**Ministerial Meandering**

*Living with contradiction*

‘I’m right, and you’re wrong!’ - we used to say when we were kids - and someone would usually follow up with the words, ‘…he said, peeling another banana with his feet.’

Of course, no-one likes to be contradicted, especially when they ***know*** they are right. So it was refreshing to watch a film recommended to us by some friends in Mission at the end of last week, called, ‘Come Sunday’. It is a 2018 American [drama film](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drama_film) based on the excommunication of [Carlton Pearson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlton_Pearson), starring [Chiwetel Ejiofor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiwetel_Ejiofor) as [Carlton Pearson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlton_Pearson).

The thrust of the movie is the true story of Carlton Pearson, who was a hell-fire and damnation preacher, and bishop in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who has an epiphany when he realizes that he has got it all wrong, and that far from supporting all his prophecies of hell to come for homosexuals and others, he finds - particularly in 1 John 2:2, where it is written, ‘…He (Jesus) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours *but also for the sins of the whole world.’* (My italics).

This threw Carlton for a hoop, and he realized for the first time that the phrase meant *total inclusivity*, and that the imperative of his preaching in the future should be on the *inclusivity of God’s love in Christ*, and not the damnation of those who did not abide by other texts all too easily found in the bible. Consequently, the Pentecostal Church expelled him.

Of course, they immediately swung the pendulum way too far over and assumed that he was saying to all, ‘Carry on sinning - it doesn’t matter what you do, you are all saved anyway’, which was **not** what Carlton was saying. Rather he finally saw that the sorting of sheep and goats was not ours to do. Our job, as ministers, is to preach the saving love of Christ, and leave the Almighty to decide who goes where when the music stops.

Quite apart from not preaching the ‘whole’ bible - which is full of contradictions - by taking only one text, and applying it to everyone, we assume the mantle of God, and our hubris then knows no bounds - condemning this one to hell, and assuring that one of heaven. Rather like the dangerous and corrupt Kenneth Copeland, a tele-evangelist in the USA, whose rants are quite literally scary. I seriously think he is possessed - and **not** by the Holy Spirit.

But away from Copeland and his flawed ravings, our job is to accept that the bible, such as we have received it from antiquity, is *not* perfect, with no errors or mistakes. It cannot be - even though inspired, as I believe it to be - it was taken down and copied by **men**; and we all know that men make mistakes - don’t you, ladies?

It therefore behoves us to live with the tension that such contradictions inject into our reading of scripture, and at the same time hold it with awe and respect. We could do worse than to take a leaf out of Karl Childers summary; he is the mentally disabled man released from a mental hospital in the movie, ‘Slingblade’, and played brilliantly by the actor Billy Bob Thornton. Talking to a new-found friend, he says, ‘I've learned to read some. Took me four years to read the Bible. I reckon I understand a great deal of it. Wasn't what I expected in some places.’

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