

A NEED FOR REVIVAL

In Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, there lives a quaint people called the Amish. They are different from everyone else, dressing in very plain clothing, traveling by horse and buggy instead of motorized vehicles, and living without electricity. Because they are so different, they are also a curiosity. People travel from all over the country to observe these folks and their ways. Tourists look at these people with wondering eyes and ask many questions to try to understand how they can live in such contrast to the world around them. They wonder why they persist in an unchanged culture while everyone else has conformed to the gradual changes that have taken place in civilized human society. From time to time there are individual Amish people who fall away from the old ways and adopt a modern lifestyle. But the faithful continue on, unmoved by all the conveniences and opportunities for change that lie at their finger tips.

Would to God that we could say the same for the evangelical Christian community. If it were unchanged from its biblical foundations, the church too would be a curiosity in this world. People would gaze at it with the same wonder, being puzzled at how Christians could live so differently, believe so dogmatically, and walk so confidently in the midst of such a perverse and crooked generation. They would ask questions and try to understand what keeps Christians focused and unmoved by all the things that stand in contrast to their faith. And there would be more than curiosity. In seeing the difference between Christians and themselves, people in the world would ask how they could escape their culture of darkness and join the Christians in the society of light.

But this is not the way it is. The evangelical Christian community has adopted change as its policy and has assimilated the fads, philosophies, and follies of each new generation to such an extent that the Christian's vocabulary, wardrobe, music, forms of entertainment, social mores, and moral values have become a mirror image of the world's. Now, the world's only curiosity about the church is its claim to be different.

How did it get to be this way? Is this really what God wants for the church? Can it be changed?

God's Desire For The Church

In 2 Corinthians 6:4-18, God makes an emphatic statement about the distinction that exists and should be maintained between His people and the people of the world.

- 14 **Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers:** for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?
15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?
16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they

shall be my people.

17 Wherefore **come out from among them, and be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and **touch not the unclean thing**, and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

He says that a yoke between believers and unbelievers is an unequal yoke and should not be entered into. He also says that believers should be separated from unbelievers and should not touch the unclean thing.

1. God wants the distinction that exists between His people and the people of the world to be maintained.

There is a profound difference between believers and unbelievers. Believers are characterized by the righteousness of God with which they are clothed in the moment of their salvation. They walk in the light which reveals the way of truth and godliness. They are the body of Christ, which is intended to be a reflection of the Savior to the lost world He seeks to redeem. They are people of faith, who believe God implicitly and trust Him for everything from daily provisions to eternal security. Unbelievers could not be any more different from believers than they are. Unbelievers walk the path of unrighteousness and do the opposite of everything that pleases God. They walk in darkness and do not the truth, having changed the truth of God into a lie. They are the children of the devil, doing the works of the one who is the enemy of Christ. They are devoid of faith, refusing to glorify God as God, and changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image of their own imagination. Between these two entities there could not be a stronger contrast. Believers are the temple of God, the place of His residence, housing the very substance of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Unbelievers are idolaters, worshiping themselves, or other creatures, or evil spirits who have rebelled against the true God (Romans 1:18-32).

God wants this profound difference between believers and unbelievers to be observed and protected by a practice of separation. God does not want believers to fellowship with unbelievers. That is, He does not want believers to participate with unbelievers in common activities, the moral implications of which contradict the righteousness of God. God does not want believers to have communion with unbelievers. That is, He does not want believers to share with unbelievers in anything that by association would dim a believer's testimony. God does not want believers to have any concord with unbelievers. That is, He does not want believers to make compromises with unbelievers that would devalue a believer's integrity by making him appear to be similar to an unbeliever. God does not want believers to have any part with an unbeliever. That is, He does not want believers to participate with unbelievers in joint ventures that would obscure the distinction between the faithful and the faithless. God insists that there is not nor can be any agreement between believers and unbelievers. Believers are the temple of God. Unbelievers are idolaters. The reality of

the distinction is clear. The maintaining of the distinction is the spiritual duty of a child of God.

2. God wants believers to refrain from touching the unclean thing.

The obvious thing from this part of God's directive is that something is unclean and God wants His people to have absolutely no contact with this unclean thing.

What is the unclean thing? In the Old Testament, God named specific things that were unclean. They consisted of such specific things as the carcasses of unclean animals and the bodies of people who have certain diseases or infirmities. In this New Testament context, God makes it equally clear what He considers to be unclean. Unrighteousness, darkness, Belial, infidelity, idolatry, and, by implication, anything associated with these matters clearly constitute the unclean thing to which God refers as taboo for believers. Although these things appear to be of an intangible nature, they have very specific tangible applications.

