

Series: State of the Union	Reference: Various Passages	Title: State of the Union	Date: 08.28.2022
Website Writeup: Where is the American Church? Where are we as a local church, and what is God calling us to now? These are the questions we wrestle with as Pastor Jason gives us a State of the Union address with some homework at the end.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

On the island of Mykonos in Greece, there are 800 chapels, equating to one per family! 30+ in this picture alone. But less than 3% of Greeks attend church & Mykonos is a playground where pleasure is worshipped in all its forms. Is this where America is heading? Ancient shrines, silent buildings having nothing to do with the actual Gospel, only there to assuage the fears of a very small percentage of the population who still hold onto the last vestiges of belief?

Today's a State of the Union address. The past few years have been difficult for churches & leadership. 2019 revealed a worldview clash & subsequent deconstruction of faith - a move away from the inerrancy & infallibility of the Bible opening the door for contrary ideologies which continues today; a destructive juggernaut few saw coming.

Dennis Prager believes as secularism increases, it comes at the cost of freedom. America was founded on the belief that freedom is an inalienable right originating with God. The founders weren't all Christians, but they believed in the God of the Bible. Scripture was central to their thinking. They weren't deists; a deist believes the Creator creates, then takes no interest in creation afterwards. But the founders believed God was interactive in creation. John Adams, our 2nd president, knew Hebrew. Up until 1800 you couldn't graduate from Harvard without knowing Hebrew. That's how important Bible study was in society...but that's been on slow decline for the last few centuries. Now, once Christian institutions have long since been compromised. In excising the Biblical God from societal life, freedom's lost. Since if God grants freedom no one can take it away, but if mankind grants freedom, anyone in power can take it away.¹ It is nature eating up Grace, as Francis Schaeffer would say.

This damage has been wrought by liberal progressive scholarship over the past 200 years deconstructing the Scriptures to develop a non-offensive civic religion to make people just good citizens; which has a low view of Christ, downplays our fallenness, and focuses on moralism instead of salvation. Jesus becomes a social model of a good person...NOT Lord & Savior. So, morality & justice are increasingly defined by society, not the Bible. The Bible simply becomes myth, with some good thoughts thrown in & not that standard by which we judge all of reality. The problem is that without God there is no morality, this video describes this reality well: reasonablefaith.org/moral.

George Barna states that out of all pastors only 1 in 3 (37%) have a biblical worldview, the remaining 63% simply embrace syncretism which is the blending of ideas &

¹ <https://www.prageru.com/video/ep-205-more-secular-less-free>

applications from a variety of holistic worldviews into a unique but inconsistent combination representing their personal preferences.² Notice in that chart, that 37% is made up of all the 5 categories below & the teaching pastors...it's only 13%!

This has been a quiet undercurrent welling to a raging river running through the Church undermining its foundation flowing out to society - so goes the church, so goes the neighborhood. Resulting in a breakdown of society we're witnessing now, since the Church is societies salt & light; its' preservative & guide. But be encouraged, the pillars of faith extend into bedrock, unable to be washed away by simple twisting of Truth!

Theology's what we believe about God out of which we live & act. Our theology carries with it right or wrong assumptions which lead to either right or wrong conclusions. Even atheism is what a person believes to be true of God guiding all decisions & thoughts concerning life. Theology's foundational, since our actions are born out of our WorldView where theology seats itself overflowing to beliefs, values & pooling finally into behavior.

Theology's '**general**' in nature. What we see. The design of the universe. Observable nature. God revealed in Creation. Romans 1:20 says...*"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power & divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."* Take a look at this video to see how incredibly precise is the design behind creation: reasonablefaith.org/finetuning. We do God a disservice when we place secular theories before His Word - our theology often deviates here drastically.

For instance, the Creation account is written as history, not allegory or myth. It never claims to be a science book - just a recount of Creation, The Fall & the beginning of God's pursuit of Humanity. If we begin with the Scriptures, science & faith can walk hand in hand. Scientists used to do this, some still do, thankfully. Science & faith aren't mutually exclusive. But, due to biblical deconstruction in the past 200 years, we have secular scientific groupthink centering on false theories pushing out any competing ideas which might be from a Christian perspective, and which has infiltrated the Church. Charles Lyell said in the 1800's that his goal was to 'free science from Moses.'³ And they've tried hard to do so since, but it's becoming increasingly hard to do so with every new discovery.

