

God's Word to Our Nation: Sins of Religious Apostasy

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The vast and weighty theme which has occupied our minds in these evening sessions this week has been entitled "God's Word to Our Nation." And after giving a Biblical setting and a Scriptural justification for this subject, I proceeded to assert that perhaps no text is more relevant in setting the framework for God's word to our nation than Proverbs 13:44 in which we read: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." And in the light of this text, then surely the word of God to our nation in this hour must primarily be a word on the one hand, of denunciation for our national sins and on the other hand, a call to national repentance and reformation from our sins. Using the analogy of a mountain range, I've suggested that the sins of any nation are likened unto foothill sins, sins that constitute the main bulk and spine of the mountain range. But then there are those sins that rise up in their height above all others like some of the mighty mountain peaks in the great ranges of mountains on the face of the earth. And I have suggested that two of these mountain peak sins of our nation are the sins of our putrid moral degeneracy and our horrible religious apostasy. Under that former head of our putrid sins of moral degeneracy, none are greater than the sins of the unrequited blood of the murdered multitudes and the sins of unrestrained and unashamed sensuality and sexual perversion.

Now tonight, we move to consider the second mountain. Not only is our nation marked by the mountain of the sins of putrid moral degeneracy but also by our sins of horrible religious apostasy. Now, for you children and young people for whom the word "apostasy" may be a new word or one concerning which you do not have a clear understanding as to its meaning, apostasy means basically to fall away, to depart from the recognition of and submission to certain fundamental Biblical truths and principles. So apostasy assumes that one has been in a condition of belief and practice from which one has now departed. And I say that the second great mountain of our national sins is to be found in our sins of horrible religious apostasy, our sins of falling away from the principles of revealed religion. Now, if there is anything which God detests and abhors with holy detestation and righteous indignation, it is the turning away from light and privilege, whether that is the light of general revelation or the more special light of special revelation. We saw last night from Romans 1 how much God hates and detests apostasy from general revelation. For it's in Romans 1:28 that we read: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." Those who turn from the worship of God according to the light of general revelation and turn to the worship of idols, God so detests and abhors that apostasy even from general revelation that He gives men over to the lusts of their hearts until they destroy themselves in their sins of lawlessness and sensuality.

But if God detests apostasy from general revelation, then how more intense is His detestation of apostasy from special revelation, that is, a turning aside, a falling away not merely from the light of Himself given in creation and stamped upon the consciousness of man made in His image, but from the light of His word brought to men through prophets when they lived and through the Word of God now that special revelation is found within the pages of the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments. And just as surely as the history of the pagan nations is a constant revelation of the wrath of God upon apostasy from general revelation, so the history of the nation of Israel is the sickening saga of the divine hatred and detestation of those who turn from the light and privilege of special revelation. Look at the statement of the prophet Jeremiah with respect to this very point. In Jeremiah 25:3-8, we read the following words:

"From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the LORD hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened. And the LORD hath sent unto you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: and go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke Me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto Me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations."

Then God goes on to say how He will accomplish His judgments upon this land. For what reason? Fundamentally this: they apostatized from the light, the privileges, the demands of special revelation. And that detestation and anger of God culminated in the Old Testament in the captivity of the people of God in Babylon. And according to the New Testament, it found its climactic expression in the utter destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. According to the word of our Lord in Luke 19:41-44, and according to the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, wrath has come upon that nation to the uttermost. Their house has been left desolate. Why? Because they knew not the time of their visitation. God sent to them, calling them back from their apostasy, back to national reformation, national repentance, back to the recognition of His laws and His ways. But they would not until they were ultimately brought to the place of desolation and destruction. I say, these incidents in the Word of God reveal something of the horrible nature of religious apostasy, the turning away, the turning of one's back upon the light of God's revealed truth.

