

The Condition of the Church Today

A Warning About the Enemy Within

Examples of False Teaching - Part 1

April 17, 2011

I. Review:

- A. There is a truth that comes from Jesus Christ, and that truth is this – only one road leads to God. Whether we name that road **Jesus** – who is the way, the truth, and the life, or we name it the **narrow way**, or we call it **salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**, or a **life of faith**, it is still only one road. But if we will travel this road, it will bring us into the abundant life, the presence of God, the arms of our loving Father, the joy of the Lord, the fulness of the Holy Spirit, an inner peace that surpasses all comprehension, forgiveness of sin, freedom from the enslaving power and practice of sin, the beauty of holiness, the power of prayer, the meekness and humility of Christ, and a pure heart that is able to see and fellowship with God – not only in the next life but in this one, too.
- B. In contrast to this truth, there is a saying that most of us are familiar with: Many roads lead to Rome. According to this saying, though there are many different roads to travel, they all get you to the same place.
 1. I am bringing these two sayings to your attention because the second one is what the devil, the false teachers, and those who want an easier gospel, expect the rest of the church to support and teach. And no, they are not concerned about getting to Rome. They are looking for alternative paths to the abundant life here and eternal life hereafter. And they promote these alternate ways by insinuating that they take you to the same place God's way takes you, but in a much easier, more satisfying, and far more enjoyable manner.
 2. Remember Eve? This is the idea the Serpent sold her – and the one she bought. Now there is no denying that the devil's path provided an easy and appealing way to get more than Eve had. There is no doubt that it provided quick gratification. There is no question that gaining this knowledge would bolster Eve's self-esteem and make her feel a lot better about herself. And on top of all this, the devil made Eve's disobedience seem completely safe by claiming that God would not apply the stated punishment in spite of what she did. Yet for all the advantages and pleasures and promised security of this road, we know exactly where it led.

- C. The scripture says: “For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning” (**Psalm 30:5**). If we seek the blessings of God’s favor without facing His anger and dealing with those things in our life that He is angry about, we will travel the same path Eve traveled. If we seek joy without passing through the time of weeping that prepares us and therefore makes us worthy to enter in to that marvelous, blessed land of joy, we may find gratifying pleasure of all kinds, but they will be temporary, and the end of our path will be heart-breaking, unrecoverable loss.
- D. Again we read: “He who falls on this stone (Jesus) will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust” (**Matthew 21:44**). These words are not here to discourage us or instill the idea that God’s way is a major downer. These words are here to show us that there is only one way to life. And though this path begins and continues for a time with the painful breaking of our pride, our self-rule, our self-centeredness, our unholy passions, our irrational fears, our worldly thinking, and our fleshly entanglements, it is from this broken state that Jesus rebuilds us into children who are pleasing to our Heavenly Father and properly prepared to enter into and experience – to the fullest – God’s promised abundant life.
- E. Now there are those within the church who want the blessings of the narrow way, but not the brokenness that fits us for the blessings. They want the future outcome of the narrow way – that is heaven, while wanting the present ease and pleasures and happiness of the broad way. And no, they don’t stand up in church and testify this is what they want. But their lives, day after day, testify that this is what they want. And there are teachers within the church who emphasize certain scriptures over others to make it sound as if we can have the blessings without the brokenness, and heaven without the humility of repentance and the self-denying path to holiness.
1. Yet the truth is, if we live as if we can avoid the breaking part of the narrow path, we will end up being crushed by the judgment of Jesus rather than being broken and rebuilt by the grace of Jesus.
 2. Remember Eve, and the outcome of her life in the Garden of Eden. She believed the devil’s lie about a faster, easier, more immediately satisfying, and supposedly God approved path to happiness and blessing. Consider the outcome of that choice and learn from her experience, for there is only one path that leads to God and all the blessings of the abundant life that God has for us.

