

‘Pastor’ STEVE AMES: ‘Progressive Dishonesty’

On Sunday morning, 12th March 2023, **John Ashe** of **Journey Community Church** in Antrim, used the occasion to refer to ‘**heresy hunters**’ and he directed some comments personally to me. He had taken umbrage at an article I had posted warning people to steer clear of meetings scheduled for 20th–25th of March and that would involve 60 people from the ‘**Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry** based in **Redding, CA**. The article itself and an **APPENDIX** I added in which I responded directly to what he said can be viewed on this link –

<https://www.takeheed.info/pdf/2023/March/bethel-school-of-supernatural-ministry.pdf>

That, if you like, was one ‘attack’. It was followed then by another, 5 days later, when **Steve Ames** of the **Harbour Faith Community** in Carrickfergus posted this on Facebook –

So I know there are plenty of self-appointed “**heresy hunters**” out there and I normally wouldn’t comment or draw attention to them. In this case, however, we have a man whose practice is to deliver sombre talks at various reformed type churches where he denounces virtually any expression of Christianity other than his own. (I’ve never met him and he has never reached out to me for an actual conversation, yet I am regularly referenced by him as someone you should be wary of.)

Again, this is not uncommon in Northern Ireland and is usually best ignored. What’s interesting from this excerpt, however, is that he reveals what he himself truly believes about the love of God. Duly warning against those “**dangerous progressives**”, he gravely asserts from the sanctuary of a reformed presbyterian pulpit: “**We are NOT all beloved children of God**”.

And there, spoken in his own words, is the ideology that stokes the fear of people like Cecil. His sincere belief that God does NOT, in fact, love us all. If you believe that, then your experience of God’s kingdom is going to be very, very limited. It’s not surprising that some begin to overcompensate by lashing out at everyone else.

Over the years I’ve become well used to these earnest Christians who want to warn me about the so-called “dangers of progressive Christianity.” These folks are only worried for my soul, I’m assured, lest I be punished for “leading people astray”. As one concerned piece of correspondence gravely declared: “I wouldn’t like to be you on the day of judgement - it actually makes me shudder.”

Their basic criticism is that we have made God too loving. **They accuse me and others of telling only half the story**: “Ah...” they want to point out, “yes God is love - but that’s not all He is. God is also holy.” **As if God’s holiness somehow negates God’s love.**

To be fair, this was the main issue that the critics of Jesus had against him. In their view, Jesus also wasn't taking God's holiness seriously enough. He was just too liberal with the healings, the forgiveness and the acceptance. To the religious gatekeepers of the day, Jesus seemed far too ready to accommodate the culture of "sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes" - which they saw as an affront to God's holiness.

Imagine how they felt when Jesus basically responded with, "It's worse than that - these people are actually entering the kingdom of God ahead of you." No wonder they had him killed So is God "too" loving?

Well from a human point of view - yes, and scandalously so. We just can't conceive of it, even the most religious of us. Perhaps especially the most religious of us. Which is why repentance isn't for "them", it's for us - all of us, all the time. Not to earn God's favour, love or acceptance, but precisely because of God's love, favour and acceptance of us.

We cannot earn that which we have always had. Such are the profoundly wonderful mysteries of grace, which are laid out before us all in the life, teachings and person of Jesus himself. There is no path to this love of God, because God's love IS the path.

God's holiness doesn't negate any of this. If anything, it only serves to underscore the firmness of the ground from which this great love springs. So if you're inclined towards a kinder, more thoughtful and more inclusive expression of Christianity, then don't let the heresy hunters scare you. Like all of us, they're only operating under a very limited horizon and there's room for grace there too. The invitation is always to live in love, casting out fear along the way.

"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." 1 John 4

This post by **Steve Ames** was linked to a very short extract that he had selected from the talk I gave in **Moira Presbyterian Church** back in April 2021 on the subject of so-called '**Progressive Christianity**'. Video of that talk is located on this link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lawfq1TLMk&t=3338s>

The short segment **Mr Ames** selected runs from **37.02 – 37.36** and concludes with me saying "**We are NOT all beloved children of God**". And for maximum effect **Mr Ames twice more** reruns me saying those particular words. This is why the subtitle to my article is '**Progressive Dishonesty**'. **Mr Ames** has only highlighted a portion of what I said – to hear **IN FULL** what I said he should have allowed the video to run to **37.53**. In the portion that **Mr Ames** did NOT include, I continued on to immediately say after the portion that he honed/homed in on, the following – **(I have interspersed what I said with scriptures that validate what I said) –**

'When we are born into this world, we are born in sin and shapen in iniquity (**Psalm 51:5**) cut off from God (**Ephesians 4:17-18: Colossians 1:21**) and it's only when we are "born again" (**John 3:3**) and "saved" (**Ephesians 2:1-5**) that we are ADOPTED (**Romans 8:14-15; Galatians 4:3-5**); **Ephesians 1:5**) into the family of God and AT THAT POINT we become His children'.

