



The Emergent Church -- Theological “Sons of Jeroboam”

By Bob DeWaay

In January of this year I debated Emergent Church leader Doug Pagitt. During my twenty minute opening statement, I used Scripture to establish the fact that God Himself through His Word determines the boundaries of how we come to God and walk with Him. I used simple logic: either there are boundaries on how we come to God or there are not. Since no boundaries would open the door to universalism, there are boundaries. Since there are boundaries, either God determines the boundaries or man does. Since man is the fallen sinner who needs to come to God, he can hardly be trusted to determine valid boundaries. So logically God must determine the boundaries of how man comes to God.

Pagitt rejected my logic as “binary reductionism” but would not reveal what boundaries, if any, he considered valid. He clearly was very uncomfortable with the idea of restrictions and boundaries. This is not a unique situation.

There was a king in Israel who decided that he could set up his own way of coming to God. The king was Jeroboam. Jeroboam received a prophecy that God was going to tear 10 tribes away from Solomon and give them to him (**1Kings 11:31**) because of the idolatry of Solomon (**1Kings 11:33**). Solomon then decided to put Jeroboam to death, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt until Solomon died (**1Kings 11:40**). At Solomon’s death the prophecy came true and **Jeroboam** became king over the 10 northern tribes.

However, once God had made Jeroboam king, Jeroboam became concerned. He reasoned: *“If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah”* (**1Kings 12:27**). So, being a pragmatist, he set up two convenient houses of worship: Dan in the northern part of the realm and Bethel in the southern part. Then he made priests out of non-Levites and instituted his own feast day, hoping to keep the people from going to Jerusalem as required by Torah.

To further make the new way of worshipping God amenable to the people, he placed a golden calf in each place of worship: *“So the king consulted, and made two*

golden calves, and he said to them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt'' (1King 12:28). He believed himself to have the right to determine the images and practices of his version of Yahweh worship.

Jeroboam thought he could come to God anyway that he saw fit. Prophets of God spoke to him (**1Kings 11:31; 13:1; 14:7-10**) and he was healed by God (**1Kings 13:6**), but in the end he was judged as an evil doer (**1Kings 14:10-14**). Jeroboam saw no need to follow the prescriptions of Torah concerning how Israel was to worship God. How wrong he was!

Modern “sons of Jeroboam” are making the same mistake. Consider the following story from the book *Church Re-imagined* by Doug Pagitt.

“Our last pose of the evening is called ‘savasana’ or corpse pose. The student lies on her back letting the legs fall open as they will, the arms hang limp like empty coat sleeves. The face, the forehead, the space between the eyebrows all relax, and the person melts heavily into the floor. Eyes are closed, breathing is rhythmic. I turn the lights off, and only the glow of candles and sometimes fireplace illuminates the room. This state of being is holy. It is at this time that we become closer to God, aware of our bodies, of the divine. . . . Slowly people get up, talk, commit to a daily practice of yoga in hopes of getting this feeling again and again. We are hesitant to leave this moment of shared reverence, this experience of worship.” (*Church Re-imagined*: 87, 89)

I asked Doug about this during our debate and made it clear that I believed practicing yoga like this was crossing a God-given boundary. He said that this portion of his book was written by someone else, but he would stand by it.

The thing that stood out to me during this debate was how very little we had in common. In fact when we no longer agree that inerrant, authoritative Scripture determines the boundaries of our faith and practice, we actually end up with nothing in common. The Emergent Church is going the way of Jeroboam and providing practices for Christians that have more in common with the pagan culture than they have with the

Bible. Leaving man to determine his own boundaries is to have no boundaries. The simple answer is to repent and come to God on His terms.

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