For instance, secular scientists are embarrassed & perplexed - they have absolutely no indication in the fossil records of a 'change of kind' which is desperately needed to prove evolutionary theory. We see adaptations in nature, but not a change of kind which evolutionary theory demands; some thing becoming something else. There's no sign of it in nature currently, or in the past! If it were there, we would've found it by now.

² Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University Release Date: May 10, 2022

³ Life Letters and Journals, published by John Murray 1881

In reference to the search for the missing link, fossil records have been fabricated, or made up from bones collected from various levels in the earth miles apart, or whole skeletons have been fabricated based on bones the size of a grain of rice, then assigned human traits. Piltdown Man, one of the first evidences claimed to be the missing link was promoted to be so for over 40 years. Until...they found that the piece of skull was from a human, and the partial jawbone was from an orangutan with the teeth filed to look human, and both pieces had been dyed to look similar. A whole generation was taught that in text books, and probably don't know of the hoax. Even Lucy, the most recent & famous, was recast in plaster, then the hip was cut apart & reshaped to look like a human hip when it originally looked like an apes - most secular scientists believe she was simply an ape. But we made a movie about her, *Lucy*, with Scarlett Johansson, where she replaces Eve as the first woman, and humanity is worshipped as the pinnacle of all things.

Truth is, Lucy's no lady! In every single instance, nothing points to a change from ape to human & with every instance Time magazine puts out an issue claiming 'We've found the missing link!', they don't reprint another issue as retraction later as it's disproven & whole generations believe a lie.⁴

Understand...this is a theologically driven worldview. When you free science from Moses, you start with wrong assumptions leading to wrong conclusions. Even Charles Darwin admittedly said in 1859, "Geology assuredly doesn't reveal any such finely graduated organic chain; and this, perhaps, is the most obvious & serious objection which can be urged against the theory."

Paleontologist Colin Patterson said there is... "no direct illustration of evolutionary transitions...fossil or living...there are no transitional forms...there is not one such fossil." And 140 years after Darwin, it looks even more bleak for the theory, as scientists using their imagination in an overwhelming desire to be 'the one' to finally find the missing link, or fabricate evidence to extend grant money. The human element in science is very strong.

But Creation makes sense. Fossil records show a sudden appearance of creatures with a sudden burial in a global flood with marine fossils covering all continents. The fossil record indicates the earth was reformed by the waters of the biblical flood rather than millions of years of slow change. The Grand Canyon couldn't have been formed by a lot of time & a little bit of water. The walls would've eroded into slopes. Instead it was formed by a lot of water in a little amount of time carving it out suddenly! A modern example is Mt. St. Helens which blew in 1980 - in minutes & following weeks whole forests were buried in 600 feet of sediment. Whole canyons were cut in bedrock in days. The Great Unconformity is found all across the world, a line in the sediment indicating a great flood. It doesn't show any signs of erosion in the sediment below, and fossils are extremely rare in that underlying sediment, meaning it happened suddenly across the globe, so the idea of a great amount of time is thrown out!

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBDTVBBb7iE>

Add to this, Christian scientist Dr. Nathaniel Jeanson, a PhD in cell & developmental biology from Harvard University, has authored *Replacing Darwin*, then moved onto publishing *Traced: Human DNA's Big Surprise*, has discovered a DNA-based, generation by generation family tree for global humanity; tracing humanity back to Shem, Ham & Japheth - then back to Adam! His work is compelling! Even secular biologists are seeing that we're all traced back to one ancestor.

Is God capable of creating the earth & heavens in 6 days? Of course! Is this earth full of His glory? Of course, from the Great Unconformity, to the humming bird on my porch, to the eyeballs in your head! The complexity behind the design of Creation is all but impossible to create by chance out of nothing. But we've been conditioned to think otherwise by a unified front drunk on the words of Darwin & others who've sought to divorce science from Moses. Their theology defining a worldview which begins with wrong assumptions leading to wrong conclusions. The human element pollutes scientific conclusions. The complex design of Creation reveals a creator God!

