

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (NKJV)*

As Christians who are dedicated to keeping the whole Word of God, we can not turn our focus to social issues at the *expense* of *dismissing* seeking the lost. The mission given to Christians is one of a spiritual nature — i.e. concern for the eternal salvation of those around us. Jesus stated in Matthew 16:26 —

*“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (NKJV)*

If the Red Letter Christians succeed in gaining political power in the USA and implement programs that do all types of social good but fail to instill the myriad of *other* lessons taught throughout the Scriptures — some of which could cost the eternal salvation of souls — what is gained?

It is no accident that in II Timothy 3:16 and 17 Paul instructs,

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (NKJV)*

Please don't misunderstand what we are saying in this issue. There's certainly nothing *wrong* with social programs — it's just that the mission given to the Church is not a *social* one — it's a *spiritual* one. We are to spread the Gospel to those who are lost in sin. We are *certainly* not saying that Christians have no obligation to demonstrate care and concern for those things on which Red Letter Christians are focused. What we *are* saying is that the *entirety* of Scripture is important. Failure to place importance on continuing “*steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine*” (not *just* the words of Jesus) opens the door for the *acceptance* of numerous sinful lifestyles, behaviors and activities in the name of “social justice.” Tony Campolo stated that Red Letter Christians have decided to refute Mahatma Gandhi's claim that everybody in the world knows what Jesus taught — except for Christians! It may well be that Christians don't always live up to the standard that we should and perhaps we often fail to demonstrate the love of God in the manner we should. But throwing out all of the Bible that *isn't* written in red is *definitely* not going to lend itself to knowing how we should live, what we should do and how we should behave to be pleasing to God. We *need* the *Apostles' doctrine* as well as Jesus' words. The Sermon on the Mount is an outstanding guide by which to live — but there's more to it than that. There's 23 *other* books (besides the Gospels) in the New Testament — not to mention the Old Testament — that we must read, understand and follow to live a life pleasing to God.

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*“Diligence” is a privately funded publication of:  
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# DILIGENCE

*“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11*

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

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Volume 10

March 15, 2011

Issue 4

## The Apostles' Doctrine

Since Christianity has become a tool being used by many politicians in the United States, there are major alignment efforts underway to create an atmosphere of *unity* among anyone who claims Christ as their Savior. To facilitate success for such an effort, it is essential to remove distinctions of various Christian beliefs which might create less cohesion. There is one organization — The Red Letter Christians — that hopes to accomplish this via the use of websites, blogs, candidates forums, debates, and printed voter guides.

The Red-Letter Christian movement is a politically driven movement that includes such people as Jim Wallis, founder of *Sojourners* magazine; Richard Rohr, a well-known Catholic writer; Brian McLaren, an Emergent Church leader; and Tony Campolo, a popular speaker and author of *Red Letter Christians: a Citizen's Guide to Faith and Politics*.

The name Red Letter Christians refers to the words of Jesus, which are printed in red in many editions of the New Testament. According to [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org), they are “a group of liberal Christians whose desire is to counter the political influence of conservative Christians. In the past thirty years, the voice of evangelical Christianity has been fairly prominent in the political process, much to the chagrin of secularists, non-evangelicals, and liberal Christians. As conservative Christians networked in such groups as the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, and American Values, popular figures within liberal Christianity began to feel disenfranchised. They deemed their faith to have been ‘hijacked’ by the religious right.”

Red Letter Christians resent the fact that many Christians focus on the issues of homosexuality and abortion. They believe that *Jesus* did not deal with those two issues and they should therefore, not have importance placed on them. Red Letter Christians focus instead on social justice issues such as poverty, environment, education, gay rights, racial discrimination, etc. As a result of the positions *they* hold, it is their belief that Christians in general have embraced the *wrong values*. They believe political candidates should be elected based on the positions they hold concerning social justice issues such as those mentioned above — rather than on the positions they hold concerning issues such as abortion and homosexuality. Red Letter Christians seek to *redefine* moral values according to *their* interpretation (*exclusive* of anything *other* than the *red* letters) of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and other “red letter” passages. Their aim is be more inclusive and more accepting Christians.

