



Critical Issues Commentary

A BIBLICALLY BASED COMMENTARY ON ISSUES THAT IMPACT YOU

JULY/AUGUST 2008

ISSUE NUMBER 107

MIKE BICKLE AND INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PRAYER

THE LATTER RAIN REDIVIVUS

BY BOB DEWAAAY

Earlier this year the International House of Prayer (IHOP) sponsored a conference in Kansas City entitled *Passion for Jesus* that was heavily promoted toward young people. The purpose of the conference was to “cultivate intimacy with Jesus.” In the conference’s second session, IHOP president and director Mike Bickle preached a message based on an allegorical interpretation of a Matthew 25 parable in which he explained his end times theology and “revelation of the bridal paradigm.” Bickle claims that Jesus cannot return until something drastically changes in the church: “He is not coming any day. He is not coming until the people of God globally are crying out in intercession with a bridal identity under the anointing of the Spirit.”¹ If you do not understand what he means by that it is likely because you have read the Bible literally and have never found anything regarding a special anointing that imparts a revelation of a “bridal identity.” In fact, much of Bickle’s terminology will be strange and foreign to most Christians.

In this article I will show that Bickle’s movement is based on allegorized scripture, deeper life pietism, and mysticism, representing a slightly modified version of the heretical Latter Rain movement of the 1940s. Bickle claims that he began his ministry through the hearing of an audible voice of God in 1983 that told him to start 24-hour prayer in the spirit of the tabernacle of David. He further claims that he erected a sign to that effect and that he him-

self did not even know what prayer in the spirit of the tabernacle of David was, despite that God had told him to establish it. It turns out that it is “prophetic singing prayers.”² Once they figured out what it was, IHOP was born.

THE LATTER RAIN END-TIME SCENARIO

On IHOP’s Web site is a series of affirmations and denials that appear to distance themselves from the discredited Latter Rain movement. (I explained Latter Rain ideas in a previous CIC article.³) For instance, they deny any belief in the Joel’s Army teaching,⁴ one of the key teachings of the Latter Rain stating that an end-time church would arise with great power and defeat God’s enemies during the Great Tribulation. They also taught that Christ could not return to the “defeated” church they deemed existed in their day.

As I documented, key leaders of the New Apostolic Reformation have picked up the concept and teach the same thing. This teaching is so eccentric that it is unlikely anyone espousing it had not been influenced by those who first proposed it. This is especially so when one considers Bickle’s past associations with prophets like Paul Cain of the Latter Rain era. Therefore I conclude that Bickle and IHOP have indeed been influenced by the Latter Rain despite their denials.

Bickle claims that the church will not only go through the Great Tribulation, but the church will *cause* it:

We’re not absent for the great tribulation, now listen carefully, the church causes the great tribulation. What I mean by that – it’s the church, it’s the praying church under Jesus’ leadership that’s loosing the judgment in the great tribulation in the way that Moses stretched forth his rod and prayed and loosed the judgments upon Pharaoh. The church in the tribulation is in the position that Moses was before Pharaoh but it won’t be a Pharaoh and Egypt, it’ll be the great end time Pharaoh called the antichrist and the book of Revelation is a book about the judgments of God on the antichrist loosed by the praying church.

In Bickle’s eschatology, the church, with a special type of prayer as the key, defeats Antichrist. The Latter Rain version claimed that a company of prophets and apostles would do it. In both versions an elite end-time church defeats God’s enemies, and Jesus is “held in the heavens” until it happens. Earl Paulk actually wrote a book by that title in the mid 1980s.⁵

Bickle describes his doctrine that Christians must adopt a certain version of prayer before Christ can return:

Right now the prayer movement is growing fast....really fast! But when I say it’s growing fast instead of one percent of the Body of Christ taking hold of it, maybe 10 percent. It’s....you know it’s like 10 times bigger than it was a generation ago, but beloved as fast as the prayer movement is growing, where people are getting hold of it, still for 90 percent of the Body of

Christ it's not even on their mind. Jesus is not coming until the Body of Christ globally is crying out "Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus" and they don't just say "come and forgive me" they are crying out in the understanding of who they are as the one that is cherished by Jesus in the bridal identity.