Now, someone asks, "Pastor Martin, you have told us we dare not make any equation between Israel and the United States. What does all this say to us?" Well, I trust the Romans 1 passage says much to us and that its message is obvious. But there is also a principle from God's dealings with the nation of Israel. Since God is the sovereign director of where His word goes among the nations, it is God that decreed and then secured to this nation the tremendous measure of Gospel light and privilege which we have known from our very inception. According to Acts 16:6-10, it

is the Holy Spirit who suffers the Apostle not to enter a whole new area for Gospel witness. It is the Spirit of Jesus who suffers him not to go one direction and directs him in another. And so amidst all the nations of the earth, when Gospel light comes, and when that light comes with unusual intensity, and when that nation is blessed with the Scriptures in its own language, blessed with the visible church greatly multiplied, blessed with the proclamation of the Word, blessed with institutions that are framed by the Word of God, that nation, I say, has been the recipient of a sovereign act of God in bringing this tremendous privilege of Gospel light, this tremendous privilege of the light of special revelation, casting, as it were, both its illuminating and warming influence over the entirety of that nation's life and experience. And surely this has been true of our nation, perhaps as of no other nation in the history of mankind.

Think of our founding fathers. Don't ever forget, particularly you young people, for you won't be taught this with any detail in the history books by those who hate this heritage. We had 150 years of national life before the Declaration of Independence. In 1620, our forefathers arrived on these shores, and whatever we may say about the weaknesses of our Puritan forefathers, the fact that they did not see as clearly as we see the principles of the separation of church and state, and we perhaps believe--many of us--that their ultimate eschatological vision, that is, their vision of a situation in which righteousness would prevail as the dominant characteristic among the nations (their postmillenarian eschatological vision)--we may feel that it was exegetically and theologically defective. But whatever we may say about the defects and the blemishes and the perspectives of our Puritan forefathers which we would not emulate, surely, my brothers and sisters, it is accurate to say that in spite of some of these minor irregularities, the heart of Puritanism that beat within the breasts of these people was the desire to live in the fear of Almighty God and gladly to welcome the impingement of Biblical perspectives upon every single facet of family, community, and national life. And anyone who denies that simply shows his ignorance. That's the climate in which this nation was born. Our Puritan forefathers longing to carve out an identity and a social and a political and a national experience that would reflect that all of life must be lived under the eye of the God who has spoken in Holy Scripture.

And surely this was true of many of our founding fathers. I am not so naive nor ignorant historically to say that even the majority of our founding fathers were self-consciously evangelical or reformed Christians. But this much can be said: some of the most strategic men as to the framing of our constitution were men whose thinking about government and particularly about the framing of our government was tremendously influenced by Calvinistic theology. And many who were not Christians, many who would claim no adherence to the evangelical faith had been nurtured in the context in which there was a general perspective of regard to God as the Lord of the nations and to God as the one who alone could establish our nation and make it that which they longed it should be. And therefore, woven into the very fabric of our system of jurisprudence, woven into the very fabric of statutory law, you find Biblical principles again and again as the very molding and shaping influence of our national life.

Then surely as we look at the founding of our original institutions--do you know why Yale college was formed? Do you know why Dartmouth was formed as an institution? Dartmouth was formed to train men to be missionaries to the American Indians. Yale was formed to train preachers to preach to the colonies. Princeton was formed out of

the womb of the log college of the elder Tenet who gathered Godly young men around him whose hearts beat with a passionate concern to see the outpouring of the Spirit upon the colonies. Princeton came out of the womb of this passionate commitment to revivals and to the mighty manifestation of the power and grace of God.

And in our early national life, the appointment of chaplains to the armies and our courts and halls of legislation--what was all of this but a reflection of the true one nation under God. And it is nothing short of willful blindness that takes the first amendment and tries to use it as a justification to make us an aggressively Godless nation. That was never the intent of the framers of those words, for those very men were the men who sought to recognize the sovereign rule of God over the nations in the founding of this nation and in the vast majority of its institutions.

Then we think of the influence of Whitefield. It's a tragic thing to think that the nation that now welcomes that pious piper from Rome is the nation that welcomed Whitefield throughout all the colonies. And wherever Whitefield went, he went not to deceive people, not to try to lead them back to the mother of harlots, but to lead them to the feet of a pierced Christ where they might find in the direct embrace of the needy sinner, in that embrace of the offered Savior life and salvation.