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Now, with that brief background in mind, should this movement be of concern to those of us who are Christians? On the surface you might say, “we *should* be concerned about some of those things.” To which we would agree. But, on the other hand when people claiming to represent Christianity choose to *exclude* and place very little, if any, importance on doctrines taught by the Apostles throughout their letters — a choice has been made. It is a choice that denies the importance of the New Testament, other than the Gospels themselves. It is a choice that disparages all of the teachings included in the *rest* of the Bible. It is a choice that — although the Red Letter Christians would deny this — *excludes* the teachings of the Apostles. In effect, all that matters are the Gospels. The Acts of the Apostles and the Letters simply are not viewed as all that important.

So the question is, “do the Red Letter Christians have a valid approach to Christianity?” Acts 2:42 states —

*“and they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and the breaking of bread and prayers.” (KJV)*

Choosing to end Scripture as Christ ascends to Heaven, does not get the reader to Acts 2:42. Thus, there is no information as to how the church started. There is no information *about* the early church, its formative years and teachings of how to live in Christ as his followers within the body of Christ. There would be no patterns to follow concerning worship or how God expects His kingdom to be organized. In effect — almost *all* distinctions between various Christian beliefs would be non-existent. There would hardly be *any* doctrines that would create less cohesion or less unity within the then *very broad* use of the term “Christianity.”

The *exclusion* of much of the New Testament (by using Jesus’ words only) permits *inclusion* of most any form of doctrine man might choose to practice. A social gospel that places the care of the physical needs *on this earth* above the spiritual need of mankind to be obedient to *all* of God’s Word, directly opposes the entire pattern laid out in the Scriptures since the beginning of time.

The Apostles learned first hand the things they later taught with the help of the Holy Spirit. As they lead the church forward they were called upon to give numerous instructions concerning all types of things ranging from how to live ones life to exactly how the Church was to function as well as how one is to *become* a part of the Body. John 14:26 tells us that the apostles provided instruction based on the teachings they received from Jesus as well as guidance from Holy Spirit.

*“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” (NASB)*

Jesus proclaims that his message is from the Father. It is of God, not man (John 7:16 and 14:24). In the same way the teachings of the Apostles are not of themselves, but of Jesus. To dismiss — or take *lightly* — all of the writings in the Bible that are *not* “red letters” — and view them as not worthy of acceptance is

to reject the message of God. Jesus states it this way in John 13:20 —  
*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” (NKJV)*

In I Corinthians 14:37 Paul states —

*“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” (NKJV)*

Paul does not claim the teaching as his own, but credits God as the source of his proclamations. As Christians we are to be wise and not easily thrown to and fro by everything that might *seem* to be right and good.

*“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;” (Eph. 4:14 NASB)*

Such is the case with this latest movement of Red-Letter Christianity. We must be aware of what such an effort is about and realize the potential impact it can have within the broad spectrum of the so-called “Christian community” — as well as within the New Testament Church. Some unsuspecting people can very easily fall for a kind of a Gospel that is no Gospel at all.

*“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel; — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:6-10 NIV)*

While obedience to the Word certainly includes a responsibility that would be defined as having a social nature, it is not in keeping *with* that Word to dismiss everything *but* the social side and focus *only* on various social issues. While the Red Letter Christians *claim* that is not their goal, Tony Campolo states in *Red Letter Christians: a Citizen’s Guide to Faith and Politics* that “what differentiates Red Letter Christians from other Christians is our passionate commitment to social justice....” While that may in some circles — be an admirable focus, it is *not* the mission for which Christ came to this earth to accomplish.

*“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10 NASB)*

If Christians are to have a passion for that which Jesus gave His life, it would be that mission commanded in Matthew 28:19-20 —