Psalm 50:1-5 The mighty God, even the LOORD, has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

Psalm 50:8 I will not reprove you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, to have been continually before me.

Psalm 50:16-22 But unto the wicked God says, What have you to do to declare my statutes, or that you should take my covenant in your mouth? Seeing you hate instruction and cast my words behind you. When you saw a thief, then you consented with him, and had been partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things have you done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was altogether

such an one as yourself: but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes. Now consider this, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

In this psalm, in which God is ripping mankind up one side and down the other, He gives a classic description of mankind's general attitude toward Him, which helps to point out why God never intended the teaching in services accompanying the New Paradigm church's pattern that these people have developed and are following.

The first six verses set the stage. Just to give you an idea of how serious this issue is to God, the first three words in this Psalm are El, Elohim, Yahweh—three titles and names of God. He wants to make sure everybody understands who it is who is calling the Israelitish people into account for what they are doing. He is going to be the One judging. It is the Mighty One—the Judge, the Eternal-Self-existing One who commands your attention. He then further heightens the seriousness by calling upon the Earth. He is calling upon all mankind to witness this judgment and to learn from it.

"The perfection of beauty of Zion" that is mentioned in verse 2 is that the Word of God goes forth to all the earth from that location. Zion of course was in Jerusalem. That is where the Temple was, and now Zion has become a symbol of the church, and it goes out from there. Thus God is beginning this by warning that in order to be just, He must punish.

In verse 4, He calls to the heavens above. Do you know what He is doing? He is saying, "I do not just want all of mankind to learn from this; I want the angels here to witness what I am doing so they too understand what is going on."

Who are the saints mentioned in verse 5? Remember, a saint is just a set-apart person. They are sanctified, and in this case it is the *physical* nation of Israel. Israel is set apart by means of covenants, and therefore conduct becomes the focus of the rest of the psalm. First, the Israelites who did not even exist at the time, were set apart by God by means of His covenant with Abraham when God promised that He would bless the descendants of Abraham.

Then Israel was more personally set apart by means of making the Old Covenant with God at Mount Sinai. These are a people who should have had, at the very least, a basic knowledge of God and His way, because out of Zion shone forth His Word. So what God is saying is that there is no justification for Israel's poor conduct, which is the subject of this judgment, because they had the "beauty of Zion"—God's Word.

Verse 8 confirms that these people were not irreligious. They were worshipping God to some degree. That is why He mentions, "I am not going to call you into account for sacrificing." They were making the sacrifices, but the remaining verses, up to verse 13, reveal that they almost completely misunderstood and misapplied His instructions. Besides that, they had a terrible attitude in their misunderstanding.

Brethren, I want you to understand that in principle this applies to the Israelitish people today and the New Paradigm churches. Where has God's Word gone forth from? Primarily it has gone from Britain and the United States. In one sense, God is calling the Israelitish people, especially Britain and the United States, into account for their conduct. He knows, He recognizes, that they are making some effort to worship Him, but it is not good at all. So these are not completely irreligious people.

Like the Jews in Jesus' day, those people adopted a completely physical carnal conception from God's instruction, and they never took their thinking beyond the most basic of application. For instance, these verses show that they thought that they were somehow doing God a favor in their misunderstood obedience. However, in their careless attitude they had, in actual fact, reduced the Mighty and Holy God into nothing more than a copy of the pagan gods of the rest of the world—a God who was so insignificant in their conception He needed to be taken care of so that He would not get angry.

A book that really had a big impact on me was a tiny little book written by the man who did the Phillips' translation of the Bible. It was called, "Your God Is Too Small." How **big** is our conception of God? In a way that is the issue here. The Israelites' conception of Him was that He was no better than Baal.

Does the Creator of this vast awesome universe need anything from us? Does He, who has the wisdom and the power to create living beings like angels, animals, and humans, designed and brought forth in absolute fabulous complexity, need anything from us? What a brain He has! What, brethren, can we possibly add to Him? He needs nothing from us. We need to get that out of our mind.

The purpose of everything that He instructs in His Word is for *our* good. The sacrifices that He requires are not to appease Him or to provide food for Him, or to make Him feel good because He has us under His thumb. They are required to produce qualities of character and understanding in us, thus preparing us to be like Him, and for living in His kingdom.

But mankind's pride exalts him into thinking he is a pretty good person who only needs,

at best, a few nudges here and there; and he is already in pretty good shape spiritually. Do you know that Barna's survey shows this is how Americans evaluate themselves in their relationship with God? It just reveals how poor their conception of God is.

Brethren, God's creation is serious business requiring major changes in us. It sometimes requires seriously painful discipline by us in order to enhance our relationship with God, glorifying Him with our lives and producing change in us. By nature, we think so much of ourselves. Our attention is focused so much on the wrong things to satisfy the self, which unless brought up short, nothing ever changes.

Verse 14 focuses on proof of God's charge. Do you know why thanksgiving is so important to God? It is because the giving of thanks to Him reveals our understanding of our dependence, our indebtedness, and our obligation to Him for **everything!** He gives us every breath of air we breathe. Thanksgiving shows Him that we have the right understanding of our position in the relationship with Him. We owe everything to Him. Thanksgiving reveals our humility before Him and our need to continue the relationship with Him.

I want you to notice especially verses 21 and 22. Their lack of thanksgiving reveals that they have lifted themselves up to be His equal. Do you see what that verse says? "You thought that I was altogether one such as yourself." "Oh, we just need a little tweaking here and there and everything will be all right." Do you understand the sin that He is talking about here? It is idolatry! These people were religious, but their conception of God made Him so insignificant they were His equal. "You thought I was one such as you."

I will conclude with these words and let you think on it. The New Paradigm church people have done exactly the same thing. They set aside the Word of the Almighty God in favor of their own thinking. They have lifted themselves up as the equal of God, feeling that they are pure and powerful enough to set aside what He says, and teach the things that are going to produce the outcome they desire.

We will leave it there until the next sermon. We have very interesting times occurring all around us, and this particular group may just grow into something really significant.