

Adrift
Book Review
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Adrift: Postmodernism In The Church. By Phil Sanders. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 2000, 251 pp. \$10.00. ISBN: 0-89225-382-7.

Phil Sanders gives some insights into the problem of postmodern thought and how it affects the church of Christ in his book titled, *Adrift*. Sanders is an evangelist for the church of Christ. He has served churches in Oklahoma, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee and Arkansas. He currently is a speaker for the television program “In Search of The Lord’s Way.” In addition to this present work, he has written three other books.

Adrift begins with a preface. It is comprised of thirteen chapters each with discussion questions at the end of the chapter. This makes the book suitable for classroom study or small group study. The book ends with three appendices. Appendix one contains the end notes. Appendix two lists a bibliography of other works on postmodernism. Appendix three gives a glossary of terms used in the book.

In chapter one, the author examines the question, “Why is the World Turned Upside Down? He shows that the mindset of the world and the mindset of God are in conflict. A prevailing worldview—postmodernism—has infected the thinking of many and as a result confusion abounds. This confusion is also present in the church. Some observations made by the author will illustrate this fact. Churches are less likely to ask, “What does the Bible say?” and more likely to ask, “What does the community want?” Christians clamor for more grace from God, but less accountability to God. Preachers are urging significant changes in worship with an emphasis on pleasing and entertaining the audience rather than pleasing God and paying homage to Him. Judging the conduct of others is discouraged even condemned. Sin goes unrebuked.

In chapters two and three, the book attempts to illustrate the mindset and consequences of postmodernism. Chapter two addresses the loss of our foundations. Christians believe in truth while postmoderns do not. Christians uphold moral and religious absolutes. Postmodernism does not. Postmodernism denies objective truth. This denial creates chaos. Fyodor Dostoyevsky said, “Without God, all things are permissible” (p. 27). The result of postmodernism is doubt and uncertainty. This uncertainty has affected the church. There are many in the church who are suffering from an identity crisis. Convictions about baptism, instrumental music in worship, the women’s role in the church and others have eroded.

In chapter three, Sanders defines postmodernism. Postmodernism is a worldview that holds to four tenets. The first is **secularization**. The author states, “Secularization is the process whereby God is replaced by man” (p. 46). Postmodernists embrace secular humanism. Again Sanders declares, “America is rapidly becoming a profane society where all authority is suspect and the sacred is to be mocked” (p. 47). The second is **privatization**. Privatization involves the exaltation of personal preferences over God’s precepts. Right and wrong, good and evil are self-determined. The third is **pluralization**. Pluralization means that “all convictions about values are of equal validity, which says in effect that no convictions about values have any validity” (p. 50). Pluralization affirms that there are many faiths and that they are all equal in value. This leads to *tolerance and political correctness*, more buzz-words of postmodernism. Christianity

affirms that salvation is only in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). It is exclusivistic rather than pluralistic. Finally, there is **relativization**. Postmodernism affirms that truth is relative. In the postmodern mindset, situationism, truth according to circumstances, has captured the thinking of most people. Truth is subjective not objective. Truth is a construct of an individual based upon his or her experiences. Sanders adds one more tenet of postmodernism in his conclusion to this chapter. It is **syncretism**. “Syncretism is the condition in which people pick and choose the elements they approve of from different, irreconcilable faith systems and then piece those elements together in a unique, idiosyncratic, customized faith system” (p. 54).

Chapters 4 through 12 attempt to respond to the postmodern mindset by considering nine categories: absolute truth, authority, the Restoration Plea, an unashamed commitment, the nature of the church, worship, obedience, right attitudes, and evangelism.

Absolute truth, inspiration, and inerrancy of the Scriptures are discussed in chapter four. “A recent poll indicates that 72 percent of Americans 18-25 years old do not believe in absolute truth” (p. 57). Many believe that truth is relative. In contrast to this type of thinking, the gospel is an absolute message. Sanders gives three reasons for believing this: (1) the gospel is universal; (2) the gospel is final; and (3) the gospel is unchangeable. For the postmodernist every thought that enters the mind is socially constructed by men. Men only believe what they believe because they have been socially programmed by their environment to do so (p. 60). Authority for the postmodernists comes from this socially constructed belief and not from God’s Word. It is subjective not objective. Consequently, there is no absolute truth. The Word of God represents absolute truth revealed and inspired by God. It is true (inerrant) because God cannot lie and God is not ignorant.

Sanders explores the topic of judging in chapter five. Postmodernists believe that all judging is wrong. Judging another and condemning them would indicate that you believed you were right and they were wrong. If truth is relative, there is no basis for making these types of judgments. If truth is objective, then there is a standard upon which we can make judgments regarding morals, values, beliefs, and religions. Postmodernists have serious problems with objective evil. When they admit that objective evil exists in the world, then they must accept objective good. Righteous judgments must be based upon a righteous standard. God gives us a righteous standard—His Word—by which to make these righteous judgments.

