

EVANGELISING Christians

—by Peter Hammond

Some churches have a sign over the inside of their doorway declaring: You are now entering the Mission Field!

That is a good reminder that the church service is primarily for the building up of believers for works of service and evangelism in the world. However, if we assume that the mission field is only outside the Church, we would be mistaken.

Unbiblical Christians

Engage in conversation with some of the

members of your local church and you may be surprised, probably even shocked. So far this year, I have spoken to a number of church-going people, who describe themselves as Christians, yet believe in strange and unbiblical new-age concepts such as re-incarnation and universalism.

People who have described themselves as "a good person", and "a dedicated Christian", have, in all seriousness, told me that "everyone will go to Heaven, because God is all-forgiving"; "all religions lead to God"

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and "people are basically good!" One man claimed that he had not sinned for over 30 years! One woman claimed that she had prayed and God had guided her to abort her child!

Subverted by the world

Looking out over a congregation on Sunday morning and assuming that everyone there is in a right relationship with the Lord and diligently following in His steps, would be gross presumption. Those of us who are involved in personal, one-on-one evangelism and counselling, are left with no such illusions. In many ways the world is evangelising, or subverting, the Church. This

should not actually surprise us. When you consider that the average Christian spends far more time reading the newspaper than reading the Bible, reading secular magazines, rather than Christian magazines, secular books rather than Christian books, it is no wonder that "*their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*" Rom 1:21.

Conformed to Hollywood

In households with television, the average child has seen some 30 000 hours of television before leaving school. During their teenage years, the average student will listen to over 10 000 hours of music, much of it filled with sensual, immoral and occultic lyrics.

Filling the void

The influence of parents and churches in the upbringing of most children today is declining at an alarming rate. The disintegration of many families, absentee parents and a general absence of discipline have created a vacuum.

Violent and immoral films and videos, aggressive, pulsating noise masquerading as music and pornographic magazines and websites are filling the void in the aimless and meaningless lives of all too many young people. "*Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind...*" Rom 1:28.



Everything has consequences

What we see influences what we think, and what we think influences what we become and what we do. Ideas have consequences. Actions flow from thought patterns. So the question is: what form of education has moulded your thought patterns? What entertainment and news media is filling your mind, on a daily basis?

"Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Eph 5:15-16.

Biblical illiteracy

At camps and courses, and during surveys in shopping malls, we have found that the vast majority of church-goers have no idea what the Biblical worldview is. If you ask: what is the Biblical position on economics, most say they don't know, some say to pay tithes. Very few have any understanding of Biblical principles for economics.

When asked: what is the Biblical worldview on crime and punishment, most say the government should forgive. Few

church-goers understand the distinction between the ministry of grace entrusted to the Church, and the ministry of justice en-

Disastrous consequences

Blatant lying, breach of contracts, breaking of promises, stealing, even from churches

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trusted to the State.

When asked if evolution can be reconciled to the Bible, most say Yes!

When we have asked church-goers who they think are the greatest people who have ever lived, many mention the same political and Hollywood idols that would be promoted in the secular media. When we have asked what books and publications they read, it is extraordinary how few church-goers are actually reading Christian publications. Most would cite scandal rags and secular tabloids. It is evident that many church-goers have become antinomian (believing that the Law of God no longer applies).

and ministries, have become no longer a rare exception, but pervasive. Christian bookshops have to deal with shoplifting. Christian churches are no longer open for those wanting to come in and seek the Lord in quietness in the sanctuary. Most churches today have to be barred and bolted with security gates, burglar bars and alarms. There was a time that a mere verbal agreement, or handshake was sufficient. Now even signed contracts are violated by people who claim to be Christian.