What does it mean not to touch the unclean thing? It means to have no contact with those things. Contact would soil or spoil the testimony of a believer and the New Testament is replete with instruction concerning God's desire for the cleanness of His people. He calls for purity in 1 Timothy 1:5. He calls for holiness in 1 Peter 1:15-16. He calls for sanctification in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4. He calls for chastity in 2 Corinthians 11:2. He calls for a good and pure conscience in 1 Timothy 1:19 and 3:9. He calls for godliness in 1 Timothy 4:7. He calls for righteous living in Titus 2:12. This can only be achieved by a concerted effort to refrain from touching those things in this world that are contaminated with uncleanness.

God makes it abundantly clear that as His people are delivered from sin by His Son Jesus Christ, they are given a definite distinction from those who have not been delivered. He wants that distinction to be visible and obvious and constantly on display. Let your light so shine before men, Jesus said, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Do not hide it under a bushel basket. Put it in a visible place for all to see (Matthew 5:14-16).

The Crisis

Many believers have rejected this directive from God. Instead of maintaining a distinction between themselves and the people of the world, many Christians have embraced the people of the world and have emulated their appearance, values, activities, etc. Instead of refraining from touching the unclean thing, many Christians have refused even to consider what the unclean thing might be, and have chosen rather to touch everything that is available to them in this world without making moral judgments about doing so.

As a result there is a serious identity crisis in Christianity. The world looks at

Christianity and it cannot see a reflection of Jesus Christ, because Christians do not resemble Him. Christians today tend to resemble the world. Consequently, the world looks at Christianity and sees a mirror image of itself. It sees the same moral flaws, the same selfish ambitions, and the same diabolical ethics that characterize its own. As a result, the world is uninterested and unmoved by the message of the church because it is a hollow message being proclaimed by those who by appearance do not seem to have been affected by it.

What are the mistakes that Christians have made that has brought about this crisis of identity.

1. The Acceptance of the World

God said that Christians are not to love the world, neither are they to love the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15). Yet that is exactly what they do. Christians love the way the world dresses. In spite of God's insistence that His people dress modestly, skimpy and revealing clothing are typically worn by professing believers. In addition, cries of legalism are cast into the face of any Christian who attempts to define modest guidelines for the clothes Christians choose to wear. Many Christians also love the way the world sings. There is a popular argument that modern styles of music are being used by Christians to help certain groups of people identify with the message of the church. But what really happens is that when Christians adopt the world's design of musical styles, Christians learn to love them and tend to use them as a means of entertainment and personal gratification and not just as bait for seekers. Many Christians also love other things that are in the world including such things as questionable forms of entertainment, unethical choices, and immoral values. For example, on more than one occasion I have been approached by a young couple who wanted to be married, of whom both professed to be believers, yet they were already living together in the same house or apartment and were already sexually active as if they were husband and wife. When confronted with the immoral nature of their living conditions, some of these young people have been literally appalled that I would suggest they were committing sin and living in fornication. They reasoned that since they were engaged and fully committed to be married, their living conditions were completely justified. They had no sense of guilt or remorse for what they were doing and resented that I tried to make them feel guilty. They had no idea that they had succumbed to the influence of the world's moral values which contradict the Word of God. [The number of unmarried couple households in the USA increased sevenfold from 1970 to 1996. In 1970 there were 523,000 unmarried couple households. In 1996 there were 4 million. The world clearly accepts living together without being married as a legitimate lifestyle. God clearly rejects it (1 Corinthians 7:1-2) yet many Christians accept it right along with the world.] The saddest thing of all is that in each case like this that I know of, the couple was able to find another preacher who was willing to perform a church wedding ceremony for them without confronting the moral implications of their living conditions. Such moral values do not come from the Bible. They come from the

world. And many Christians love the world's low standards, gleefully living by them in spite of the what God has said.

2. The Indulgence of the Flesh

The Bible says that the works of the flesh stand in stark contrast to the fruit of the Spirit and that if we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-26). Yet Christians seem to be completely devoid of discernment in distinguishing between the things of the flesh and the things of the Spirit. In their love for the world, Christians have allowed the will of their flesh to rationalize away the immoral connotations of many activities. In the spirit of politically correct speech, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, revellings, and such like (which constitute the works of the flesh - Galatians 19-21) are repackaged in religiously palatable euphemisms, allowing Christians to indulge in them without a sense of guilt. For example, a popular Christian musical artist was discovered to be having an affair with a man in violation of her marriage covenant. Yet she was successfully painted as a victim, allowed to go through an appropriate time of healing and in the process maintained an undiminished level of popularity with her fans. In another case, a nationally known evangelical preacher experienced difficulties in his marriage and made a promise to his congregation that if his marriage ever ended in divorce he would resign as pastor; yet when the divorce actually occurred, he was allowed to break his promise to the people and ignore the biblical qualifications for serving as a pastor. In spite of these things, He continues to be heralded as one of America's great preachers. In other cases, Christians are known to have abortions, live as homosexuals, consult ouji boards, play the lottery, drink alcohol, sow discord among the brethren, lie, cause divisions and split churches, yet they still preach in pulpits, serve on church boards, teach Sunday School classes and proudly profess their Christianity. Something is seriously wrong when the flesh can be so readily indulged by those who earnestly align themselves with Christ and in spite of it they are still applauded as notable Christians.