Many years ago, I remember a pastor and friend saying **'When a half-truth ("We are NOT all beloved children of God") is proclaimed as the whole truth (no mention of what I immediately said after to justify my statement) it becomes a lie'** and that, in essence, is the **'dishonesty'** that **Mr Ames** is guilty of. It could in effect be viewed as a breaking of the ninth commandment (**Exodus 20:16**).

The logical truth of the matter is that if someone has to be **ADOPTED** into a family, they do not belong to that family prior to their **ADOPTION** and God's Word confirms this. It's interesting that **Steve Ames** finished his post by quoting a version of **1 John 4: (16)**. If we go back to **chapter 3: 2** we read this **"Beloved, NOW are we the sons of God"**. John is writing to **"born again" "saved"** believers and reminding them of their familial standing **NOW** with God. Prior to this they would have, as Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:2-3** **"walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air (Satan) the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we ALL had our conversations in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"**.

One of **Mr Ames** Facebook 'friends' did actually post this intuitive comment – **'Wow. Out of interest, how did he qualify his statement that we're not all beloved children of God? What was his reasoning? Would like to have heard the rest to try to understand how/why someone could think or try to justify that.'** And so, to a degree, this was how **Mr Ames** was 'forced' to respond – **'basically his argument is that we're all born as sinners and therefore not beloved by God. He then asserts that only those who repent (in a very specific way) become "adopted" as God's children and are therefore beloved children of God.'** He then supplies the link to the full video.

Here we see another measure of **'dishonesty'** in the reply by **Mr Ames** when he wrote – **'He then asserts that only those who repent (in a very specific way) become "adopted" as God's children and are therefore beloved children of God.'** I have already quoted at the bottom of page 2 what I said to justify my statement and I only mentioned being **"born again"** and **"saved"** and thus being **"ADOPTED"** as **"His children"**. **NOWHERE** did I mention **'repent (in a very specific way – Cecil, whatever that is supposed to mean)'** as **Mr Ames** falsely claims.

It's interesting that the first words of the Lord recorded in **Mark 1:15** are **"Repent ye and believe the gospel"** and by **"repent"** the Lord would have meant **(1)** Rethink your understanding of sin and recognise sin for what it truly is **(2)** Regret your sin, not just because of its earthly consequences, but because of its offence to the Holy God of Heaven **(3)** Repudiate and forsake your sin. All of this is very well summed up in **Proverbs 28:13** **"He that covereth his sins his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy"**. **Matthew Henry** commented –

'It is folly to indulge sin, and excuse it. He who covers his sins, shall not have any true peace. He who humbly confesses his sins, with true repentance and faith, shall find mercy from God. The Son of God is our great atonement. Under a deep sense of our guilt and danger, we may claim salvation from that mercy which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Other scriptures that show this alienated state of those who have not been “born again” or “saved” include –

Isaiah 59:2 “But your iniquities have SEPARATED between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear”

(John MacArthur comments – ‘Abraham’s physical lineage had not yet experienced the Lord’s deliverance because of the barrier created by their wrongdoings. This is a UNIVERSAL truth applying to all men – sin SEPARATES people from God’ (cf Romans 3:23)

John 8:42-44 “Jesus said unto them, **IF** God were your father, ye would love me ... Ye are of your **FATHER** the devil”

Matthew 26:24 “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but **WOE** (invoking the curse of God) unto that man (Juda Iscariot) by whom the Son of man is betrayed: It had been good for that man if he had not been born”.

John 17:9-12 “I pray for them (believing disciples) I pray NOT for the world but for them which thou hast given me; for they are mine ... and none of them is lost BUT the son of perdition (Juda Iscariot) that the scripture might be fulfilled”.

