

Chapter 24

YE SEE HOW LARGE A LETTER

Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world [has been] crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new [creation]. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. (Galatians 6:11-18)

When Paul began his epistle to the Galatians he was pressed with an urgency and did not use a scribe as was his manner, but wrote with his own hand. He referred to this when he closed, *Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.* The Spirit of God had given him the message he wrote to the Galatians, and he purposed to deliver it immediately to the messengers who had come to him from Galatia. The translator of this letter misunderstood Paul. He apparently thought this was a reference to the length of Paul's epistle rather than to the size of the Greek characters with which he wrote because he translated the plural word for *letters* in

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the singular.

The translator's error is confusing to us, but there was no doubt this statement clearly identified the apostle to the Galatians. They were completely aware of his condition. They knew Saul had been blinded by the glory of the Lord on the road to Damascus and that God had restored his sight through the ministry of Ananias. Yet when Paul came to them, he came in weakness because of an infirmity of the flesh, which prompted him to write, *And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.... For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible ye would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.*

There seems to be little doubt what Paul's infirmity was. Even so, no matter what it was, it was just one of the many marks he bore in his body for our Lord's sake. He continued to receive these marks throughout his ministry. Thus he wrote the Corinthians:

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. (II Corinthians 11:24-27)

Paul accepted these trials, as well as his physical malady, as a part of his unique relationship with the Lord. He must have pondered often our Lord's statement to Ananias, *I will show him how great things he must suffer for my names sake.* It seems the very core of Paul's statement to the Corinthians:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet

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me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (II Corinthians 12:7-10)

The Judaizers sought by every means to bring the Galatians and the other Gentile believers throughout the world into subjection to the commandments and doctrines of men, as well as to the law of Moses, so that Paul wrote the Galatians:

As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. (Galatians 6:12-13)

With any spiritual understanding at all, it should be evident that it is (and always has been) impossible for man (saved or unsaved) to perform the Mosaic law, or any other code of ethics, to the satisfaction of a Holy, Just and Righteous God. It should be equally evident that if one takes a stand against such efforts as necessary for salvation and aligns himself with the Biblical position of salvation by grace, apart from the deeds of the law, such a person will eventually face the condemnation of the world's system.

The testimony of the Scriptures and the testimony of church history bears witness to Paul's statement to Timothy, *All they who live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*. The one who lives Godly is not involved in any of the things man perceives to be Godly (according to *a way which seemeth right unto a man*), but recognizes he is accepted of God by the imputed Righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is only by grace, through faith, that it is possible for God to declare sinners to be saints. This is not the approval of a fiction, but the perfect satisfaction of

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the Holiness, Righteousness and Justice of God through the Love, Mercy and Grace of God, by means of the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even so legalism is so much a part of the preaching of the churches of this age that when one stands for the truth of the grace of God, he is immediately labeled as condoning sin. When one preaches the truth of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, the accusation today is what it was in the first century: we are accused of preaching, *Let us sin that grace might abound*. In the forty-five years of my ministry I have never once preached, *Let us sin that grace may abound*, but I have been accused of doing so. In fact, I have never heard of anyone, who actually understood the truth of the grace of God, ever say or even imply, *Let us sin that grace may abound*. Nevertheless the accusation remains.

The counterfeit Christian is so steeped in the lie of the Devil that it is imperative for him to find something in his life of which he can boast. This generally leads to accusing others and excusing themselves and is partially responsible for the world's idea that Christians are hypocrites. Indeed many professing Christians are hypocrites, because the Greek word from which we get the word hypocrite means an actor. Thus, in their pride, they pretend to be something they are not rather than resting in the imputed Righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Pride was at the root of the fall of Lucifer, and pride is very much a part of legalism. Remember the Scripture says of Lucifer, *Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty*. Considering that *a way which seemeth right unto a man* was of the Devil, we should be able to understand that ego is at the root of all of the sins that a man commits, just as it was at the root of the sin of Lucifer. In this regard, the Spirit of God has provided us with the mind set of Lucifer

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at the time of his fall, recorded in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah:

All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into the heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? (Isaiah 14:10-17, emphasis mine)

Paul taught Timothy: If a man is to preach the gospel he must not be *a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the Devil*. Lucifer (who became the Devil) fell into condemnation because of his pride. He lifted himself up above the authority of God and sought to make himself God. There is no place for this kind of thinking in the service of God. Despite his salvation, the believer retains the sin nature he received as a result of Adam's sin. A grievous part of this nature is the ego. It cries for preeminence and must be brought into subjection. Therefore Paul wrote the Corinthians, if you must boast about something, boast about this: *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*.