So I say, the great sin of our nation is the sin of our horrible religious apostasy, a drifting away, a turning away, a casting aside of this tremendous heritage of the light, not of general revelation, though God knows our nation has so much of it in its native beauty and in the continuous blessing of God upon the earth and its produce--but this nation has been blessed with megawatts of the special light of special revelation that burned and etched, as it were, its very presence into the consciousness of this nation as it came from the womb of Almighty God and His providence when He moved our Puritan forefathers to come in the 1600s. And that work was continued as God raised up mighty preachers. And God raised up whole denominations that acted as light and salt upon every facet of our national life so that wherever one turned, one did not find a Christian nation--we have never been a Christian nation in the sense that the majority were in vital union with Christ--but we were a nation marked by national righteousness, and in that was our exaltation. "Righteousness exalts a nation." And so powerful was the direct influence of the Gospel through revivals, so widespread was the indirect influence of the Gospel in the leavening influence of that Gospel upon our national life that it was true of us as a nation: righteousness exalted this nation. But now our sin is a reproach to us, not only our sin of putrid moral degeneracy but our sin of horrible religious apostasy.

Now, how has that apostasy manifested itself? I turn you now to Jeremiah 2 for a text that will constitute the framework of the remainder of my message as I try to descend now from the theology that justifies my declaration to the specific applications of that exposition. And here the prophet crying out in the name of Jehovah God of His people says in verses 11-13,

"Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? [He asks a question: 'Do you see fickleness among the pagan nations?'] They worship what they call gods but are not gods, and yet you can count on them to be consistent in their worship of their false gods. And you could say in Jeremiah's day that the nation of Babylon and the other nations of the earth were identified with the worship of this false god or that false god or another false god. And you didn't have to worry that if you made the

statement on Monday, you would be proven wrong on Wednesday. He asks the question, 'Have you ever heard of a nation changing its so-called gods?'] but My people have changed their glory [the true God] for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For My people have committed two evils [something the pagan nations have not done]; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters [a living bubbling spring of pure, clear, refreshing water], and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

Now, what's the picture? Try to envision what the prophet is saying. Here is a man who has in his back yard a bubbling spring. And when it comes up out of the earth because of the natural system of filtration that is there in terms of the subterranean rock structure and all of the rest, that water is clinically and chemically analyzed as being the nearest thing to pure water upon the face of the earth. It has no impurities. It has an excellent balance in terms of the minerals. It has the proper content of the saline and all of the rest. It is a fountain of living waters. And any thirsty person who wants his thirst assuaged, he never needs fear that he will be poisoned or in any way harmed. All he needs to do is go and plunge his thirsty mouth into that fountain of living waters. Now, here's the picture: A man goes out one day to this fountain of living waters that springs up very naturally from his back yard. And he takes two or three yards of concrete. (You can carry about a third of a yard in a big wheel barrow. I know that from my construction days.) And he goes to that fountain of living waters, digs around it, seeks to place a cap upon it, and then he has three yards of concrete poured over the top of it and utterly stops it up. And then having done that, he goes further in his yard, and there he finds a large boulder. And he takes a little mason's hammer, and he begins to chip away at the boulder. After a while, he's got a little indentation, and it gets a little larger and a littler larger. And just about that time, you come by and say to him, "Man, what in the world are you doing?" He says, "I chipping out a cistern. I want to collect the rain water when it falls upon the earth." And you say, "But don't you know that that rain water coming down through the atmosphere picks up all kinds of impurities from the pollution in the air? Don't you know that anyone could come by and put something into that water and defile it? What in the world are you doing? You have that lovely fountain of living waters, and now you're chipping away to make a little cistern." The man says, "I know what I'm doing. Leave me alone." And he chips and chips and chips, but alas, in the process, in chipping too hard at one spot, there's a crack and a fissure goes right down through his boulder. And then as he chips further on another side, another crack goes through. And then the moment of truth comes when the first rains descend, and though it holds the water for a few moments, it isn't long before it all leaks out. Why? Because it is a broken cistern that can hold no water. Now, you kids tell me, if you had a neighbor like that, what would you says was his problem? You'd say he had a few bricks less that a full load upstairs. You might not say it to his face, but you'd say he's crazy. Why would anyone forsake a fountain of living waters, a natural, bubbly, pure, refreshing spring to chip away at a cistern that ultimately can hold no water? It's madness! It's folly! God says that's exactly what religious apostasy is.