3. The Failure to take the Devil seriously.

The Bible says that the Devil is our adversary, acting like a roaring lion, determined to devour his prey (1 Peter 5:7). Yet many Christians exert little or no effort in trying to resist him. They seem ignorant of his wiles and his uncanny ability to transform himself into an angel of light. Thus they fall prey to the Devil's most subtle trick. He infiltrates the very ranks of professing Christians and successfully deceives some of the most well meaning of them. The trick of the Devil has been to create a wide diversity of doctrines within the church, many of which actually contradict each other. Based on this diversity, many Christians are then confused as to which is true and which is not. The diversity of beliefs among professing Christians then is used to

convince many that much of the Word of God is irrelevant and should be set aside for the sake of the more important issues of peace and unity. By this means, the Devil successfully prevents much of God's truth from being taken seriously by those who profess to believe. As a result, Christians who still preach the whole counsel of God are shouted down as legalists, bigots, and promoters of negativism by fellow Christians, while the Devil stands in the corner and laughs. The sad result is a fulfillment of a biblical prediction. In the latter times, the Bible says, some who have been part of the faith will depart because they gave heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1).

Conclusion

Because they have loved the things of the world, have given in to the will of the flesh, and have failed to resist the Devil, many professing Christians bear little resemblance to Jesus Christ. Instead, they look pretty much like everyone else. In fact, in many cases they look worse. By professing that Christ has made them to be different from everyone else in the world, yet appearing to be very much the same, Christians often come across as hypocrites. Many unbelievers refuse to attend church services or listen to a gospel witness because they have come to believe that all Christians are hypocrites. While some of the accusations of hypocrisy are merely stereotypical, far too many have legitimate grounds.

God's intention is that his redeemed people bear a testimony of the Savior to the lost world. This testimony is to consist of both word and deed. It is not enough for us to echo the words of the gospel; our lives must resound with a reflection of the person and nature of Christ. God said, *Only **let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*** (Philippians 1:27).

God appointed all believers to be participants in a holy and royal priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, and showing forth the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:5,9). As priests to the world, it is a Christian's duty to publicly demonstrate the difference between what is holy and what it is unholy and between what is clean and what is unclean (Leviticus 10:10, 1 Peter 1:15-16).

The same grace of God that brings salvation also teaches redeemed people that ungodliness and worldly lusts are to be denied in the pursuit of living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. The grace of God is intended to make a difference in a person's life not only for eternity, but for the present experience on earth as well.

It is God's will that every believer know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor (1 Thessalonians 4:4). This requires abstaining from unclean things that are available in this world. It requires restraint and discipline in faithfully walking in the Spirit so that the works of the flesh will not be fulfilled in the life of a believer (Galatians 5:16).

It is necessary for Christians to be aware of the enemy, to take him seriously, and to resist him diligently. No believer need be intimidated by the Devil. God has promised that when a Christian resists the Devil, he will flee from them (James 4:7). It is necessary, however, for Christians to actively and diligently resist the Devil, or he will not flee.

The world, the flesh, and the Devil have done us in. The Bible says that friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). The Bible says that he who sows to the flesh reaps corruption (Galatians 6:8). The Bible says that the snare of the devil brings reproach (1 Timothy 3:7). When a lost world cannot see Christ in Christians because large numbers of them are at enmity with God, are contaminated with corruption and are bearing reproach, there is a serious crisis in Christianity.

What can be done about it? It is because of this crisis that many are calling for revival. They would like to see a passionate movement sweep across Christianity in which masses of professing believers are compelled to fall on their knees and renew themselves spiritually before God. There have been such revivals in the past, but the results have often been tenuous and short lived. Biblical revival actually works in a reverse of this plan. It begins with the individual and swells as others become personally involved one at a time. Repentance is not corporate, but personal. Sanctification is not corporate, but personal. Each professing Christian must examine himself (2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Corinthians 11:28). Each professing Christian must make himself transparent before God (Psalm 139:23-24). Each professing Christian must personally commit himself to spiritual renewal (Romans 12:1-2). Consider what would happen if many Christians did this. Each individual would be brought into harmony with the image of Christ. Collectively, they would resemble each other because they all individually resemble the same Person. The impact of this collective image of Christ on the lost world would be overwhelming. Christians would become a curiosity to the world, not because they are numbly following a movement, but because each and everyone is equally committed to their Lord and Master. The people of the world would ask questions and try to understand what keeps Christians focused and unmoved by all the things that stand in contrast to their faith. And in seeing the difference between Christians and themselves, people in the world would begin to ask how they could escape their culture of darkness and join the Christians in the society of light.

It is okay to pray that revival would sweep across Christianity. But too often, those who pray for revival sit passively and wait for it to start someplace else. If revival

will ever occur, it is going to have to start with me – and with you. You and I are the key to solving the crisis in Christianity. 📖