The parable of the mustard plant serves as an example. It had its beginning with the planting of a mustard seed for its healing qualities. In other Scripture our Lord used the mustard seed to represent *faith* or in a larger sense, *the faith*. However, in the parable of the mustard seed, the focus was changed from the seed to the plant, which had unparalleled growth. It grew to the stature of a tree and became the habitation of the birds of the air, which lodged in its branches and

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enjoyed the benefits of its shade.

In the parable of the sower, which was spoken first, the birds of the air ate up the seed that fell by the wayside. Our Lord interpreted them to be the Devil. In the history of the church the emphasis soon changed from the seed, which represents *the faith*, to a plant of phenomenal growth, which is organized Christianity.

This growth changed the status of the church in Rome from a persecuted entity (hiding in the catacombs) to the power behind the throne and with more growth, the very throne itself. This made it a very attractive dwelling place for the ministers of the Devil who came to lodge in its highest places and to enjoy the comforts and luxuries such an organization could provide.

However with this status, the emphasis in the Roman Catholic Church was not upon *the faith* which gave it birth, but upon its continued growth and power, so that its message was not the message of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, though it continues to give lip service to it, but the message of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. This has been the way of the Roman Church, and it is the way of the world.

Therefore this way automatically attracts many in the world to participate in such a magnificent organization. Everything about this organization is attractive to the world: its tradition; its rich buildings and art works; its priesthood with its vestments; its liturgy, and most of all, its *way which seemeth right unto a man*. Consequently this organization is almost guaranteed perpetual growth and power until the day of its judgment, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the book of the Revelation.

When those of a lesser status observe the power and wealth that comes with unparalleled

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growth, they desire the same thing. Consider the emphasis that we have seen in protestant churches throughout the twentieth century and (with this revision of this book) on into this twenty-first century. The emphasis has clearly been upon numbers. Numbers suggest success. Consequently the quest for numbers has produced many success stories, from man's point of view. Yet from the point of view of the Scriptures, it has produced the Laodicean church: a church that is rich, yet poor.

This began to come about when the major denominations learned that an emphasis upon *the faith* (the doctrine of the Person and work of Jesus Christ) had a tendency to minimize numbers. They then learned, through men like Billy Sunday, that preaching against drunkenness and moral issues could unite the churches divided by doctrine. Thus through a united effort to rid a community of drunkenness, prostitution and the like, revival could be produced. This gave birth to the modern evangelistic meeting. The numerical success of these interfaith meetings ultimately produced the so-called nondenominational church.

Certain leaders had learned from these revivals that minimizing doctrine and maximizing the life of the individual had caused their attendance to boom. Thus they began to boast their minimization of doctrine, and they began to stress personal experience and personal *holiness*. They did this with the testimony meeting, where many testified, *this emphasis upon life made their faith more practical*. It took awhile for this new approach to catch on, but when it did it has produced the modern pentecostal movement, which is the fastest growing movement under the canopy of Christianity.

These two elements, the nondenominational church and the nondenominational evangelistic

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campaign, have produced the *net cast into the sea* stages of the church age, described in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. The techniques of mass evangelism, the nondenominational church and over zealous personal workers have produced many false professions of faith. This is seen in the parable of the net cast into the sea.

The characteristic of this era of Christendom is that it is indiscriminate. It is like *a net cast into the sea*. One does not have to be a fisherman to recognize that trawling with a net will snare virtually everything in the path of the net. Consequently, at the end of the age, it will be necessary for the angels to separate the good from the bad. The tragedy of this form of evangelism is that vast numbers in the net entertain false hopes. They all believe they have an inheritance in heaven, but they do not. Their hope cannot be verified by, *Thus saith the Lord*. Rather it is dependent upon an experience; and this experience, in many instances, is apart from the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God. Thus there will be *weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth*.