God came to Israel and gave Himself to her as the fountain of living waters, all she could ever need to assuage the thirst of the soul, the thirst of the soul for the knowledge of God and the knowledge of forgiveness of sins, all that was needed to assuage the thirst of the mind for reality--Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? How did the world get here? Whose world is it? Who governs it? All that was needed to assuage the thirst of the soul and the mind was theirs in the living

fountain of Jehovah. And she poured three yards of concrete upon it, stopped it up, and chipped out a boulder that couldn't hold any water. And I say, that's a picture in principle of how apostasy works whenever God has brought the light of special revelation to a nation, and that nation rejects that fountain of living waters and chips away and hews out its own cisterns. But they are cisterns that can never hold water.

Let me point out some of these broken cisterns that constitute the undeniable evidence of our national sin of apostasy in the realm of religious truth. There is, first of all, the broken cistern of decadent humanism. Now, we use the word "humanism" frequently, but do we know what it means? Let me give you the relatively simple definition found in *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*: "Humanism is a modern, non-theistic [it rules out God], rationalistic [you go no further than your own noggin] movement that holds that man is capable of self-fulfillment, ethical conduct, etc. without recourse to supernaturalism." In other words, humanism is that approach to life which says, "Everything I need to know about all of the basic questions of life (who I am, how I should conduct myself, how I can find meaning in life), I can know, and I can attain without going out of myself to God." It is a closed system in which man is both the center and circumference of all reality.

In the early days of our national life from our Puritan forefathers even to our founding fathers, many of whom were not evangelical Christians, to the original institutions, to the very fabric and perspective of our national life, we were a theistic nation that believed over and above what man purposes, over and above what man plans, over and above what man can accomplish stands Almighty God. And when man asks the question, "Who am I?", he must look outside of himself to the God who made him to give him the answer, and He's given it in His Word. How should I live? Man must not look within because he recognized that within was a nature that led him in the direction of sin and perversity. He looked outside of himself to the changeless character of God who has etched, as it were, the liniments of His character in His own changeless, eternal, moral law. And so the Ten Commandments, whether with saved or unsaved people, became, as it were, the framework of the consciousness of national morality.

Now, what has happened? We have forsaken the living fountain, that bubbling fountain of knowledge of ourselves and of right and of wrong and of personal identity. And in its place, we have hewn out the broken cistern of a decadent humanism. Man's mind is made the measure of all reality. Who am I? Humanism says, "Connect electrodes to your head, and we'll find out who you are. Dissect you on the table, and we'll find out who you are. We'll watch the patterns of other animals in the laboratory, and we'll find out who man is, why he does what he does, and reacts the way he reacts." Why have animal experiments become, as it were, the dictates as to the nature of man and the patterns of behavior expected of man? Because of the curse of this wicked, decadent humanism that says man's mind is the measure of all reality. He can find out who he is, why he's here, what's right or wrong, what's acceptable or unacceptable by having no recourse to the supernatural. It is all within himself.

Furthermore, man's ability is made the measure of possibility for what we can expect from man. What a sorry thing to live with. What can we expect in terms of our individual experience, our family experience, community experience, and national experience? If man is not only the measure of reality but the measure of expectancy, then, dear people, what can we expect from such creatures--the likes of you and of me?

What a tragic apostasy has occurred in our national life, an apostasy in which we have forsaken the fountain of living waters, in which the consciousness in our nation was that man was indeed a creature of God; man indeed was distinctly and qualitatively different from the beasts of the earth. And man was answerable to God--there was a judgment to come. And men may have used the words "damn" and "hell" as curse words, but when they stopped and thought about the word "hell," they believed there was such a place because they knew eternity was stamped upon their very being. O, what a tragic thing, this apostasy from the living fountain of the knowledge of God to the broken cistern of decadent humanism that can hold no water.

