

AFTER MAY 21*: HELPING THE FOLLOWERS OF HAROLD CAMPING

“...evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it; and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:13-17, ESV)

I. General: “Approaching the Cultist” (from *The Four Major Cults*, by A. Hoekema, pp. 405-416)

- A. Why adherents to cults are “the most difficult people to evangelize”:
1. They are not religiously indifferent. *“They are ‘deeply religious’ to the point of fanaticism.”*
 2. The cultist firmly believes that he has found the truth. *“...hence he considers the message of historic Christianity to be inferior to the doctrines he has obtained through ‘special revelation’ or through some inspired channel of truth.”*
 3. Cultists are victims of a kind of mass delusion of grandeur, coupled with a great deal of personal pride. *“They are God’s only true people – so they think – and all others must either join their group in some way or become eternally lost.”*
 4. Cultists are acutely aware of the shortcomings of the church...and do not hesitate to remind us of these things.
 5. The cultist has usually had to endure considerable ridicule from his relatives and friends because of his fanatical adherence to the teachings of the cult. *“(He is) even now sacrificing much of his time and effort in making propaganda for the group. Hence it is not going to be easy to induce him to leave the cult.”*
- B. Understanding why people join cults and stay in them:
1. People find in the cult a warm and brotherly fellowship which they have usually failed to find in church.
 2. People find in the cult a center of integration: *“a place in which each member plays an important role and fills a necessary function, a place where one is known and needed.”*
 3. People find in the cult a certain sense of security.
 4. The cult provides an outlet for the drive toward greater intensity and radicalness in one’s religious life.
 5. The cult answers a need for specific instruction in the techniques of various religious practices and for specific advice on various types of moral problems.

“In view of all this, our first aim as we approach the cultist must be to approach him as a total person – that is, not just someone whose doctrines need to be refuted, but as someone whom we love, about whom we are concerned in the totality of his life. We should therefore try to find out, if we can, why he joined this cult. Did he previously belong to a church? If so, why did he leave it? What shortcomings did he find in it?. In what way did the church fail to satisfy his needs? What benefits is he deriving from...the group to which he now belongs? What does this group do for him that the church failed to do? What activities does he engage in, which he neglected before? What sacrifices does he now make which he did not make before? What has this group done for him?”

II. Specifically: Helping the Followers of Harold Camping, i.e. After May 21, 2011.

NOTE: The four basic points below are developed more fully in Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands, by Paul David Tripp (pp. 115 – 276).

- 1. Love:**
 - Begin by praying for the Lord’s work in the heart of the one with whom you will be speaking.
 - Pray also for yourself, especially that you will be given a heart of true love for the person.
 - Make an opportunity to contact the person, expressing your concern and requesting a time to speak with him/her.
- 2. Know:**
 - Take the time to enter into the world of the person with whom you are speaking. Specifically, ask his/her reaction when May 21 came and went without what the person expected. Do not be judgmental. Be sincerely concerned for the shattering this experience has done to the person.
 - Keep in mind the material from A. Hoekema in #I above. You may find the questions in the final quotation above to be useful. Remember that you are dealing with a person who is genuinely hurting.
- 3. Speak:**
 - Do not lecture or condemn. The person you are speaking with needs compassion, not condemnation.

- It may be wise to use the Socratic Method, i.e. graciously but firmly asking probing, thought provoking questions, in order to help the person think the issues through. Some examples of questions you can use (but remember to use them kindly and in love that seeks the repentance of the one whom you are seeking to see released from the bondage of following a false teacher):
 - *Does it bother you that Mr. Camping never repented after his false prediction that Christ would return in 1994?*
 - *Do you think that Mr. Camping is exempt from Christ's requirement to listen to those who seek to correct him under the authority of the Word of God, e.g. Matt. 18:15-17?*
 - *Do you think that a natural reading of the numbers in the Bible would lead a person to the kinds of conclusions to which Mr. Camping has come? Why do you think that Mr. Camping has special insight into these numbers? Have the events of the past days and years challenged your belief that he has special insight into the meaning of numbers?*
 - *Do you think that a natural reading of the New Testament would indicate that there is a time when Christians are to leave their churches in order to be saved? Where in the New Testament would that be taught?*
 - *Does it concern you that Mr. Camping now denies the historic Christian doctrine of the eternal, conscious punishment of the lost?*
 - *Are there any things about Mr. Camping's life, conduct, and way of teaching that now make you think that there is no merit in following him as a "Bible teacher"?*
 - *Does it concern you that no other Bible scholar or teacher shares Mr. Camping's views on how to interpret the Bible, and particularly his views regarding the church?*
 - *Do you think it is odd that only Mr. Camping's Bible teachings are permitted on Family Radio?*
 - *Do you believe that "the Gospel", i.e. the good news, is really the message of Judgment Day? Or is the good news about Jesus Christ and his saving work?*
 - *What assurance of salvation have you received from Mr. Camping's teachings?*
 - *How has your love for Jesus Christ been strengthened by Mr. Camping's teachings?*
 - *How have Mr. Camping's teachings furthered your "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17)?*
 - *Under the influence of Mr. Camping's teachings, how have you become a better father or mother? How have you become a better husband or wife?*
 - *Would you honestly say that your loyalty is more to Jesus Christ or to Mr. Camping?*