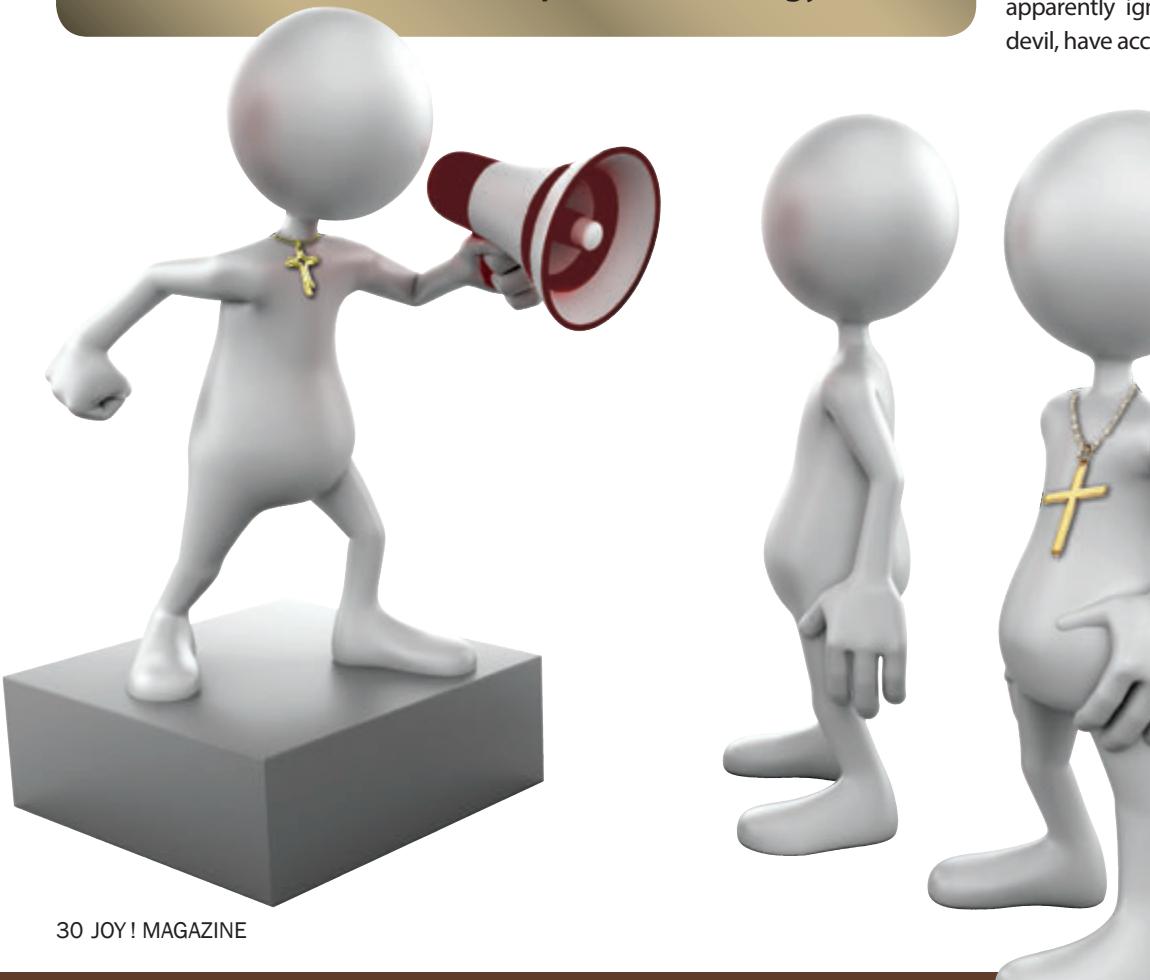
Jesus taught "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the Will of My Father in Heaven." Matt 7:21.

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It is not so much what we say, but what we do that counts. Actions speak much more eloquently than words. We are commanded in Scripture: "Walk in love... but fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting,

which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." Eph 5:2-6.

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Superficial spirituality

The root of the problem is the shallow experience and superficial message proclaimed by all too many Christians today. Shortcut methods and over-simplified formulas have just failed to work. It is as though the devil himself has advocated another gospel (Gal 1:6-9), polluting the Christian message, adulterating its contents and confusing the issues. The enemy has reduced the greatest message of all time to a cheap, over-simplified formula, or to a dead, over-complicated theology. All too many Christians, apparently ignorant of these wiles of the devil, have accepted these corruptions.

Shallow doctrine

The emphasis of feelings and blessings to the exclusion of commitment, obedience and discipleship is a sure way to failure and disappointment (Matt 7:15-23). The notion of a, "once and for all", token gesture of commitment to God, being sufficient to effect eternal salvation and inner fulfilment, is to invite utter disillusionment (Luke 14:27). These concepts are all unworthy of our great God and

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hopelessly inadequate in conveying the Biblical message, or in promoting true spiritual life and discipleship.

