

Discernment In Times of Apostasy

Westwood Men's Retreat 2011

- Ezekiel ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah during the time of the divided kingdom leading into the time of the Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel 9:4-6 ⁴“And the Lord said unto him, go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. ⁵And to the others he said in mine hearing, go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: ⁶Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.”

- Ezekiel prophesied, spoke for God during a time of general apostasy – a time that seemingly reflects our modern culture. I believe that just like in Ezekiel's time we are approaching a time of judgment for God's people.
- What was going on at that time, what was the dividing line between those who were grieved about what was going on – whom God approved of, and those who were part of what was going on and were judged for it – all of whom were near to the house of God?
- **Apostasy is the desertion of one's faith or religion. Apostasy is the forsaking of the belief to which one had previously adhered to.**
- The time period known as the great tribulation, the time just after the rapture of the church will be when that turning away from the faith reaches it's climax – and it can be instructive to us, it give us things to guard against.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 ³“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; ⁴who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. ⁵Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ⁶And now ye know what with-holdeth that he might be revealed in his time. ⁷For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way. ⁸And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: ⁹Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, ¹⁰and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: ¹²that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

- Sadly apostasy has been around since the Garden of Eden; Adam and Eve were in a perfect environment they seemingly had perfect fellowship with God – because they were submitted to the Word of God and His authority in their lives.
- Satan was the first apostate, having rebelled against God's word. As Eve got into a dialog with the enemy of our soul his first recorded utterance was "Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"
- Even gave into Satan's subtle attack, forsaking God's word, turning away into apostasy, Adam followed, and the rest is history.
- How many questionable Bible translations have surfaced in the last few years? How many pastors have forsaken the word of God?
- When we examine the offerings of Cain and Abel – Cain had forsaken God's instruction for bringing an acceptable sacrifice – he brought what he thought would or should be acceptable.

Judges 17:6 "In those days there was no king in Israel (no authority), but every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

- We see apostasy continuing throughout the Old Testament, one of the saddest examples coming from the wisest man that ever lived – king Solomon.
- Solomon was blessed by God, given wisdom and understanding in all things, wealth beyond our imagination – God used him to build the Temple upon which God placed His name – His very presence dwelt there.
- Later we see Solomon's compromise, living his life contrary to God's word, marrying foreign women who worshipped other gods. Eventually we see Solomon building altars to pagan gods and worshipping them. Just as God's word says, his heart was turned away and he became apostate.
- Sadly church history is no exception and is rife with apostasy:
 1. Augustine, considered a hero of the faith – developed many of the dogma's that are foundational to the false theology and false gospel of the largest apostate institution in Christendom – the Roman Catholic Church.
 2. Martin Luther, who took a stance against the RCC, the father of Protestantism also fathered replacement theology and anti-Semitism within the church.
 3. Now we have the "Word of Faith" movement – Bill Johnson / Bethel Church in Redding.
 4. Brian McClarin and many others from the "Emergent Church" – Rick Warren and his purpose driven ecumenical apostasy.

What is the antidote? How can we keep ourselves from giving in to those things that would draw us into apostasy?

Psalm 1:1-3 “¹Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ²But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. ³And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

- These instructions are centered upon our being strengthened by God’s Word and they begin with the counsel not to follow the counsel of the ungodly.
- This doesn’t just mean avoiding counsel only from those who are obviously evil but rather rejecting any counsel that does not conform to what is taught by the Word of God.

Proverbs 14:12 “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

- A major factor related to the apostasy within the evangelical church today is that fewer and fewer professing Christians really believe in the sufficiency of God’s Word.

2 Peter 1:3 “According as His divine power hath given unto all things that pertain unto life and Godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue:” (virtue = manliness, valor)

- The so called “Christian” counseling movement that embraces the wisdom of this world, the teaching of godless, hedonistic men in the spirit of anti-Christ such as Sigmund Freud & Carl Jung.
- Evangelical Christianity is increasingly walking contrary to the warnings in Psalm 1 – increasingly walking in the counsel of the ungodly, increasingly standing in their ways – adopting their practices, and increasingly comfortable sitting in the seat of the scornful – scornful I might add of those who adhere to God’s Word and believe in the veracity of God’s Word and that it is to authoritative in our lives.
- There is an obvious digression in this warning:
- By listening to and heeding what the lost – and even the enemies of the faith have to say, one settles in comfortably with their perspective and eventually practices what they preach.
- The tragic result is that the heart becomes hardened to God’s truth, and one’s attitude turns to scorn when confronted with it.

- I know that Calvary Chapel isn't the only church seeking to honor God's Word and teach it accurately and so forth but I believe there is a growing sense of isolation, that there is a shrinking minority who even believe in God's word – amongst professing Christians.
 1. Health food store: Calvary Chapel – Oh, that's the church that teaches God's word!
 2. At another church: Calvary Chapel – ooh... and turned away in disgust...
- The warning from Psalm 1 verse 1 leads to the primary action to be taken in verse 2:

“²But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.”

- It is difficult to delight in something, or to meditate in it if we are ignorant of it.

2 Timothy 2:15-16 **“¹⁵Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ¹⁶But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.”**

- Too many professing Christians are functionally – biblically illiterate. Almost all Christians have Bibles – but very few actually read them, or study them.
- In a poll of over 35,000 professing Christian adults – 57% believe that many religions can lead to eternal life.

That means that almost 60% of professing Christians are either ignorant of or ignoring:

John 14:6 **“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”**

- This statement by Jesus represents a Biblical absolute – there is no way around this.

Peter declared:

Acts 4:12 **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”**

- Speaking of our present time:

2 Timothy 4:3-4 **“³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”**

Sadly, in our day biblical absolutes including an exclusive way of salvation have become viewed at the epitome of intolerance – an accusation that many Christians can't handle because they don't know the Bible well enough to respond appropriately.

Delighting in God's Word, meditating upon God's Word, studying God's Word is the obvious solution to this problem, and will make us different in this age of apostasy.

Jesus' prayer for us:

John 17:17 "Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth."

- Jesus wants us sanctified, set apart, as those who regardless of what the world thinks and says, are confident that His Word is the truth.

Jesus told His disciples:

John 8:31-32 "31 ... if ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; 32 and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

- Free from sin and death, but also free from the lies of the enemy.
- This is not about a man's intellectual ability or education, it is about a desire to know God's truth and to diligently pursue after it.
- When Jesus chose His A-postles, who did He choose? Un-educated fishermen and goofs just so we wouldn't exclude ourselves for that reason.
- The man / believer who meditates continually in God's Word will find that his effort is both preventative against apostasy, and his faith will be strengthened.

Romans 10:17 "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

That man will be like what the Psalmist declares:

Psalms 1:3 "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Solid, rooted, grounded, fruitful.

- The crux of the battle is over the Word of God.
- The enemies strategy is to discredit, diminish, and contradict God's word wherever possible – unless we really know the scriptures we'll never even see what is coming.

Ephesians 6:13-17 "13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

- We need to be good soldiers, we need to be Bereans, we need to be true students of the word.