F. **Pray**

II. Introduction to the Examples of False Teaching Within the Church

- A. My purpose in this next section of teaching on the Condition of the Church is to expose us to the subtle yet powerfully influential false teachings that are part of the culture of the church today.
 - 1. I want to acknowledge that there are more false teachings than we will address. However, the ones we are going to examine are what I call, the foundational false teachings. I am calling them the foundational false teachings because they have a broad and powerful influence on Christianity as a whole, and they open us up to the more obvious, blatant false teachings that are in the church today.
 - 2. For example, it is not my intention to examine the Word/Faith teaching, or the older Prosperity Gospel, or the Possibility Thinking and Positive Confession gospel. In my opinion, if you've bought into any of those teachings it is an indication you have already bought into some of the foundational false teachings I want us to look at.
- B. Finally, my encouragement to all of us is to pray and think, again and again, about this matter of false teaching in the church – trusting God to confirm that the false teaching we are aware of is indeed false, and trusting Him to reveal its destructive influence in our lives.

III. Examples of False Teaching Within the Church – **The rule of God over all and our love for God above all**

- A. The scriptures teach that God is the King of kings and Lord of lords. This means that God is the Ruler over all. His rule extends from the highest, most powerful human authority to the weakest and least important person on the earth – and that includes you and me.
 - 1. Now there is no question about our having the ability to rebel against God's supreme authority and rule – as we see from Lucifer, and Adam and Eve, and many others in our own day.
 - 2. Yet it is equally true that we have never had nor will we ever have the right to rebel. You see, having the ability does not naturally or logically give us the right to rebel against God. And if you need help with this, the reason we do not have the right to rebel against God is because He is the Creator and we are His creation. He is God and we are mere mortals. He is the ruler and we are His subjects. He is the Master and we are His servants. He is the Father and we are His children.
 - 3. So what is the point? Though many rebel against God – be it wholly, or only partially – the fact is, God is the Ruler over all, all the time, and our created position is that of being under His authority.

- B. The scriptures also teach that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This means there is to be no other love or treasure or interest that exceeds or even directly competes with God for the place of supreme love in our life.
1. Now you may be wondering why I am bringing together the rule of God over us and our love for God. I am doing this because Jesus himself does this when He says: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (**John 14:15**). And: “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me . . .” (**John 14:21**). And again Jesus says: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me” (**John 14:23-24**). And we also read in **I John 5:3**: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”
 2. The point Jesus is making is both simple and clear: when it comes to our relationship with God, obedience is the foundation of our love for God, which means love cannot be separated from obedience. Now the reason love cannot be separated from obedience is because our relationship with God is not one of equals. He is the authority over all, and we are the ones under authority. He is the Master, and we are the slaves. He is the Father, and we are the children. And as in all Master/slave relationships, or Parent/child relationships, the love of the slave or the love of the child is proven genuine and validated daily by obedience to the one over them. Or to say it the negative way: to willfully disobey your Master or Father is to show Him you don't love Him.
- C. Now I understand that you may disagree with the statement: “To willfully disobey God is to show Him you don't love Him.” But before you decide that I don't know what I am talking about, I invite you to consider the reasons why this statement is true.
1. Let's begin by affirming that our relationship with God is not one of equals, but one where He is superior and we are inferior. In this kind of relationship, the way we validate or prove our love is to do the will of the one who has authority over us. Therefore, the most natural and most convincing manifestation of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is to obey Him completely.
 2. Now I understand that we Christians are imperfect – which means none of us obeys God completely. However, I urge you not to use that

reality as an excuse to ignore the truth about our behavior in relation to our relationship with God. And here is the truth.

- a. When we knowingly, and therefore deliberately disobey God, it is because we have chosen to deal with Him as if we are superior and He is inferior. In other words, in disobeying God, we exalt ourselves over God and treat Him as if He is of such little importance that we don't need to obey Him.
 - b. There is a second truth here that is equal to the first. When we act as if we are the ruling authority, we stop pleasing God and start pleasing ourselves. And when we stop pleasing God so we can start pleasing ourselves, it is a clear indication that we have rejected God's command to love Him supremely and have begun loving ourselves in the very way we ought to be loving God.
3. Now the point I am making here is that to obey God less than completely – whether it be in one or two areas, or in many – is to make a major shift from God being the Supreme Authority to us acting as if we are the supreme authority, and from loving God supremely to loving ourselves supremely.
- D. Now you may be thinking that however good this all sounds, the reality is, no Christian is perfect. So why are we making such a big deal about obeying God completely and loving Him supremely? The answer to this question takes us right back to God.
1. You see, in spite of our imperfections, God is the one who says we are to submit to Him and obey Him as any good servant obeys his master. And God is the one who lays before us this first and greatest of all commandments – we are to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In other words, in spite of our weaknesses and the great difficulty of walking this narrow path of loving God supremely and obeying Him completely, God still sets it before us as the only path we are to travel.
 2. Now at the same time, God graciously provides a remedy for failure. However, His remedy does not change His will concerning obedience and love from us. But sadly, it is at the very point where God's will runs smack into the weakness of our faith, the laziness of our flesh, our longings for the pleasures and treasures of the world, and the relentless temptations of the devil that the false teachings swirling through the church begin to appeal to us. And when we come to our senses after falling for the fiftieth or sixtieth time, and take a hard look at the hard work that is required to remain faithful to the truth we know, an easier gospel in relation to obeying God completely and