Note the elitism. Here, Bickle obviously refers to people who have adopted his movement, and by implication has rendered useless the practice of praying in the manner the Bible teaches—with regard to God executing His plans for the earth.

The proof text for this idea is this passage: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." (Revelation 22:17) First, it is not clear whether the Spirit and bride are asking Christ to come, or whether the Spirit and bride are inviting all to come to Christ to find salvation (as the last part of the verse does). I believe that the entire verse is an invitation to salvation, not a call for Christ to return.⁶ Second, in either case, the passage does not only address some elite end-time group that has a special bridal paradigm revelation. The church has been praying for Christ's return ever since He gave us the Lord's Prayer. Every time we receive the Lord's Supper and thus "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes," we implicitly state our longing for table fellowship at the marriage supper of the Lamb. It is abusive to imply that Christians throughout the centuries had inadequate prayer because they lacked a personal revelation that cannot be validly derived from Scripture.

Another idea that Bickle emphasizes throughout his message is that the greatest revival lies ahead and will be contemporary with the Great Tribulation. This makes sense from the Latter Rain perspective, but where is it taught in Scripture? Amazingly, Bickle claims that Matthew 24 teaches it:

"There's so many principles in this [parable of the virgins] parable. It is an end time parable, I tell you it is. It is for the people and when the crisis and the revival of the great Matthew 24 is unfolding."

Hold on. Matthew 24 teaches a great end-time revival? *Where?* It teaches the opposite: a great end-time falling away. Here are a few passages:

For many will come in My name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will mislead many. . . . Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. . . . For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:5, 9-12, 24)

Not one verse in Matthew 24 teaches a great revival where Christians defeat God's enemies. And Bickle cites none, but he claims the teaching exists there:

We're still in Matthew 24 it's all about the end times—Matthew 24 and then the three parables. Jesus is preparing the church through these three parables to walk in victory in the hour of the greatest revival in history and the greatest time of trouble in history—it's called the Great Tribulation.

The Bible simply does not teach this revival. The Bible teaches that there will be people coming to faith during the Tribulation, but most of them are martyred.⁷ The idea of the revival Bickle describes is a Latter Rain teaching that came from allegorizing some Old Testament passages about the agricultural seasons in Israel. Bickle repeatedly refers to this non-existent revival

and makes it the centerpiece of his allegorization of the parable of the virgins.

What we have here is Latter Rain redivivus.⁸ In its resurrected form it is sans anti-trinitarianism, the manifested sons, and a few other false teachings that caused the first version to be discredited. But the distinctive eschatological doctrines of the Latter Rain are alive and well. In both movements, Jesus cannot return for the church because the church is supposedly "defeated" or "lacking revelations." In both movements, it is the church, and not God Himself, who defeats God's enemies during the Tribulation. In both movements all Christians are considered unenlightened and lacking, except those elites who are privy to special experiences and revelations. Both movements predict an expected end-time revival that is greater than anything that has gone before.

ALLEGORIZED SCRIPTURE

The bridal paradigm so central to IHOP's teaching is based on an allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon that creates the idea of an "intimacy with Jesus" that is analogous to a sensual relationship between a man and a woman. (K. Jentoft deals with the problems with such a "Jesus" in the accompanying article in this issue of CIC.) But the problematic practice of allegorizing God's Word to find hidden or secret meanings causes much mischief in other ways besides the romantic Jesus they promote.

For example, consider Bickle's interpretation of the parable of the virgins. First, with no exegetical support he claims that the parables in Matthew 24 and 25 are about "leadership at the end of the age." Bickle says, "He is specifically talking to leaders." In fact, the parable of the virgins is a warning to disciples to be faithful and vigilant. Bickle then goes on to claim that the two groups of five in the parable are people who have intimacy with Jesus and those who lose it:

He is not contrasting wise and evil, he is talking about wise and

not so wise, but these are within the ranks of the people who are saying yes to the Lord. These are people who love the Lord today, and their love for the Lord stays steady to the end, but their connect with the Lord [sic]; a lot of people who love Jesus, they lose their connection with him at the heart level; I mean at the intimate level. I'm not talking about people, this is not talking about people who lose their salvation; it's talking about people who lose their intimacy in all that is going on at this time of history.