Why do I tell you all this? Well as AJ Mattil Jr said...“For if there was no Adam, there was no fall; and if there was no fall there was no hell; and if there was no hell, there was no need of Jesus as Second Adam & Incarnate Savior, crucified & risen. As a result, the whole biblical system of salvation collapses...Evolution thus becomes the most potent weapon for destroying the Christian Faith.” 2 Peter 3:3-7 talks of people denying Creation & the biblical Flood in the last days. Sadly, many of us have built our faith on the faltering sand of secular theories, and now we're seeing the results in a consistent breakdown of a biblical worldview in Christians.

General revelation draws us to explore ‘**special revelation**’ as revealed in Scripture. “Special revelation includes physical appearances of God, dreams, visions, the written Word of God, and most importantly - Jesus Christ. But today we focus on the primary importance of the revealing of God - His Word, the Bible, a form of special revelation. God guided the authors of Scripture to record His message to mankind, while still using their own styles & personalities.

Hebrews 4:12...For the word of God is alive & active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul & spirit, joints & marrow; it judges the thoughts & attitudes of the heart.

2 Timothy 3:16-17...All Scripture is God-breathed & is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting & training in righteousness, 17so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God determined to have the Truth regarding Him recorded in written form to reveal everything humanity needs to know about Him, what He expects, and what He's done for us.”⁵ Scripture isn't progressive, it doesn't change. Our responses to it may, but it

⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/general-special-revelation.html>

stays firm & fixed. We regard it as the divinely inspired Word of God revealing who He is, and how we live in relation to Him. Our theology will never be perfect, but the majors have been set by great saints of past & present - we should strive to know it well as our compass. But, due to deconstruction, divergent competing theologies have grown so incredibly prevalent that unity's been undermined in the Church at large. Hence, a purging & purification now.

Consensus is that this stage of the church will be long as churches grow smaller. People won't attend any longer who haven't had a true conversion experience. In one sense that's good. In another, it means we have some suffering ahead, work to do in our calling (Mt 28:18-20), and there's potential to change how we operate.

Up until 2019 we'd been growing. But, as a result of the influences I've described, exacerbated by issues hotly debated in culture, followed by the pandemic, we've seen many people walk away as they did on Jesus in John 6 saying... *"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"* Deciding faith in Christ & the Church wasn't for them any longer. Or that a local church which still held to the specific revelation of Scripture as the inspired Word of God was antiquated & out of touch. Seeking a more accommodating faith community, open & accepting of lifestyles & ideologies deemed sinful by Scripture.

They begin from culture. We begin from Scripture. Their revelation emerging from sinful faulty human hearts. Ours from outside ourselves; Truth emanating from the mouth of God. They redefine God, developing a theology which denies His divinely inspired Word. Cherry picking what they like, discarding the rest. This theology doesn't reflect the true God of the Bible & places Man at the center, breaking the 1st Commandment, which always devolves into individual emotion & desire, which is eventually unsustainable in church or society.

This is what's happening in our country & churches. Individual human desire & emotion now rule, not the Word of God. Church & leadership have been castrated of any directive power as a result of this fragility. Those whom God has ordained to shepherd & lead can't, given people have chosen simply not to trust. *If feelings rule, logic & reason are abandoned & no one can argue a feeling. Unity & sustainability are only found in shared beliefs & values arising out of God's Word, which is increasingly not the case in churches. 'Your truth is your truth, my truth is my truth', is not how the Church operates - we unify under God's Truth. Society at large can't operate without some unity on major issues either & we may witness the dissolution of America as a result in our lifetime.*

2 Timothy 4:3-4 is prophetic... *"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4They will turn their ears away from the truth & turn aside to myths."*

All churches experienced dismantling through the pandemic, some closed their doors. But we weathered it well. However, the wounds sustained cut deep requiring more than simple platitudes. Across the board in American churches, the ability to gain

momentum with simple tasks has been increasingly difficult. Leadership & commitment is sparse. Keeping people in positions long enough to gain traction hasn't been possible. Sporadic attendance, and difficulty in managing volunteers has taken its toll on the few. Fragile emotions leading to inflammatory conflict has eaten away at community to the point that sustainable organizational viability is called into question in many churches.

