
Chapter 5.6

Modern Applications to *Virtue Apologetics*

Overall Objective

To apply the test of Christian virtue to evaluate the authentic Christian element in personal lives, churches, and modern movements.

Table of Topics

- A) Biblically Evaluating Churches & Pastors**
- B) Biblically Evaluating *Charismaticism & Mega Mysticism***
- C) Biblically Evaluating the Emerging Church**
- D) Biblically Evaluating George Barna's *Revolution***

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- No one can claim special revelatory or miracle working abilities from the Holy Spirit and then not be exemplary examples of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- None of the NT writers ever praises or criticizes a local church for so many of the things the modern Church uses to define success. Rather, NT critiques of local churches always focus on doctrinal errors or moral weaknesses.
- Are “Charismatic” Christians in general significantly more loving, patient, humble, sacrificial, and holy than other Christians? Obviously not, and therefore *Charismaticism* has no biblical ground to claim that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit more than others.
- Movements like the Emerging Church that too often promote worldliness, threaten its right to be called Christian.
- The growing number of “Christians” who seem quite content with not belonging to a local church, fail the biblical test of *virtue* as well.

Thankfully, *virtue apologetics* enables us to objectively evaluate the authentic Christian element in personal lives, churches, and modern movements. God's people suffer from the great abundance of damaging deception in all of these realms today and the test of virtue exposes dangerous frauds. Nothing and no one that is not exhibiting supernatural morality has the right to the sacred name of Christian.

A) Biblically Evaluating Churches & Pastors

Accordingly, virtue is the ultimate test for the true Christianity of a church. Contrary to so many today, it is not the size of its audience, buildings, programs, or budgets. "Is this church loving and holy?" is the most important question Pastors, and prospective members should be asking themselves, because this is what matters most to the Head of the Church (cf. Eph 5:23). Accordingly, one notes that none of the NT writers ever praises or criticizes a local church for so many of the things the modern Church uses to define success. Rather, NT critiques of local churches always focus on doctrinal errors or moral weaknesses.

Related to this is how we evaluate the God-ordained authority of a Pastor. It is all too common today to choose Pastors based on their business and marketing skills, spiritual gifts, or personality, because all of these fit into the faulty definition of success for churches. On the contrary, the Chief Shepherd requires exceptional *virtue* of anyone claiming to be serving Him as an under Shepherd (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4).

So again, a required question that should be asked concerning whether or not someone should join a particular church is what kind of virtue do the Pastors have? While all Christians are obligated by Christ to be under the authority of a Pastor, no one is obligated to follow a man who does not meet the character qualifications set by God Himself.

B) Biblically Evaluating *Charismaticism*¹ & *Mega Mysticism*

The test of supernatural morality exposes a great number of false prophets, philosophers, and "faith healers" in our day as counterfeits, as discussed further elsewhere.² No one can claim special revelatory or miracle working abilities from the Holy Spirit and then not be exemplary examples of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. At least no one God would want us to trust.

In terms of prophets, we have already noted the hypocritical and horrendous immorality of Muhammad. Likewise, as we discuss elsewhere, virtually all of the foremost “prophets” in the Church today have been exposed as moral frauds, clearly marking them as false prophets.³ The “faith healers,” whose greed is evidenced by their fancy clothing, cars, jets, and mansions clearly are not getting any power they may have from Christ. As we discuss elsewhere, Jesus in fact predicted in Matthew 7:15-23 that a high concentration of fake Christians would be in *Charismaticism*.⁴

Such fakes find a particularly safe haven where the heretical “health and wealth gospel” is taught and greed is praised as a virtue, instead of denounced as a vice. Christ’s words to the Pharisees should strike fear in their hearts if their arrogance and deception have not left them totally insane:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence” (Matt 23:25; cf. Matt 8:20; Luke 12:15; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Eph 5:3, 5; 1 Thess 2:5-6; 1 Pet 5:2; 2 Pet 2:3, 14).

Use the Scriptures referenced here to evaluate the lives of most of the “Christian” superstars on television and it becomes clear that they do not even deserve to be called Christian, let alone leader, Prophet, Teacher, Evangelist, or healer.

While the God-ordained test of supernatural virtue allows us to biblically evaluate the authentic Christianity of ourselves, others, and churches, it does the same in regards to movements. For example, the central claim of *Charismaticism* is that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit of God to a greater degree than other Christians. The test of *virtue* clearly helps us discern whether or not this is true because any move of the Holy Spirit will be evidenced by the fruits of the Spirit. Are “Charismatic” Christians in general significantly more loving, patient, humble, sacrificial, and holy than other Christians? Obviously not, and therefore *Charismaticism* has no biblical ground to claim that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit more than others.⁵

Likewise, *mega mysticism* is exposed as a fraud in this way as well. *Mega mystical* Christians are claiming that God regularly “speaks” to them apart from Scripture, even about extra-biblical matters. In other words, the claim is that *mega mysticism* provides a closer relationship with God. Is this true?