loving Him supremely seems real appealing. And it is just this easy that we reject the true gospel in relation to obeying God completely and loving Him supremely, and turn to a false gospel that frees us to do what we think is best – even when it is against God’s word, and encourages us to love ourselves in ways that remove God from His rightful place of being loved supremely.

E. In conclusion today, I want us to consider the true and the false gospel in relation to obeying God completely and loving Him supremely.

1. The true gospel acknowledges our humanity and its weaknesses, but it never excuses us from obeying God and loving Him. Instead, the true gospel tells us what God has done to help us live up to the high standards of the Christian life, so we can make good use of His help in gaining victory over our flesh and the devil’s temptations. And, the true gospel shows us what we must do to live a godly life so we can put our energy into those things that bring us to that place where we want nothing more than to obey God completely and love Him supremely.

a. On the other side, the false gospel is careful to affirm that we ought to obey and love God. But instead of making this its focus so that it becomes our focus, it redirects our focus to ourselves. It does this by speaking so seldom of God’s requirements of us and so often about God’s love for us, that we lose sight of loving God and begin thinking of ourselves as the important ones. It reinforces this self focus by teaching that God’s love for us is such that ongoing weaknesses, failures, and the unrepented practice of known sin has, at the worst, only a minor effect on our relationship with God. But it doesn’t stop here, the false teaching goes one step further in making us the important ones. It presents change as something that is good for us by improving our lives, rather than something that will enable us to love God as we ought. And the result of just these three false teachings is a self-focused, self-ruled, and self-absorbed religious life.

2. The true gospel never implies that obeying God sometimes, or even often, is the same as obeying Him all the time. It never infers that loving God in part – that is, now and then or here and there – is the same as loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Instead, the true gospel shows the link between obedience and love, and establishes the fact that our love for God is proven genuine and validated daily by our ongoing obedience to Him.

- a. The false gospel, in an effort to help us feel better about ourselves quietly lowers God's standard to one that feels more easily attainable. It does this by focusing so often on the scriptures that show God's grace and forgiveness in response to our sin that we begin to believe that the half-hearted, half self-centered, half sinful Christian is in as good a standing with God as the godly Christian. And the result of this exaggerated focus on God's grace are teachers who feel no conviction over failing to practice what they teach, and church members who never take the time to seriously consider the contradiction between their public demonstrations of godliness and the way they live in their own home.
3. The true gospel speaks of God's remedy for sin as an occasion to manifest a broken and contrite heart, to confess honestly what we have done, to quickly return to doing what we know is right, and to devote ourselves to taking whatever steps are necessary to avoid making the same rebellious choices in the future.
 - a. Rather than being concerned about how God feels as a result of our ongoing sinfulness and failure to love Him as we ought, the false gospel zeros back in on us. It does this in a subtle yet effective way by focusing its attention on making sure we are not psychologically traumatized by feelings of guilt or self-condemnation or discouragement over having failed against to do what we know is right. And the result of this false teaching is Christians who seek forgiveness with the same carefree attitude as when ordering a hamburger at MacDonald's. Their dry eyes, their complacent minds, and their calloused hearts – in the moments of confession – show how little they love God and how little they care about what matters to Him.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Now I could go on and on for some time about the true gospel in relation to obedience and love toward God, but the point here is this: The true gospel makes it clear we have been freed from the power and practice of sin – which means we can submit to the rule of God and we can love God supremely, if we will, and if we will persevere in pursuing obedience and love according to God's will. We may never achieve perfection in this life, but the way we pursue it clearly shows who we serve and who we love the most.