The Church won't die. It's weathered worse. God will sustain it. Some local churches close, new ones are born, or go through a metamorphosis, or just weather the storm. Feeling Spirit led, I've preached the Gospel clearly this past year. Spiritual attack comes as a result. The Church in America has always thought, 'Just preach the Gospel & God will grow your church.' But, that's not what Jesus says. He says...*"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."* (John 15:18) His message draws some & repels others. Concerning the Apostle Paul, God said in Acts 9:16...*"I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

For far too long churches have been devoid of a theology of suffering. As a result, it's been viewed as failure instead of signs the Gospel's actually going out. Unwilling to face it, many preach only what feels good; excising Jesus' lordship, focusing only on Him as Savior. As a result we have communities without commitment, or the ability to persevere through basic difficulties of relationship. We've preached the gospel well at Six:Eight, but the world affects us too. The Gospel preached & experienced through our ministry has transformed lives for 15 years in positive ways. We've also experienced negative results from those who've rejected it as well, which shouldn't discourage, rather it should tell us we're being faithful to our calling.

In Acts we saw growth in the Early Church & also great persecution. Adversity & transformation walk hand-in-hand when the Gospel's preached. Past growth in many churches seems to have been due more to a watering down of the Gospel instead of a clear preaching of it - a civic religion, not biblical Christianity. Church growth experts have gone silent as their work's dismantled. The American Church has grown itself a mile wide & an inch deep, when the intense rays of the cultural sun shine upon it, evaporation quickly occurs. Shallow discipleship snaps easily under the slightest bend.

Yet, God always keeps a remnant of the Faithful willing to suffer greatly for His name. Those who stay, like Peter did in John 6 as the others walked away, when he said, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe & to know that you are the Holy One of God."* People taking the advice of 2 Timothy 4:5 which follows those in vv3-4 who gave up on sound doctrine...*"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."*

Ours is a spiritual malady. Jesus is the only cure. The questions are: Is He Lord & Savior? If so, are we willing to suffer for His name? Devotion's in question. Devotion to Jesus & His local Church in which He's embodied. Is Christ's work through the local church the hope of the world? If so, what are we willing to sacrifice to see it sustained? Questions of time, talent & treasure. As we experience purification there's opportunity

to see depth & further proclaim Jesus. He works through us. So I'm asking for renewed commitment in the following areas...

TIME - Prayer & Engagement: Pray for wisdom & direction of our church. For leadership to be Spirit filled & Christ focused. Pray the Holy Spirit convicts in joy leading to renewed commitment & courageous discipleship. Come early, leave late, say 'yes' to church activities. Develop community. Put aside feelings of insecurity, indifference & petty dislikes. Don't react from emotion; bear with one another in love. Keep short accounts. We'll be holding Sonship Groups for men & women this fall, come & deepen your faith. When we do Alpha this year, invite friends & come yourself. We'll do trainings, show up to equip yourselves.

TALENT - Volunteering: Pray for people to be responsible in stepping up to roles. Consider where you can serve. Pray the Holy Spirit leads us to commitment in these. Attend the Explore class & become a member so we can utilize all your gifting.

TREASURE - Giving: 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 calls us to give willingly & with joy. Take the time to revisit how you can give with joy to the kingdom of God. Ask the Holy Spirit to stretch you in this area.

OUR CALLING - Evangelism: Equip yourself to evangelize. Watch the Living Waters videos of Ray Comfort sharing with people on the street on YouTube. Watch many of them, notice his demeanor, his process of sharing, his arguments. Then pray for opportunity, look for it, and take the risk to evangelize. Ask people, "Can I pray for you, right now?" Then do it, listening to the Holy Spirits lead, allowing Him to bring power to your words. Watch & promote *The Chosen*. Use the gospel cards we have to share with others - leave the results to the Holy Spirit; be obedient in your calling (Mt 28:18-20).

So, here's your homework...

- Review your packet of resources I've emailed out through Breeze this morning.
- Immerse yourself in the Word, have quiet times & pursue the Holy Spirit. Realize knowing about God without the Spirit, is just as damaging as a pursuit of the Spirit without a healthy pursuit of strong theology. Let the Bible define your theology.
- Pray for our church & neighborhoods.
- Pray for conviction by the Spirit in your devotion to Christ & His local church.
- Evaluate your giving, stretch yourself further if possible.
- If there's conflict, repent & be humble, work it out in a Christlike way.
- Train yourself in evangelism through the resources listed in the packet.
- Start to pray & consider who you might invite to Alpha beginning now.
- This fall we'll be holding Evangelism Trainings, Men's & Women's Sonship Groups, Monthly Challenging Video Series & monthly Sunday lunches.