But what in the context tells us levels of "intimacy" are the issue? (Remember, the bridal paradigm implies the sensual—the Bible never uses the term "intimacy.") I will deal with the two-level schema in the next part of this article. But here Bickle is not making much of an attempt at literal exegesis. The parable itself teaches that the foolish were lost people, not lesser Christians:

And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord, lord, open up for us." But he answered and said, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." (Matthew 25:10-12)

It is serious when Jesus shuts the door to the wedding banquet and says "I do not know you"! But Bickle interprets those in the parable to be Christians. In the context of other such warnings in Matthew (such as those in Matthew 7 who said "Lord, Lord" and the parable of the sower and the seeds) it is clear enough that Matthew is warning that some are false disciples who do not really know the Lord.

According to Bickle, the lamps are ministries: "They all had a lamp...they all had a functioning ministry. They're born again, they're virgins and they all have a functioning ministry." Bickle assumes they are born again because of

a passage in 1Corinthians that calls believers "virgins." But this is not how parables work. In Jesus' use of parables, He tells a story that uses language of literal Jewish wedding practices to make a point. The story contains literal oil, lamps and virgins as there would have been in the situation described in the parable. It does not follow that every detail has a meaning that is found by how terms like oil, lamps, or virgins are used elsewhere. But the allegorical method finds hidden meaning everywhere. So for Bickle the lamps are ministries and the virgins are truly regenerate Christians.

Since all went out to meet the bridegroom in the parable, Bickle says that the ten, "were involved in pursuing the Messiah as the bridegroom God." Never mind that the "revelation" of the bridegroom God is Bickle's own invention based on allegorization of other passages. But allegorizing one passage in his hermeneutic helps prop up further allegorization of others: "Now there is only one time in history, only one time in all of human history where the people of God universally, worldwide will see Jesus as a Bridegroom King – a Bridegroom God and that's at the end times. It says in Revelation 22:17 'The spirit and the bride say come.'" Bickle is correct in that quote. The Spirit and bride have indeed said "come"; they have said it since John wrote Revelation and the invitation has been valid throughout church history. Bickle's interpretation has no merit. But, if we follow Bickle's thought, he proposes that now we have leaders with the revelation of the Bridegroom God at the end of the age with ministries (lamps) going out to meet the groom.

Another allegorized part of the parable in Bickle's scheme is the oil: "Oil – oil is the heart connect with the Holy Spirit. As we cultivate our secret life in God, did you know that every one of us in this room have [sic] a secret life with God. . . . It's the reach of your heart for God. Every one of us are [sic] developing a secret history in God – that's the oil, the connection with the Holy Spirit." Is there any evidence from the text of Matthew that oil means

"secret life with God" that is better for some Christians than others? Clearly not. The contrast in Matthew is between those who are alert and therefore ready for the Lord's return and those who are not: "*Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour*" (Matthew 25:13). But Matthew's meaning does not even factor into Bickle's interpretation.

Why should that be so? Because it does not fit into his Latter Rain eschatological scheme he likely ignores the issue of the need to be alert, based on the realization that we do not know when the Lord will return. He claims that the Lord cannot return until after the entire church gets the revelation of the Bridegroom God, defeats God's enemies, and calls Jesus from heaven to return. If all that were already happening when Jesus does return, then obviously the entire church would be in the condition of the five wise virgins and would hardly be taken by surprise by the timing of the return. So not only does Bickle's interpretation make no sense based on what we read in Matthew, it does not even make sense based on his own eccentric eschatological scheme.

The allegorical approach to hermeneutics attacks the concept that the meaning of the Scriptures is determined by the Holy Spirit-inspired authors. The clever allegorist finds his own meaning. The bottom line is that the reader who dreams up the allegory determines the meaning of the Bible; God, who inspired the Scripture, does not. The Bible becomes a touch point, a base for creative ideation where ideas that have no direct link to the text itself inspire new interpretations.

