

17 JANUARY 2013

A. W. Pink: glorifying God by disobeying Him?

by Dan Phillips

I realize that A. W. Pink is a hero and beloved saint to many. His books, particularly [*The Sovereignty of God*](#), have been very helpful for decades.

For my part, I've never been a huge fan. I've tried reading him, and generally been defeated by his verbosity or his fanciful exegesis. I've other books that do a better job of what he tries to do, so they take up my time instead of Pink.

Having said all that, I'm reading through a book called [*Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*](#), edited by Elwell and Weaver. The chapter I just finished was devoted to A. W. Pink.

From a whole-Bible, sufficient-Scripture perspective, it's not a particularly happy story after the opening bits. Pink had been a Theosophist, but was soundly converted whilst in the middle of his activities, and instantly preached Christ in a Theosophical meeting at which he was to be a speaker.

But after that, Pink's life goes south in a number of ways. He eschews any kind of apprenticeship or training, too devoted to himself and his own endeavors. This will yield mixed fruit: the intensity of his studies will indeed give Pink some good material to give away. However, this isolation is constantly and roundly warned against in Scripture, which commends instead humble exposure to the reproof and counsel of others (e.g. [Prov. 10:17](#); [12:1](#); [13:18](#); [15:5](#), [10](#), [31-32](#); [18:1-2](#); etc.). As anyone who reads and believes the Bible could have predicted, baleful effects follow foolish choices.

Pink attempts to pastor, but ends up careening from location to location to location. Pink prefers talking to people from a great distance (i.e. writing), and ends up devoted to that activity solely, in complete isolation from any personal contact with Christ's church or the means of grace. Which brings me to set these two passages in contrast.

First: He labored faithfully for his remaining twelve years of life, writing and producing the periodical while he lived in virtual isolation, not even attending a local church. He justified this behavior by explaining that the admonition not to neglect the assembling of ourselves together does not mean that the sheep of Christ should attend a place where the goats predominate or where their attendance would sanction that which is dishonoring to Christ. On Sundays he spent his time pastoring his flock of faithful readers by writing letters answering their questions concerning the Bible and theology. Would-be visitors who had traveled great distances to Stornoway were discouraged as they were usually turned away, not being allowed to see him. The townspeople knew little about him, except that each day at a certain hour he took a walk through the town.

Second: Pink also believed in, practiced, and preached holiness of life, including sacrificial living for his Lord. He longed to do the will of God, whatever it might be. He searched and searched, prayed and prayed, waited and waited to learn the will of God, and finally surrendered to do what was unmistakably God's will—the use of his pen. [Ibid., 140.]

These passages in juxtaposition give us an opportunity to consider what I've hammered on again and again, just about every place I have a chance.

Consider: The *second* passage tells us Pink was holy, and committed to "sacrificial living for his Lord," doing the will of God heroically, surrendering to "what was unmistakably God's will—the use of his pen." But the *first* passage had told us that Pink had no time for pursuing the second

most important thing in the universe according to Jesus: love your neighbor as yourself ([Matt. 22:36-40](#)).

Now, like all religious people, Pink worked out what the biographer calls a "justification," which as always is nothing but a *rationalization*. And the biographer gives Pink a pass, because he was such a splendid writer. So because of Pink's (and the biographer's) writing, Christians are once again urged to the fiction that one can seek *and do* the "will of God" *in direct and continued disobedience to the Word of God*.

Because the second passage is utter nonsense, to a Biblical Christian. Disobeying [God's direct, unambiguous and insistent commands to be personally in community, under the oversight of elders](#), is not "holiness of life," and it is not "sacrificial living for the Lord." It is indulgent and arrogant living for oneself. It is someone who didn't seem, in any way, to "get" [what it means to live and think like a slave](#).

In fact, mark the first passage. Not only was Pink too good to associate with imperfect saints (where he is not in charge and running things his way); he would not even accept visitors. Pink must have imagined that he had some mystical exemption from [Romans 12:13](#), [Hebrews 13:2](#), and [1 Peter 4:9](#) as well as the previously-noted commands. And while he wrote very critically and insistently upon evangelism, and how everyone else was doing it wrong, "The townspeople knew little about him, except that each day at a certain hour he took a walk through the town." So according to this, Pink "practiced holiness" by *neither* actually *obeying* the Word of God, nor even through *practicing* what he literarily preached.

Instead, here once again this ugly specter of a mystical, individual will of God *that in fact trumps the written Word of God* rears its devastating head. The writer is content that God had a will for Pink that trumped the revealed will He inscripturated for all saints at all times and in all places. God's inerrant and unchanging and living Word is packed with "one-anothers" to be lived in the fellowship of the local church; but to A. W. Pink, we are given to think that He whispered, "Not you, Arthur. I want you to disobey what I told everyone else to do and stay at home, isolated and distant, practicing none of the graces of the Spirit, lecturing others about their responsibility. You just write; and in your writings, urge others to the obedience and holiness from which I am hereby excusing you."

So you see, like many who have tried to ply their wares in our metas, [Pink imagined he had a "note from God" excusing him for actually obeying](#) those commands God addressed to lesser beings. And the biographer apparently confirms that note.

You want to say Pink wrote some helpful things? If you say so. You want to tell me he's a model of Christian holiness and sacrificial living and integrity?

Yeah, I don't think so. In walking after Christ I constantly struggle (cf. [Gal. 5:17ff.](#)), I too frequently fail, I am at unceasing war with my own inconsistencies and inadequacies. The human knack for rationalization is an ever-present risk and fear.

The *last* thing I need held up for emulation is a man who found a way to avoid that whole struggle by pious-sounding excuses.

How about you?