While we elsewhere demonstrate that such a position is unbiblical,⁶ perhaps the best way to determine this is by the test of virtue. In other words, it is practically certain that anyone *really* experiencing *more* personal direct revelation from God, *more* specific divine guidance for their life, and *more* intimacy with God, would have *more* spiritual fruit and maturity in their lives. Unfortunately for *mega*

mystics, they do not have, nor can they prove, any such thing. In fact, in the author's experience, more *mega mystical* Christians are typically less spiritually mature because they live so much according to their feelings.

Both those in *Charismaticism* and *mega mysticism* need to be reminded that the biblical commands to "**be filled with the Spirit**" (Eph 5:18), "**live by the Spirit**" (Gal 5:16, 25), "**live in accordance with the Spirit**" (Rom 8:5), and be "**led by the Spirit**" (Rom 8:14) have absolutely nothing to do with experiencing healings, performing miracles, casting out demons, receiving visions, or God "speaking" to us apart from Scripture. Rather, all of these vital biblical commands mean to live according to the power and fruit of the Holy Spirit which is by far more satisfying and God-glorifying than anything the *super-supernaturalists* are seeking and claiming.

C) Biblically Evaluating the Emerging Church

Another movement in modern Christianity is referred to as the Emerging Church. In their noble effort to reach postmodern culture with the Gospel, some of them have turned Christ's mandate to "**Be [morally] perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect**" (Matt 5:48) on its head. Instead of promoting the need for us to be supernaturally holy in order to attract the lost, a core value among some Emerging Church leaders seems to be encouraging less virtue in order to reach the lost. The current, and apparently unbiased, Wikipedia entry puts it this way:

Drawing on a more 'Missional Morality', that again turns to the synoptic gospels of Christ, many Emerging Churches draw on an understanding of God seeking to restore all things back into restored relationship. This emphasizes God's graceful love approach to discipleship, in following Christ who identified with the socially excluded and ill, in opposition to the Pharisees and Saducees and their purity rules.

Many emerging church participants therefore, do not subscribe to many of the moral standards expected of Conservative Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism such as abstaining from alcohol, profanity, and watching adult movies. Those who identify with the emerging church movement are not likely to be dogmatic about private, moral behaviors which do not hurt others or the environment. Others in the movement seek to expand the range of moral concerns to include issues of social justice such as sex-trafficking and economic slavery alongside personal moral behavior as they understand it.⁷

We would heartily agree that the extra-biblical rules promoted by the Pharisees and some Fundamentalists do not please God, nor advance the Gospel. But some in the Emerging Church have given far too much freedom to their sinful flesh in the name of relating to the lost. For example, John MacArthur has written:

The recent wave of popular books written by leading figures in the Emerging Church movement has unleashed an unprecedented flood of vulgarity and worldliness onto Christian booksellers' shelves. Obscenity is one of the main trademarks of the Emerging style. Most authors in the movement make extravagant use of filthy language, sexual innuendo, and uncritical references to the most lowbrow elements of postmodern culture, often indicating inappropriate approval for ungodly aspects of secular culture.

In the popular book *Blue Like Jazz*, for example, Donald Miller writes of his experience in one of the best-known Emerging churches in the Pacific Northwest, referring to the pastor as "Mark, the Cussing Pastor":

Even though Mark said cusswords, he was telling a lot of people about Jesus, and he was being socially active, and he seemed to love a lot of people the church was neglecting, like liberals and fruit nuts. About the time I was praying that God would help me find a church, I got a call from Mark the Cussing Pastor, and he said he had a close friend who was moving to Portland to start a church and that I should join him. Rick and I got together over coffee, and I thought he was hilarious. He was big, a football player out of Chico State. At the time we both chewed tobacco, so we had that in common. He could do a great Tony Soprano voice, sort of a mafia thing. He would do this routine where he pretended to be a Mafia boss who was planting a church. He said a few cusswords but not as bad as Mark.'⁸

Dr. MacArthur goes on to relate regarding this movement:

A secular writer doing an article on the Emerging Church movement and postmodern Christianity summed up the character of the movement this way: "What makes a postmodern ministry so easy to embrace is that it doesn't demonize youth culture-Marilyn Manson, 'South Park,' or gangsta rap, for example-like traditional fundamentalists. Postmodern congregants aren't challenged to reject the outside world."