4. Act

- Lovingly urge (and even beg!) the person to stop listening to HC because the person is giving attention to someone whose teachings are both demonstrably false and detrimental. This is just like urging an adulterer to break off a relationship with a party other than his husband or wife.¹
- Lovingly urge (and even beg!) the person to join you for worship the next Sunday. Promise that the person will not be looked down upon or treated with disrespect. Tell the person lovingly but boldly that he/she needs to go through a period of "spiritual de-tox" after the experience with HC.
- Ask the person to begin reading the New Testament without the eyeglasses given to him/her by Mr. Camping. (This will not be easy for the person to do). Ask the person to be constantly comparing what the New Testament books (especially the epistles) say, and what Mr. Camping says.²
- You might suggest that the person read through a book or books of the Bible with you so that you can show the person how you have learned to understand and interpret the Bible. Begin with a basic book like Romans or I and II Thessalonians. Put your focus on Christ, his saving grace and power, and his promises to believers.
- Pray with and for the person, especially asking that the Lord will show the person the glory, goodness, saving and transforming power of Jesus Christ as he is made known in the Scriptures.
- Keep building a relationship of Christian friendship and transparent love with the person.
- The goal is that the person have a joyful and confident trust in Christ, and that the person is fully established in/re-established in church membership and healthy church life. Pray, work, and ask your friends to pray and work to that end.

¹ See II Corinthians 11:2-4

² This is similar to the process that Roman Catholics go through as they begin to read the Bible, only to find that many of the RC distinctive teachings are not found there.

* **Postscript: What will Mr. Camping say on May 22?**

- There are already indicators that HC has a “contingency plan” for after May 21.
- He may simply say (as he did after his 1994 prediction of Christ’s return) that his math was not quite right and that he will go back to studying the Scriptures to find the next date. However, he is quite definite about the prediction that Judgment Day will be coming on May 21, and that there is no “Plan B”.
- His recent emphasis on Jonah and Nineveh may signal that he will be telling his listeners that he was not wrong, but that God has heard the many prayers that have been offered up and that, in His mercy, He has postponed judgment. However, HC will be very hard pressed to explain how the churches, all of which he believes have become apostate, have manifested repentance; let alone to demonstrate how this nation and other nations have demonstrated repentance.
- One person close to Family Radio has suggested that HC will say something like this: *“You see what has happened? The Bible is correct. Judgment day came, and just as God’s mercy was granted to Nineveh, He has shed his abundant mercy upon us . . . We really do not need to know why, but it is obvious that Holy God has shown His mercy. He has validated what He told us in the Bible, validated it fully. We should thank Him, thank Him so deeply. Now it is all the more important, with these extra days He has given us to proclaim His Gospel in all the corners of the earth. So we need to sacrifice financially in every way to spread Family Radio still further and to strengthen this ministry.”* This is probably close to exactly what will happen.
- In any case, what will HC say to people who have maxed out their credit cards, sold their homes, and taken out all of their life savings to “spread the Gospel of Judgment Day that is sure to come on May 21, 2011?” Will this bother him at all? Is there a possibility that some of those who have “forsaken all to follow Christ” (actually, HC) and who wake up on May 22 only to find themselves destitute will commit suicide? Would that bother HC at all? Is that the mark of a Christian teacher?
- And what will be the response in the broader society when media outlets and pundits poke fun at this “Bible teacher”, his followers, and his assured prediction of “what the Bible teaches”?
- How many who become disillusioned with HC after May 21 will ever come to a church again, given that they have been taught and have parroted that “Satan now rules the churches”, and that “you cannot be saved if you are in the church”?
- How many will *continue* to follow HC in spite of all of this?

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it...” (II Timothy 3:14, ESV)

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