



Revelation 13:11-19 Sermon Notes

Emperor Worship in the 1st Century

"...in Asia Minor the culture increasingly expected public expressions of loyalty to the imperial cult, and local civil authorities not untypically mandated by law that inhabitants of towns and cities show varying degrees of support for the imperial religion. This occurred especially from the time of Domitian onward [Domitian was emperor at time of writing of Revelation]. Such cultural pressure and formal civic insistence extended primarily to times of celebrations and festivals. These festive occasions were usually related to the emperor's birthday or arrival at a city but were also linked to the celebrations of private associations or guilds. The festivals were held both in temples and in civic centers. City decrees to participate in the celebration extended even to people being required to offer sacrifices on altars outside their own houses as the festival processions passed . . .

"Against this background it is understandable that popular pressure on and animosity against Christians would come at times of such public festivals when the Christians refused to participate in these corporate expressions of idolatrous religio-political loyalty."
Beale, *Revelation*, pp 712-713

False Signs and Wonders

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and

sorcerers and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts. Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them just as the LORD had said. Exodus 7:10-13

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known)"and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dream. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him all your heart and with all your soul. Deuteronomy 13:1-3

At that time if anyone says to you, "Look here is the Christ!" or "There he is!" do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See I have told you ahead of time. Matthew 24:23-24

Adjustments to the Gospel

At the 2010 Together for the Gospel Conference, Dr. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, gave an address listing eight "trajectories" for altering the gospel that he sees tempting the church today. Below is a summary of those trajectories, though I would encourage you to listen to his talk online (www.t4g.org).

1. Modern Trajectory - The temptation to fit the gospel to modernistic thinking, particularly by stripping it of anything supernatural in the name of logic, science and rationalism. This is the trajectory of modern theological liberalism.
2. Postmodern Trajectory - The temptation to accommodate the post-modern rejection of truth

categories. Truth becomes completely subjective and "tribal" and carries no objective significance beyond oneself or one's cultural unit.

3. Moral Trajectory - The temptation to change the gospel message to fit modern moral sensibilities in order to make it more appealing. This includes de-emphasizing teachings such as sin, hell, Christ's substitutionary atonement, and more.
4. Therapeutic Trajectory - The temptation to move from a gospel that saves us from sin to a gospel that merely helps us recover from emotional hurts, addictions, and other psychological and emotional "issues." People are not sinful, but sick, and are in need of wholeness, not holiness.
5. Pragmatic Trajectory - The temptation to de-emphasize the gospel, biblical truth, and theological thinking in favor of pursuing whatever methods and practices "work" for filling pews and programs.
6. Emotional Trajectory - The temptation to emphasize messages that bring positive emotional responses and to avoid those aspects of the gospel which cause the hearer emotional discomfort. Beliefs become shaped by feelings, rather than by God's Word.
7. Prosperity Trajectory - The temptation to make prosperity, health and worldly success the goal of the gospel.
8. Aesthetic Trajectory - Similar to the emotional trajectory, this trajectory emphasizes that which is beautiful. Ugly topics like sin and judgment will be de-emphasized. God is beautiful, the nature is beautiful, but the cross is not.

All of these trajectories, and more, are ultimately attempts to conform the gospel to perceived cultural mores and moods. Just as the first century Christians were tempted to compromise the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God with idolatrous emperor worship, so we're tempted to conform the gospel to fit the idols of our time.