Counterfeit Christianity

The devil has a counterfeit for everything the Lord offers. He has fake fruit to offer – it's not the real thing, although it can look the same. When you taste it, you find it's plastic fruit. It looks real, but it isn't! It doesn't give the peace that passes all understanding, true

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joy, or real love. It's false!

Now why is it that so many who try a counterfeit product, and taste its synthetic flavour, try to hide their disappointment, thinking that perhaps this is all that the Lord has to give? How can we ever think that God's ways are unsatisfying? If the way is disappointing, then it's not God's way! If the fruit is unsatisfying – you need a new spiritual diet.

Don't settle for less

God's way is not easy, but it is fulfilling. His way is not cheap, but it is the best. His way is not trouble free, but it is the way of peace of heart and mind. His way is not all blessings, but it is all joy. His way does not keep us from trials, but it does involve God's constant love.

If you are content with a superficial, lukewarm, stagnant, defeated, mundane, mediocre existence, then God cannot give you a deep, on-fire, over-flowing, fulfilling, victorious, supernatural life.

By settling for less, we rob ourselves of the best. Good is the enemy of best. If you are content with your present spiritual state, then the Lord can do no more for you. Complacency is the deadly enemy of advancement and progress.

The trouble is that all too many Christians are in a spiritual desert, frustrated and bewildered by emptiness and dissatisfaction with their life and faith. To many, Jesus is not really Lord, but He is just a constitutional monarch. Have you made Him the impersonal »



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seeking (Jer 29:13), and following God's way (1 Pet 2:21). You have to forsake the world (1 John 2:15-17), and you must give up living for selfish reasons and motivations (Matt 16:24). Repent of your past sinful way of life (Isaiah 55:7), and put all your energies, time, strength, talents, money and abilities under God's control. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind and live wholeheartedly for Him (Rom 12:1-2).

Full surrender to Christ requires that Jesus is Lord of all

You give up your sins and your strengths, your lusts and your loves, your ambitions and your failures, your talents and your wasted opportunities, your abilities and your hurts. God gives you forgiveness,

marathon race (1 Tim 6:12). Christians are described as pilgrims, disciples, soldiers, long distance runners. The Bible is full of words describing fighting, overcoming, advancing, conquering, struggling, suffering and succeeding.

These Biblical descriptions speak of progress, advancement and movement. They speak of a continuous ongoing experience and way of life. Not of a once for all gesture, or technical theory, or mere theological understanding.

A restored relationship with God

The heart of the Gospel is a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ, where communication and contact is established and maintained with God, where your character is developed and God's eternal purposes are accomplished in and through your life. You must realise that God has so very much more to give you, to show you and to teach you. He has so much more for you to achieve.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Eph 3:20-21.

Trust the Lord; change your ways

If you read this article and feel convicted about your walk with God, repent now. Ask for His forgiveness and change your ways. Find a Christian mentor to help disciple you or call our offices. ■

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figurehead of your religious convictions? You want His help, but not His interference. Jesus can save you, He can answer your prayers, but He must not tell you what career to choose, what friends to have, what clothes to wear, what language to use and what kind of life to live and what films to watch. You don't really believe that God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him.

When you give up everything that you have, you gain everything that God gives. The heart of the Gospel is restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Total transformation

Do you have a superficial commitment? Have you settled for the counterfeit? Are you missing out on real Christianity: with a daily discipline of discipleship.

Do not let the label fool you. You cannot expect maximum blessing from minimum commitment. There is no shortcut method, no four-point programme, no cut and dried, canned salvation. There is no alternative to full surrender to the Lordship of Christ (Col 2:6-7), and wholeheartedly

eternal life, abundant life, love, joy, peace, guidance, fulfilment, companionship, direction, meaning and purpose in life.

You give up everything you have, and gain everything God gives. Missionary pilot Jim Elliot, noted: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose."

The adventure of discipleship

The way of salvation in the Bible is described as a search (Jer 29:13), a journey (Matt 7:13-14), a war (2 Cor 10:3-5), and a