Then I hasten on to point to a second specific indication of this religious apostasy. And it's what I'm calling the broken cistern of deceptive liberalism. Now, I'm not speaking of political liberalism, but I'm speaking of religious liberalism. That is the situation in which so-called Christian churches and denominations hold the name, and the forms, and the rituals of Christianity, and even in many places still the hymnody of Christianity, but they have rejected everything that is distinctively Christian according to the Bible. There has been a rejection of the infallibility and inerrancy of this blessed Book. It is no longer looked upon as the deposit of the revealed mind of God who in gracious self-revelation has spoken and embodied His words in a book. It is looked upon as the fallible, error-ridden, pathetic account of man's developing and changing religious consciousness. No longer is there a view of man that he is essentially and fundamentally evil having fallen in Adam. Each man, woman, boy, or girl was conceived in sin, born with a positive bent to evil, and that from within--out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, adultery, murder, fornication, theft, pride, and all other forms of wickedness. No longer is there the confession of and belief in a supernatural Savior who is as much man as though He were not God, as much God as though He were not man; no longer any conviction with respect to the virgin-conceived theanthropic person, the great mystery of Godliness, that in the Lord Jesus is true, essential, undiminished humanity joined to pure, essential, undiluted, and undiminished Godhood. And in Him and Him alone is the hope of wretched sinners. Liberalism has jettisoned an infallible Bible, jettisoned a depraved man, jettisoned a supernatural Savior, jettisoned the heart of the Gospel, which is penal substitution (the wrath of God being vented upon His Son). So holy and righteous is the God of the Bible that He will not forgive in a way that stains His holiness, His righteousness, or His justice. And the only path He could cut in fulfillment of eternal redeeming love consistent with the rectitude of His nature was the path that cut through the heart of His own beloved Son and made that heart the very depository of divine wrath until under the billows of that wrath, the Son of God cries, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Liberalism has no answer to that question. Liberalism won't even approach and listen to that question.

There was a time when in our land the great denominations, the great Presbyterian denomination that is now again reunited after all these years of separation since the civil war, most of the great Baptist denominations, the Methodist denominations, even the Episcopalian denominations by and large back even as recent as the early to mid-1800s--men could exchange pulpits from these denominations in the confidence that whoever stood to preach would hold to the essentials of mainstream, historic evangelicalism: an infallible Bible, a supernatural Savior, a depraved sinner, a supernatural salvation based upon the bloodletting of the one who became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. But alas, in our day, though we thank God for the evangelical and reformed denominations that have come to

birth in recent days, the tragedy is, dear people--and O, may you never forget it--sitting in the warmth and basking in the light of that reformed congregation of which you are a part, millions in our nation every Sunday are put to sleep and lulled in the lap of deception until they will land in hell by the broken cistern of a deceptive liberalism. And I say, this sin of religious apostasy is our national shame.

Then I want to touch very briefly on a third and then more fulsome on a fourth and final cistern. We have turned to the broken cistern of demonic occultism and astrology. You say, "Where in the world does that fit as a national sin?" Well, I remind you of what we read in Deuteronomy 18. We looked at Deuteronomy 19 last night, but in the previous chapter, we have to my knowledge the only other explicit reference to the key reason for God casting out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan before the children of Israel. You remember in Leviticus 19, God said that the land vomited out the inhabitants because of the sins of sensuality and sexual perversion. In Deuteronomy 18, God says in verses 9-12,

"When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee."

Non-covenanted nations, because of the law of general revelation, are to know from the heavens His everlasting power and divinity. There is but one true and living God. And there is to be no seeking to consort with familiar spirits and the demonic elements of the occult. And further on, though time does not permit us to turn to it, in 2 Kings 17:14-18, there is a condemnation of the worshipping of the stars of heaven. And again in Jeremiah, God addresses Himself to what we would now call the science of astrology. Who would have ever thought that the daily papers in some of the smallest towns in our nation as well as the great metropolises would have a daily column for Jeanne Dixon? And we've gotten so accustomed to it, we're no longer shocked, are we? We can flip through the paper, and in the corner of our eye, see "Jeanne Dixon says" and may even read it and snicker. But do you believe that may be one of the major factors for God to bring judgment upon this nation? Have you lost the ability to feel a shudder of horror that our free press should propagate an abomination of this broken cistern of the demonic occult and astrology? Millions of Americans, before they have their first cup of coffee, turn to the astrology charts for the day; they dial the local astrology number. We have become a nation that is given over to the occult and astrology. Ouija boards are sold by the millions. Satan cults are being established by the scores. Satan worship is becoming a matter of public discussion. And books are being written to initiate men and women, boys and girls into the "marvelous" world of Satan worship. "My people have committed two evils." Imagine a nation with the light of a translated Bible and the privilege of public preaching of that Bible turning to the Jeanne Dixons and the astrology charts. But dear people, that's your nation; that's my nation, the nation of my children. And if the Lord spares us, the nation of my unborn grandchildren.