John 3:36 “He that believeth on the Son of God (“born again” “saved” believers) hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son (everyone else not “born again” or “saved”) shall not see life, but the wrath of God ABIDETH on him”.

Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father (and that includes living in obedience to His holy standards and statutes – see 1 Peter 1:14-16) which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord have we not ... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I NEVER knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”.

Matthew 10:34-36 “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth ... For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household” (Christ basically sorts the ‘wheat’ from the ‘chaff’ – see Matthew 3:11-12 or the ‘sheep’ from the ‘goats’ – see Matthew 25: 32)

Another case of ‘dishonesty’ is when **Mr Ames** wrote – ‘As if God’s holiness somehow negates God’s love’, written in the context of someone like me pointing out that the Bible indicates that God’s supreme attribute is **His holiness**. On page 16 of my article on ‘Progressive Christianity’ I wrote this –

‘God’s greatest and supreme characteristic/attribute is HOLINESS (Isaiah 6:3) and not ‘love’. Indeed, His love in Christ (Romans 5:8) cannot be rightly understood until a person understands the perfection of His holiness and our complete unrighteousness as Paul wrote in Romans 3:10. That article is located on -

<https://www.takeheed.info/pdf/2021/March/progressive-christianity.pdf>

As a **“born again”** and **“saved”** believer, I am overwhelmed by the reality that **God’s holiness** did not **negate His love** for a wretched sinner like me, but, that in grace and in mercy **“He commended/demonstrated His love toward me in that while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me”** (see Romans 5:8).

The **“born again”** and **“saved”** Apostle Paul regarded himself as the **‘chief of sinners’** (see 1 Timothy 1:15) and yet in **Galatians 2:20** could write of **“the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me”**.

The biblical truth is that **God’s holiness** does not **negate God’s love** for **“born again”** and **“saved”** believers. But in the case of those who are not **“born again”** and who are not **“saved”** and who have shown no evidence of obeying the Lord’s words, **“Repent ye and believe the gospel”** then very clearly **His holiness** will **negate** any notion that they may have that they are **beloved children of God** who will spend a blissful eternity in His presence.

In relation to **‘matters LGBT’** we read this on <https://harbourfaith.com/lgbt> - this is the web site of the **Harbour Faith Community** of which **Steve Ames** is ‘pastor’ –

‘We declare ourselves to be an open and affirming congregation, welcoming into the full life and ministry of the church persons of every race, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and economic status.’

That declaration flies totally in the face of **1st Corinthians 6:9-10** **“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God”**.

In **Revelation 21** the Apostle John is given a vision of **“a new heaven and a new earth”** (v 1) and of God dwelling with His people (v 3). However, we go on to read in **verse 8** - **“But the fearful and unbelieving and the abominable and murderers, and whoremongers and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”** All those people mentioned in **verse 8** will be eternally aware that they were **NOT beloved children of God**.

Later in **verse 22** we read **“And there shall in no wise enter into it (the “Holy Jerusalem” of verse 10) any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life”** (Cecil – only those who are **“born again”** and **“saved”**).

Finally, in **Revelation 22:14-15** we read – **“Blessed are they that do his commandments that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs and sorcerers, and whoremongers and murderers and idolaters and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie”**.

According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, the reference to "**whoremongers**" relates to persons engaged in '**fornication**' including the type engaged in by '**LGBT**' people who according to **Harbour Faith Community** and **Steve Ames** are '**welcomed into the full life and ministry of the church**'.

That is 'dishonesty' of the most damning kind.

There were other comments made by **Mr Ames** that I could take issue with but I think what I have written is sufficient to demonstrate the high level of '**dishonesty**' contained in his post.

Earlier I quoted **1st Corinthians 6:9-10** "**Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God**".

BUT, the Apostle Paul goes on to write in the next **verse 11** – "**And such WERE some of you, BUT ye are washed, BUT ye are sanctified, BUT ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and BY the Spirit of OUR God**".

There were those in Corinth who had obviously been engaged in **LGBT** lifestyles but having been converted ("**born again**", "**saved**" and "**adopted**") they now knew that **they had become beloved children of God** and that they would "**inherit the kingdom of God**".

My prayer is that many associated with **Harbour Faith Community** will experience a similar such glorious and gracious conversion to the Lord Jesus by the Spirit of God.

Cecil Andrews – 'Take Heed' Ministries – 23rd March 2023