DEEPER LIFE PIETISM

In an earlier *CIC* article I described various types of pietism that claim there are two types of Christians, with certain elites in the preferred category.⁹ Like the Latter Rain, Mike Bickle's IHOP takes pietism to a completely new level, and his message on the parable of the virgins shows this. He has promoted pietism by claiming that the wise virgins are Christians with a better secret connec-

tion to God and the foolish ones are Christians with worse, or lesser, connections to God. Pietism is unbiblical, and Bickle misinterprets the parable of the virgins in order to find it there. The foolish virgins were not Christians not only because Jesus said "I do not know you," but because the parable before this one (about the slave) and the parable after it (about the talents) clearly portray as non-Christians those who were not faithful. In the first case it states "*the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.*" (Matthew 24:50, 51). The issue is the same: the master coming at an unexpected time. In the parable of the talents it says this: "*And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matthew 25:30). The parable of the virgins does not teach Bickle's two- (or more) tiered scheme of types of Christians.

Bickle has various dividing points between the good kind of Christian and the lesser one. One of those is "connected" and "disconnected." Bickle states: "He wants us connected to his heart, not that you feel God all day every day, but I tell you when I press into the Lord with a bridal paradigm and I stay connected to him, my heart gets tenderized." So, am I to believe that if I come to God on His terms, believing that Jesus' blood washed away my sins, and I "draw near" to the throne of grace by faith, I am still lacking something that only certain elite Christians like Mike Bickle have gained through revelation? Pietism sounds spiritual enough, but it always is an attack on the finished work of Christ and the *solus* of the Reformation. What God has done in Christ to forgive sins and bring us near to Him is the same for all true Christians: "*But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ*" (Ephesians 2:13).

The elite-minded leaders at IHOP are selling a bill of goods. They have bought the lie that by imagining "pas-

sion for Jesus" along the lines of sensual intimacy that they have ascended into an elite class that will make them like Moses and they will be able to call down the plagues on the world. They have pumped themselves up into imagining that the Great Tribulation will be the stage where they show off their exemplary spiritual powers and prowess.

It gets truly scary when they call for Christians to send their teenagers to Kansas City to get this same "passion." This is actually happening, so be warned. These young people are being inducted into a reworked version of the elitist Latter Rain heresy. If children believe Mike Bickle they will return home convinced that their parents' faith is totally inadequate. They will think that way because Bickle's doctrine is an attack against grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, and to the glory of God alone. They will have been taught to add "the revelation of the bridegroom God" which amounts to thinking of Jesus as a sensual lover in order to avoid being one of the foolish virgins whom the Lord says He does not know. The foolish "virgins" are supposedly anyone who does not believe Bickle's false teaching.

Besides "connected and not connected" there is other terminology in this version of pietism that divides the body into the "haves and have nots". There are those who have "intimacy with God" and those who do not. Bickle says, "Being the bride of Christ is a position of privilege near to experience the heart of God." Therefore the privileged ones possessing this special revelation are supposedly closer to the heart of God than ordinary Christians are. The book of Hebrews speaks of drawing near to God in several passages, and none apply to an elite group with a special revelation. Neither do any speak of a "bridegroom God." Here are a few:

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. . . . Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always

lives to make intercession for them. . . . Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 10:22)

Drawing near to God as taught in Scripture is not based on being part of a certain elite Christian class who have achieved a better piety, but it is based on what God has done for us in Christ. Our hearts are cleansed by His work of grace that we receive by faith. The Bible offers us assurance because we know we are sinners and that God is holy. Our comfort is that Jesus intercedes for us and has made a way that our sins are forgiven and we have access to the throne of grace. We draw near because of what Christ has done, not because we know some supposed secret to intimacy with God that has not been taught in Scripture.

Bickle's version is man-centered because it focuses on the supposed deeper experience that certain Christians have cultivated. He defines the "secret life" as follows: "It's the reach of your heart for God." This apparently is based on something that we do. He asks, "What are you doing in your secret history in God? Are you developing it with strength or are you neglecting it?" He is helping his listeners feel guilty about lacking something that they will have to set out to gain through their own effort based on his revelation. Hebrews encourages us by explaining what Christ has done and how He has made access for us. What we need is faith in Christ, not faith in the level of our own personal piety or "personal history in God." I am quite certain I am an impious sinner who, by God's grace, has found a gracious and forgiving Savior.

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

We will not know exactly what it means for the church to be the bride of Christ until after Christ returns and we participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Bickle's "revelation of the bride-

groom God” claims to know what is not yet revealed. What can be known about the bride of Christ metaphor is found only in what the Bible tells us. And what it tells us reveals that it is *not* restricted to an elite, end-time group with a “passion” that ordinary Christians lack.

