

CRISIS IN THE CHURCH

PART 3

FORSAKING THE WORD OF GOD

It seems of late as if I have been awakened out of a deep sleep. I thought I had a fair understanding of the spiritual condition of the American church, but I was wrong. As an evangelist I preach repentance across the country because the church has predominately embraced worldly lifestyles and is apathetic towards unbelievers. For many years it has been obvious to me that the church was in desperate need of authentic revival. But until recently I did not know how bad the situation had actually become.

Within the circles I normally preach there is, for the most part, a reverence for the Word of God. Some of the people may not be living the truth, but at least they have a basic belief that truth can be known and that it is found in the Bible. But I am now beginning to see that a large portion of the church in all of its Protestant branches is forsaking the Word; abandoning the truth for lies and illusions. Many who once believed in the infallibility of Scripture are now picking and choosing what they want to believe. Others are relegating Jesus to a position of an enlightened teacher on par with Buddha. And a growing number of people are turning Christianity into a spiritual high where truth is defined according to experience.

Though there are many reasons why people are forsaking the Word of God there are four that I will briefly outline in this article: 1) Ignorance of the Word. 2) Influence of the secular culture. 3) Believing the Word is not enough. 4) A growing apostasy.

1. IGNORANCE OF THE WORD

We Americans are busy people, so busy we do not take time to study the Scriptures. Our lack of genuine hunger for God and His Word has caused us to fill up life's voids with meaningless pursuits. We have time for TV, sports, books and a host of other non-essential activities. This reveals that our ignorance of the Word is a choice; a deliberate act of rebellion against God. This is also an indictment against Almighty God implying that He is not worth seeking and that knowledge of Him is irrelevant to life.

It is astounding how ignorant most professing Christians are of the Scriptures. How can we stand against lies if we do not know the truth? How can we say we love God and not love His Word? Because a large majority of self-proclaimed Christians do not know the Word they cannot articulate why they believe they are Christians or offer verifiable evidence that they are genuine believers. They have incorporated into their belief system views they have heard from TV preachers, parents, friends, sitcoms, news shows, movies, music, Internet and a host of other sources. But they do not know the truth for themselves and this is keeping them from knowing the true and living God.

When professing believers are ignorant of the Scriptures their worldview will be secular by default and not Christian. Their secular worldview causes them to act, talk and live like the world. It cannot be otherwise. This means they will have marriages like the world, raise their children like the world, pursue money like the world, seek pleasure like the world, talk like the world, dress like the world, think like the world and in the end, spend an eternity with those of the world.

Only by basing the entirety of our lives upon the Scriptures will we be able to think and act differently from the world. The voices of secular society are screaming at us from all sides, while the spirit of the world is wooing us to forsake Christ. We must have a purposeful pursuit of God and His Word or we will not stand against the wiles of the devil. If we do not strive to know the truth, and have the truth define our lives, then we are left to believe lies that are powerless to save us.

2. INFLUENCE OF SECULAR CULTURE

If the Word of God does not define our lives then the world in which we live will. Those who do not know the Scriptures will live worldly lives because they do not know what it means to be Christian and how to please God. Their ignorance of the Word will never allow them to develop a Christlike character. On the flip side, there are many professing Christians that are doctrinally orthodox, but are applicatively derelict. They know the Word but do not live it. We could call both types of “Christians” practical atheists and practical humanists.

What do I mean by practical atheists? These are people who say they believe in God but live like He does not exist. Their lives are not defined by the teaching of Scriptures because they have allowed their way of thinking to be developed through the propaganda machines of the secular world i.e., TV, movies, music, Internet, etc. Their lives and marriages look like the world because they think like the world and therefore act like the world.

Practical humanists are professing Christians that live no different than committed humanists. Humanism is an atheistic belief where man is the center of all things. Human passions and desires rule supreme because the individual is all important. Practical humanists have perverted the true faith by turning it into a humanistic religion in which man is the center of Christianity. By placing themselves at the center of their faith they have relegated God to the peripheral areas of life. Many have turned God into a sugar daddy that exists to satisfy their every lust and desire.

Relativism is also defining a vast portion of the church because we have been deeply influenced by the world. What is relativism? It is the belief that there are no absolutes. Therefore, morality and truth are changeable principles subject to culture and situation. This is an abandonment of what the Scriptures clearly teach—that truth can be known and morality is based upon the changeless character of God. Whenever people embrace relativism they abandon the truth of Scripture to pick and choose what they want to believe and how they want to live. This is a belief for convenience sake, so people can live as they like and feel no guilt over their actions.