I've noticed the same thing. Whole churches have deliberately immersed themselves in "the culture"-by which they actually mean "whatever the world loves at the moment." Thus we now have a new breed of trendy churches whose preachers can rattle off references to every popular icon, every trifling meme, every

tasteless fashion, and every vapid trend that captures the fickle fancy of the postmodern, secular mind. Worldly preachers seem to go out of their way to put their carnal expertise on display--even in their sermons.

In the name of "connecting with the culture" they boast of having seen all the latest programs on MTV, memorized every episode of South Park, learned the lyrics to countless tracks of gangsta rap and heavy metal music; or watched who-knows-how-many R-rated movies. They seem to know every fad top to bottom, back to front, and inside out. They've adopted both the style and the language of the world--including lavish use of language that used to be deemed inappropriate in polite society, much less in the pulpit. They want to fit right in with the world, and they seem to be making themselves quite comfortable there.

9

If the Emerging Church movement really wants the privilege of claiming to be followers and representatives of the King, the first thing they need to do is have any leaders who could be described as above, submit their resignations and be publicly rebuked. Then they need to apologize to believers and unbelievers alike for claiming to be ambassadors of Christ, but showing a greater love for the world than for out-of-this-world holiness. Then, perhaps, God would grant them the right to call themselves a Christian movement.

D) Biblically Evaluating George Barna's Revolution

Finally, the growing number of "Christians" who seem quite content with not belonging to a local church, fail the biblical test of *virtue* as well. No Christian is being humble toward God if they are not being humble toward man, and this no doubt includes being humble toward biblically qualified Pastors in local churches (cf. 1 Pet 5:1-5). Abandoning the God-ordained authority in the local church can actually be a very prideful and selfish thing, not a Christian or virtuous thing.

Nonetheless, George Barna, in his book *Revolution* (2006), claims that 20 million of the most committed Christians are leaving the biblically prescribed vehicle of a local church led by qualified Pastors.¹⁰ First, again, it would seem his statistics are an exaggeration based on his inability, and perhaps even unwillingness, to truly identify authentic Christians. Nonetheless, his claim is that:

The defining attribute of a Revolutionary [Christian] is not whether they attend church, but whether they place God first in their lives and are willing to do whatever it takes to facilitate a deeper and growing relationship with Him and other believers.¹¹

Evidently, such supposed humble willingness does not include finding an assembly of sincere Christians being led by biblically qualified leadership. The assumption seems to be that all of these millions of Christians cannot find a local church with those attributes where they live. If that is true, then they should move to our town because we have several.

Of course, there are several reasons for people abandoning the local church. One close to our heart is the multitude of God's children who have been wounded by bad Pastors and churches. We are very sympathetic to them and our grave concern over these very things compels us to write much of what we do, including the importance of *virtue apologetics*.

But the solution is not to abandon the God-ordained institution of the local church. There are difficult and divorced marriages as well, but we know we should not abandon God's institution of marriage. God created marriage with parents having authority for children to grow up under. Likewise, God created the local church to have Christ-like leaders, exercising their God-given authority to build up His spiritual children (cf. 2 Cor 10:8).

Unfortunately, all of God's children who allow their wounding from a bad church to cause them to abandon the local church, are simply running from their wounding and hurting themselves more. There are godly, loving, and safe Pastors and churches in the Body of Christ and it is there that wounded children of God will best be healed.

Other "revolutionaries" as Mr. Barna calls them are simply masking their pride and selfishness with the claim that they need not be under the authority of human Pastors in order to be under Christ's authority (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-7; Eph 4:11¹²). Unfortunately, Mr. Barna has the audacity to claim that such "revolutionaries" are seeking the values of the early Christians, while forgetting that the Apostle Paul wrote Titus: **"straighten out what was left unfinished [among Christians] and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you"** (1:5). Why would the Apostle of the King think "elders" were so important to these Christians' lives if there is no need for them to be under such authority as Mr. Barna claims and promotes?

Of course there is no biblical problem with house churches which operate under the authority of men with the qualifications the Apostle gave (cf. Tit 1:6-9; cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7) which included Christ-like character and considerable doctrinal knowledge. But Mr. Barna's "revolution" seems to have little respect for this biblical paradigm, and in the end, such a movement, if it even is one, fails the *virtue* test of humble support for qualified local church leadership, and does not biblically deserve to be called Christian.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How does Christian virtue enable us to evaluate the claims of someone to be a Christian?
- 2) What exposes many of the leaders of the modern “miracle movement” as frauds?
- 3) What are some things that seem important indicators of success in American Christianity that are not even mentioned in Scripture?
- 4) How does the test of virtue help us evaluate churches and pastors?
- 5) How does the test of virtue deny *Charismaticism* their claim that they are experiencing the Holy Spirit more than others?
- 6) We claim that the Emerging Church is too often promoting worldliness. Do you agree or disagree and why? If it does, does this threaten its right to be called “Christian” even though there are undoubtedly Christians in it?
- 7) What is wrong with a movement that encourages Christians to leave local churches?