For example, Jesus described the eschatological feast in this way: “*And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 8:11). The Old Testament saints participate in the feast along with people throughout history who have saving faith. Participation is not predicated upon a “revelation of the Bridegroom God” but rests on our having faith in God according to His terms.

When Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples He made reference to a “cup” that will be drunk at the eschatological banquet:

And when He had taken a cup, and given thanks, He gave it to them; and they all drank from it. And He said to them, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I shall never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”
(Mark 14:23 – 25)

At a Passover meal there were four cups associated with the four promises of Exodus 6:6, 7. The third cup was associated with the promise “I will redeem you.” Jesus offered the third cup when He said “This is My blood of the covenant.”¹⁰ But He put the drinking of the fourth cup on hold until it will be shared by all of the redeemed at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Interestingly, the cup that we will share with Jesus, the fourth cup, was associated with this promise from Exodus 6:7 – “*I will take you for my people and I will be your God.*” This covenant statement is thematic in the Bible and is repeated toward the end of Revelation: “*And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among*

men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them” (Revelation 21:3). When Jesus returns for His church, the dead in Christ shall rise first, and all who are truly His shall meet Him in the air (1Thessalonians 4:17). Then He shall share that fourth cup at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

To further illustrate this, Paul calls the cup we share at the Lord’s Supper, “the cup of blessing” (1Corinthians 10:16). This is an allusion to the cup the Lord blessed at the Last Supper.¹¹ Then in 1Corinthians 11:26 Paul says that in the Lord’s Supper we “proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” So we receive the “cup of blessing,” the third cup to remember that He poured out His blood for our redemption, and we do so in His physical absence as He has bodily ascended into Heaven. But we also do so in faith that He will keep His promise that we will share the fourth cup with Him at the eschatological banquet feast. And we will do so with all of the redeemed.

The marriage supper of the Lamb occurs when this anticipated fourth cup is shared and the promise associated with it (that He will be our God and we his people) will be fully actualized. This is part of the hope that Christians have shared through the centuries. Bickle would like to take it away from all but a few elite, enlightened ones at the very end of church history.

CONCLUSION

By the authority of God’s Word I offer the following assurance: Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, died for sins and was raised on the third day. He bodily ascended to Heaven and has promised to bodily return for His own. If you truly repent and believe the gospel, your sins are forgiven and you are part of the bride of Christ. To be alert means to persevere in the faith, not moved away from the hope of the gospel. If you confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9), you are saved. This eternal hope is true because of what Christ has done for you through

His once-for-all shed blood—and not what you have done for Him.

In contrast, Mike Bickle offers hope to those who have a certain unquantifiable level of “intimacy with the bridegroom God”, “secret history with God”, “passion for the bridegroom”, and “revelation of who they are to Jesus”, and other pietistic notions. But consider how tenuous assurance is when based on one’s own level of piety (according to Bickle): “Nobody can measure how strong or weak that [secret history] is; nobody really knows. You can’t even fully measure it, but God can.” If you are a follower of IHOP and Mike Bickle, it means that you may not be one of the wise virgins and your status as such cannot be known to you. In fact, you would have to be rather brash to claim that you were sure your secret history was good enough to qualify. Bickle tells you that being one of the foolish virgins is not so bad. But do you really think Jesus slamming the door on you and saying He does not know you is desirable? By Bickle’s definitions the majority of Christians have no hope of qualifying.

Because Bickle’s allegorical interpretation comes from his own imagination and not from the meaning of the Biblical authors, placing your hope in what he offers means placing it in his own imagination. I am offering you the hope of gospel made certain by God’s acts in history, backed fully by the Scriptures interpreted literally according to the Biblical authors’ meaning. If you believe on the Lord Jesus you shall be saved, and you will most assuredly participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb. If you are Bickle’s follower you should seriously consider discarding his false hope based upon your own personal level of mystical revelation and personal piety. Place your hope instead on Christ and in His finished work.

END NOTES

1. Mike Bickle audio message #2; given March 6, 2008.
2. All further references are to the above audio recording unless otherwise noted.