The only way we will not be practical atheists or humanists is to make Christ and His teaching central to our lives. Since we are inundated on every side with relativism we must make the choice to turn off the voices of the world that are within our power to do so or these same philosophies will degrade the true faith.

3. BELIEVING THE WORD IS NOT ENOUGH

There are a lot of professing Christians who live as if Jesus and His Word are not enough to satisfy their lives. They add to the Scriptures or take from them for their own selfish reasons. There are three primary reasons for this. The first comes through liberal theology in which the Scriptures are dishonored at every level. Religious liberals, whether clergy or laity, do not believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. They claim that the Scriptures are of human origin and only contain portions of God’s words, or are little more than moral stories. Whenever the Word does not define our lives then we will seek other sources that will. Here you find the

idolatrous practice of incorporating into the Christian faith false religions and worldly philosophies.

The second reason people live as though the Word is not enough comes through those who are willfully ignorant of the Bible. Their ignorance of the Scriptures causes them to espouse extra-Biblical teachings, superstitions and opinions. They reject those portions of the Scriptures they disagree with or do not like. Their ignorance of the truth opens the door for them to believe lies and consequently, become idolaters.

The final reason why people live like the Word is not enough comes through portions of the Charismatic Movement and those that are being influenced by it. We can define two types of people that make up this diverse group. There are those who have remained basically orthodox in belief but are adding to their faith the extra-Biblical teachings of self-proclaimed prophets and apostles. Then there are those who are unorthodox in doctrine while holding to extra-Biblical teachings.

In the first case, you have professing believers that accept the basic doctrines of Biblical Christianity but are basing their faith more upon experience than upon the Scriptures. Truth and spirituality has come to be defined by experience rather than the Word. Consequently, they have ceased to be authentic God seekers and have become experience seekers instead.

One of the catalysts that have propelled people to be experience seekers rather than God seekers is that they have become enamored with the latest “prophet,” “apostle” or movement. Whenever people become experience seekers they will become the followers of men because they will look for the newest experience that comes through the hottest new “prophet” or conference speaker. This causes them to add to the Scriptures the unorthodox teachings of men and subtract from the Word those teachings that are contrary to their “prophets,” teachers and doctrines.

A disturbing problem that arises as a result of people becoming the followers of men and pop-movements is that they refuse to judge the words of their prophets and teachers by the infallible Scriptures. They unquestioningly hold to their prophets’ prophecies, visions and teachings as if their words were equal to God’s written Word. In fact, this is one major reason why they will not question their prophets. This is socially very cultish and can lead to the development of religious cults.

Those who question the prophets are labeled as spiritually dead and unenlightened people that are not in the “river of God.” They further refer to them as those who hold to the old wineskins of doctrine while rejecting the new wineskins of the Spirit. This manipulative teaching is used primarily to control people and make them mindless followers. Any teacher, preacher or prophet that does not welcome honest scrutiny of his or her doctrine is hiding something sinister. Here you have the Word of God set aside for the doctrines of men. Many sincere people are being deceived and drawn away from the truth.

The second type of people referred to above are those who are unorthodox in doctrine. These we will look at in the final section of the growing apostasy that is touching all segments of the church.

4. A GROWING APOSTASY

Jesus told us that in the last days “many false prophets will appear and deceive many people” (Mt. 24:11). Paul warned, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). Why do we think that these false teachers are only men like Joseph Smith (Mormonism) and Charles Russell

(Jehovah Witnesses)? Did not Paul tell us that they would come from within (Acts 20:29)? And why do we think that they would not come in this hour of history?

There are two ways false prophets and teachers advance their deceptions. The first is that they twist the plain meaning of the Scriptures to propagate their lies. The second is that they elevate their own teachings, prophecies and visions to be equal to, or greater than, the Scriptures. Then they remove, explain away, or ignore those verses that contradict their doctrines.

There is nothing new under the sun; the new false teachings are the old false teachings remarketed. What believers would have blatantly called heresy 30 years ago many now embrace as new revelations. The preaching of the cross is abandoned for soft speeches that offend no one; the preaching of repentance is forsaken for positive confession and teachings on self-esteem; the preaching of holiness is deserted for messages that God loves us as we are; the Scriptures are cast aside for the idols of experience and worldly ambition. We have forsaken the right way and are chasing after that which feeds the lusts of our flesh. A great falling away is upon us, but we have failed to discern it.

What is the answer to the Word being forsaken? To return to the Lord and His Word. But will we return? Are we really any different than Israel of old? Jeremiah prophesied, "This is what the LORD says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.' But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen'" (Jer. 6:16). The old way of the cross is rejected by many today because they have forsaken God and His changeless Word. The truth remains the same, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).