In chapter six, the author focuses on postmodernism and its relationship to the past. Postmoderns do not want to restore the past. They want to reinvent it. Postmodernists in the church of Christ have rejected the Restoration Plea. What is the Restoration Plea? In spiritual matters restoration is the return to the ideal state that Christ desires of His church. This ideal state is revealed in the New Testament. Whenever men depart from God’s precepts, apostasy results. Calling men back to God’s Word and correcting error is the work of restoration. Two examples from the Old Testament prove the validity of restoration. King Hezekiah made sweeping changes in Judah due to his devotion to God (II Kings 18:3-7). King Josiah brought about restoration in his days as king of Judah. During his reign, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. God’s word was read and followed. The result was a restoration of the true worship of the Lord. Men often depart from God’s way. Restoration is the means of correcting these departures and returning to the true religion of God.

Chapter seven is titled, *Reclaiming Our Identity*. Postmodernism in the church of Christ has obscured the true identity of the church. Some of the ways in which this is done include: (1) rejecting the use of the name *church of Christ*. Sanders does an outstanding job of defending the use of the name of Christ on pp. 115-116; (2) claiming that there are Christians in all

denominations regardless of whether or not they have been Scripturally baptized; (3) using entertainment in worship to attract crowds; (4) expanding the women's role in the church to appeal to a broader circle of feminist minded individuals; (5) rejecting reproof and rebuke in preaching and embracing unconditional love and nonjudgmentalism. Preaching must be positive and not negative; and (6) a push for ecumenism that redefines the church of Christ as a denomination among denominations.

The author explores the tensions between inclusivism and exclusivism in chapter eight. He declares that there are two types of Christian inclusivism. First, those who accept pious people outside of Jesus Christ as saved and second, those who hold conflicting and contradictory doctrines and practices (p. 129). The first group denies that there truly is one Lord. The second group promotes a tolerance and acceptance of those who call themselves Christians but hold to unscriptural beliefs and practices. Sanders states, "Inclusivists are undeniably pluralists who must overlook the heresy of those they embrace" (p. 130). God excludes the disobedient and includes the obedient. What does it mean to obey? The answer is found in the example of Jesus. Jesus: (1) obeyed the Father by first humbling His heart; (2) obeyed the Father by listening to Him; (3) obeyed by doing exactly what He was told; and (4) obeyed the Father by doing all the Father commanded.

Chapter nine addresses the difference between worship and entertainment. *Worship* means "to adore or pay divine honors to as a deity; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration." *Entertain* means "to engage the attention of, with anything that causes the time to pass pleasantly, as conversation, music or the like; to divert, to please; to amuse" (p. 150). There is also a difference between spiritual worship and emotional entertainment. To turn worship into entertainment cheapens that which is holy and makes it profane. Such cannot please God. Sanders points out what is wrong with choirs, solos, small group singing or praise teams in the worship. He also rejects humming, clapping and unintelligible sounds in worship.

Chapter ten discusses the danger of compromising beliefs. Among evangelicals today: (1) one-fourth do not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture; (2) one-third believe that good people can go to heaven apart from the grace of God; (3) four out of every 10 believe that it does not matter what religious faith a person follows; and (4) one-fourth acknowledge that Jesus made mistakes (p. 170). Forty-six percent of evangelical seminary students believe that preaching about hell is in "poor taste" (p. 175). A compromised faith is a crippled faith. A significant quotation about universalism among evangelicals is given on p. 176. The quotation is from an interview between Robert Schuller and Billy Graham in which both reveal their universalist tendencies.

Chapter eleven explores attitudes. Here is another good quote from Phil Sanders, "Men who give the lost a false sense of assurance are unworthy to be called "gospel preachers" (p. 188). Sanders calls upon Christians to examine their attitudes toward God, the world, false teachers and compromise.

How do we adjust evangelism to the postmodern mind? This question is addressed in chapter twelve. Some principles are presented by the author. First, people have a conscience and remain vitally interested in religion. The human soul will not be satisfied forever with an endless disconnection to reality. The absence of absolutes in the postmodern mind produces fear, doubts and leads to depression. It robs of real faith. The world seems dark and hopeless. Second, life is not lived in a relative world. Life without boundaries dissolves when one faces the reality of evil by becoming a victim of evil. Third, death presents us with a reality that must be confronted. Fourth, we must declare that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that He has a

unique nature and role in our salvation. Fifth, pluralism contradicts itself. Self-contradiction is self-defeating. Confusion and meaninglessness are the results of theological pluralism. Sixth, we must affirm the historical reality of Jesus Christ. Seventh, the single greatest problem of our time or any time is that people do not know God. Christians must be prepared to answer the questions that postmoderns ask.

Chapter thirteen closes the book with an optimistic outlook. The chapter examines the holy triumvirate of faith, hope and love. Faith in God and His Word will guide us. Sanders mentions that we need an informed faith, an effective faith, a bold faith, an active faith, and a morally pure faith. Nonjudgmentalism encourages amorality (p. 227). Hope in the promises of God will anchor us. Love will steer us in the right direction. We must focus on the cross to understand the full meaning of love.

Adrift will help the honest reader understand the postmodern mindset that is at work in our religious world today. It will inform the regular member of the church of Christ of how this worldview is affecting the church and the many different ways it has become the impetus for change in the church. Overall, Phil Sanders has given the church a good exposé of postmodernism.