But I come finally--and here I speak most painfully and most reluctantly. For some of you who do not know me personally, I do not often make any personal references in preaching. I think the best compliment ever paid to me was by a man who met me

once and said, "I've listened to hundreds of your tapes, but I don't know anything about you." And I said, "Wonderful! For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord." But I want to tell you something lest someone says, "This is just Pastor Martin giving vent to his own peculiar personality trait." When God put me together in my mother's womb, He put together one of the most sensitive, fearful little creatures the world has ever seen. I am so constitutionally adverse to confrontation that when I was big enough to go down to the sand lot to play football with the guys who were a little older than I--my mother loves to remind me of this story--the first time I went down, I said, "Hey guys, can I play?" And they said, "Nah, you can't play." You know what I did? I didn't fight. I came home bawling with my shoulder pads hung over my shoulder. A short time after, I was twelve or thirteen, and I made a shoeshine box, and I went downtown in Stamford, Connecticut and set up my corner. It wasn't long before another kid came by and said, "What are you doing here? This is my corner." And I went home and cried all the way home. When a teacher would rebuke me for something in grammar school, I'd be sick to my stomach for two days. And to this day, God is witness, I have the most intense aversion to anything that borders on confrontation. And it is only the Word of God impregnated in my spirit that gives me any grace to speak boldly and plainly the truth of God. And it's that pressure that brings me to this fourth and final cistern that is the evidence of our tragic national sin of religious apostasy, and it is this: we have turned from the living fountain of a vibrant--and I say it in the truest Biblical sense--Pentecostal, spirit-infused, living evangelicalism in doctrine and in practice, which was our national heritage under the ministry of Whitefield and the Tenets and Blair and a host of lesser lights. We have turned from the living fountain of days of mighty visitations of the Holy Spirit in the 1800s in the earlier period. And you know what we've turned to? We've turned to the broken cistern of a weak, man-centered, flesh-pleasing, fad-conforming, self-flattering evangelicalism. And I don't say those words to appear clever. I've chosen them carefully and with a broken heart. It is an evangelicalism marked by a professed adherence to an infallible Bible, a supernatural Savior, man as a sinner in need of supernatural grace. But the message that is preached and the climate in which it is preached negates the profession that is adhered to. Think of the message that is popular in evangelicalism in our day, a message that lacks the cutting edge of a clear denunciation of the prevailing sins of the evangelical community. Who are the popular preachers in our day? The preachers of health, wealth, and prosperity gospels. The president of Fuller Seminary writes a commendable blurb on the heretical manifesto of Dr. Robert Schuller, which he sent to me and every preacher whose name he could get, calling for a new reformation. Do you know what Dr. Schuller's reformation is? Simply this:

"We need to reinterpret the entire Christian message. The cross is no longer the revelation of the righteous character of the God and of His holy anger against sin; no longer is it His declaration that He so abhors the sinner in his state of pollution and impenitence, and yet so loves him with a redemptive love that He will rescue him by means of the vicarious bloodletting of the Son of God. O no, you know what the message of the cross is? It's the message of unconditional love. God so loves you, my friend, no matter what you are and where you are. If you'll only believe He loves you as much as He does, you'll begin to love yourself. And loving yourself, you'll become a new creature. That's regeneration. And the way you learn that great truth is look at the cross. In spite of all you think about yourself, God has such a high estimation of you. Jesus died. Look at the cross, not as the place where God reveals His righteousness, His holiness, His justice, His burning hatred for sin that would

sooner bear the agony of the cry of dereliction from His own Son than let one sinner get pardoned without that cry of dereliction."

I say, that filthy, rotten, abominable heresy encouraged by so-called evangelical leaders is our national sin.