Publications & Particulars

¹ By modern *charismaticism* we are primarily referring to what is commonly labeled the “charismatic” movement that began with the Pentecostals in the early 1900’s, spread into denominational churches in the 1960’s and 70’s, and has merged with what is referred to as the Third Wave churches today. Pentecostal churches include Assembly of God, Church of God, Open Bible, Apostolic, Foursquare Gospel, and Full Gospel. Third Wave churches include Vineyard and a variety of independent congregations.

We thank God for all He has done through the “charismatic” movement, and for the dear Christian brothers and sisters who would claim membership in it. However, throughout *Knowing Our God (KOG)* we refrain from referring to this movement as “charismatic,” because this erroneously implies a uniqueness and even superiority in Christian grace (*charis*), and by further implication, a superior possession or experience of the Holy Spirit.

Surely no right-minded “charismatic” would desire to claim such a superiority over their Christian brothers and sisters, especially since they

cannot demonstrate one. Biblically speaking, being “**led by the Spirit**,” experiencing His power, and living “**not under law**” but by “**grace** [*charis*]” is most clearly manifested in the “**fruit of the Spirit**” which the Apostle Paul describes as “**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**” (Gal 5:4, 18, 22-3). “Charismatic” Christians in general are not superior in these virtues of love and holiness compared to other Christians, and these virtues are the real essence of Christian *charisma*, making all obedient Christians true “charismatics,” not just a particular sect.

In fact, the greatest and most important uniqueness of *charismatic* churches over other authentic Christian churches is not their love or holiness, but rather an emphasis on, and practice of: 1) emotional worship, 2) speaking and/or praying in an incoherent tongue, 3) claims to direct divine revelation through spiritual gifts such as prophecy, and 4) claims to a greater abundance of miracles in general through the gifts of healing and miracle working.

Therefore, throughout *KOG* we use the terms *emotionalism* (see chapters 4.8-11), *glossaism* (Gr. glossa: “tongue,” see Book 12: *The Truth About Tongues*), *prophetism* (see Book 9: *Divine Prophets*), and *super-supernaturalism* (see chapters 10.14-16) to refer to these distinctives respectively, while recognizing that they may exist elsewhere as well. Accordingly, we believe this allows us to address the areas of concern we have regarding the movement, and avoid speaking critically of the movement as a whole, which has many good, although not unique, attributes as well.

Likewise, we refrain from referring to those Christians who would differ from “charismatics” as “non-charismatics,” erroneously implying again that the latter is somehow lacking in grace. Rather, those who oppose the sometimes bizarre worship of *emotionalism*, the obscure utterances of *glossaism*, the extra-biblical revelations of *prophetism*, and the miracle-a-minute mindset of *super-supernaturalism* are better labeled as *historicists*. This reflects the fact that *for at least 1600 years of Church history, the great majority belief and practice of God’s people was opposed to all of the uniquenesses that the “charismatic” movement claims today.*

It is a historical fact that miraculous gifts such as healing, tongues, and prophecy ceased functioning in the church in the fourth century when the NT canon had been completed, recognized and sufficiently distributed. Accordingly, the very few people since then who have promoted bizarre forms of worship, obscure utterances in prayer, claims to extra-biblical revelation, and miracle working abilities, were always thought to be deceived and dangerous, and not accepted as biblical Christians. What those in *charismaticism* also refuse to admit, or take seriously enough, is that the modern versions of the miraculous gifts being claimed do not match the attributes of their biblical counterparts. For a great deal of discussion on these matters see the books in *Volume 2 of KOG*.

² For further discussion of the immoral behavior of prominent “miracle workers” in the Church see sections 10.14.C; 11.7.B.9; 11.8.E-F.; For so called “prophets” see sections 9.11.F.3 and 9.13.J

³ For the exposure of many false “prophets” as frauds in the Church today see

sections 9.11.F.3 and 9.13.J

- ⁴ For arguments that Christ predicted a high concentration of fakes in *Charismaticism* see section 6.6.E.
- ⁵ For further discussion of the doctrinal errors practiced in *Charismaticism* see much of Books 7-12 of *KOG*.
- ⁶ Regarding the unbiblical nature of *mega mysticism* and its claims to extra-biblical revelation see Book 14.
- ⁷ Wikipedia online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church#cite_ref-60.
- ⁸ John MacArthur, *The Truth War* (Nelson, 2007), 139-40.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ George Barna online at <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=201>.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² For further discussion of God's desire for all Christians to be under the authority of qualified spiritual leadership see section 7.14.G.