The dragnet has added appreciably to the numbers and wealth of churches under the canopy of Christianity, thus making this final stage of church history (as previously noted) to be characterized by the Laodicean church. This church is described as being lukewarm. This apathy is not towards the church or its ministry. It is towards the Word of God. This church, like Israel, has a zeal for God, but it is without knowledge (it being forfeited for numbers):

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee

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to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Revelation 3:14-22)

In this text we have two evaluations of the Laodicean church. One is by the church and the other is by the Lord. The church sees itself as *rich, increased with goods, and in need of nothing*; yet the Lord describes it as *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. Further, our Lord describes this church as *lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot*. This apathy is towards the fundamental truths of the Word of God respecting the Lord Jesus Christ in His Person and in His work, for these were the doctrines that were laid aside to gain the numbers and wealth of the Laodicean church.

If we take but a surface view of present-day churches, it might be difficult to convince anyone that these churches are apathetic. They seem to possess so much zeal and fervor, but the apathy is not towards the organization, nor towards its worship, or its relationship with the community. It is towards the distinctive truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ in His Person and in His work, so that the efforts of man are magnified and the work of Christ is minimized. Consequently doctrine has been laid aside for experience. Experience, particularly the tongues experience, has given denominations which were once divided over doctrinal issues a rallying point. Thus experience has produced a pseudo *unity of the Spirit*. A true unity of the Spirit must be based upon the Word of God, because *the just shall live by faith and faith cometh by hearing*,

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and hearing by the Word of God. Since *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God* there cannot be a true unity of the Spirit apart from the truth of the Word of God. Therefore the apostle John wrote:

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. (II John 1:7-11)

At this point it should not be necessary for me to remind you of the meaning of the Greek word translated *confess*. We know we must be in agreement with God about Jesus Christ in His Person and His work to make a Biblical confession of Christ. It is interesting to note that the majority of the denominations under the canopy of Christianity are correct about the Person of Christ. They know He is God Who became man by means of the virgin birth. Yet they err in the work of Christ, because most of them deny the eternal security of the believer. Their error is akin to the error of the churches of Galatia, which mixed law and ritual as necessities in the doctrine of salvation.

The majority of the denominations in this age of apostasy is very much like Israel was at the first advent of Christ, when our Lord said, *This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* Our Lord also said, *Full well ye reject the commandments of God that ye might keep the traditions of men.* As Israel was in the past, the Laodicean church is in the present: both were or are ignorant of the Word of God. Therefore in his second epistle to Timothy, after warning him about the conditions of the last days, Paul wrote:

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I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For 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; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (II Timothy 4:1-4, emphasis mine)

The charge to Timothy has been the charge to all who are truly called of God to preach the gospel: *Preach the Word*. However this portion of Scripture is not only exhortative, but prophetic. Paul prophesied the church would *not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they would heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they would turn away their ears from the truth, and would be turned unto fables*.

We have already seen how the church has cast away sound doctrine for the numbers that can be obtained by appealing to the flesh. We are now observing how doctrine has been replaced by that which provides sensual pleasure to the ears. This is the true meaning of *itching ears* in our text, and it projects quite a picture: that of a paramour nibbling on the ear of a maid, producing sensual pleasure in order to seduce her. Thus the meaning of *fables* in this text is anything and everything that comes from the pulpit but the unadulterated Word of God.

There were those who were seduced at Galatia, and there are many being seduced by the *other gospel* of the Judaizers at this present time. The prophetic Scriptures cannot fail. Therefore the counterfeit churches are going to be unified under the ministry of the antichrist, for they are the ten horns of the beast in the seventeenth chapter of the book of the Revelation. Those of us who know the truth must be faithful to the truth, but the apostasy will come nevertheless. Even so we can do something to keep genuine believers from being drawn into the grand seduction of the day. We can, indeed, *Preach the Word!* We can emphasize that our walk is according to the

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fact that in Christ we are a new creation.

Only the Creator can produce a new creation. Therefore we shall walk according to this rule: because we are a new creation, old things have passed away and all things have become new. Consequently we are reckoned to have died with Christ on the cross of Calvary; we have been reckoned to have been buried with Christ; and we have been reckoned to have been raised with Christ to walk in newness of life, which is the life of faith. In this position, it makes no difference whether I have been circumcised, or whether I am uncircumcised. What makes the difference is that I am a new creation in Christ Jesus. Therefore, in closing *The Gospel According to Paul*, Paul's admonition to the Galatians is our admonition to you:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. (Galatians 5:1-6)