And the charismatic movement by and large--and this is not a blanket condemnation of all charismatics--but by and large, it is nothing but thumb sucking, religious self-gratification preached in the name of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Get your tingles, get your thrills, get your baptism. Know the joy of babbling in your closet and babbling in public. What in God's name does that have to do with poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

Our national sin is the sin of the broken cistern of this decadent evangelicalism that lacks the cutting edge of a clear denunciation of our national sins, of our evangelical sins. It is a stranger to holy mourning, to holy poverty of spirit. And I'm not in any way contradicting what my dear brother said this morning. If we had a nickel for all the times we laughed until our bellies hurt, both of us would be wealthy. But the Scripture says there's a time to laugh, and there is a time to weep. But this evangelicalism has no place for weeping. In fact, it lives in morbid dread lest it should give the slightest impression to the world that Christianity is anything other than happy, happy, happy all the time, time, time. You live, you sleep, you wake with a thirty-two tooth grin from morning till night. And this foolish evangelicalism lives in morbid dread that anybody should find us sober. It's message lacks a clarion call to deep and thorough repentance. Everything is slick. You admit this; admit that; do this, and you're in. There's no waiting for any evidence that God has plowed a man's heart, giving him a sight of his own sin that sickens him enough to vomit it out. For that's what repentance is--it is the vomit of sin in which the sin that I took in and tasted every morsel with relish, and I held it in my mouth as it passed over the taste buds of the soul. Repentance is that work of God in which I now wrench and I spew out with disgust that which I took in with delight. Current evangelicalism knows nothing of a message that calls for that deep and thorough repentance.

Thirdly, it lacks in its call to radical discipleship. It doesn't call for cross bearing and self-denial and buffeting the body and plucking out right eyes and cutting off right hands. It calls for a life of simply trust Jesus and all is well. Read the ads in the Christian magazines. See the fat portly man bringing on an early cardiac arrest standing by his Cutlass with his golf clubs. And he says, "I never thought I could be a successful Christian businessman." Whole pages in our best evangelical magazines given over to the cult of materialism. No call to radical discipleship with self-denial, agonizing to enter, cutting off right hands, plucking out right eyes. And that's why this is the evangelicalism that takes the half converted ball player, and the moment he twitches a finger in the direction of Jesus, rushes him up to the platform and thinks that the glory of Christ needs his broad shoulders and bulging neck. And so he's held before people as the great model of what the grace of God can do. And he goes out the next day and encourages forty million people to profane the sanctity of the Lord's Day. And then he's quoted Monday morning as blowing his cork and using his "hells" and "damns" along with everyone else. And who has the courage to go to our leaders and say, "King Jesus needs no such service from vile and polluted mouths and lives that refuse to conform to the holy law of God." You feel uncomfortable with that? Show me from the Word of God where it's wrong. When those came to John the Baptist and said, "What must we do to bring forth fruit for repentance?" What did he

tell them? A bunch of general innocuous things? No sir, he said, "You soldiers, you know what your key sins are? Grumbling about your wages, taking advantage of your uniform. Now, stop it. Be content with your wages. And you publicans, don't take any more than belongs to you." He went after their sins.

If some broad-shouldered All-American comes into this building tonight and says to me, "Preacher, I've begun to study my Bible, and I see I'm a sinner, and I'm lost and on my way to hell. What do I do?" I point him to Christ, to the way of a Savior who died for sinners, and then point him to the path of repentance. And when he says, "But man, what will that mean for me?" I'll tell him what it means. "It means you stop your whoring around and all the silly women who go after you like animals in heat. You're done with them. And the first one that makes an approach to you, you say, 'look girl, I'm done with that. My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.'" And then I'll tell him,

"Look man, from the time you were in the Pop Warner League, you were made a little god because of the size of your thighs, your neck, your shoulders, and your ability to butt a body across a line. And you've made that your god. Man, your god's got to die, and die here and now. And if you're asking me if you can go out and worship that god on a day set apart by the living God for His public worship. No, repent of your profaning of the Lord's Day."

If he says, "But man, I don't know what to do," I'll say, "You've got a good broad back. Dig ditches till you can do something more noble. You can dig them. I dug ditches to pay my tuition to get some tools to go to the ministry." And I'm sick and tired of athletes saying, "I've got this ability to bury the offensive tackle. I've got this ability to bury the halfback." Somebody else may have the ability to blow people's brains out at three miles--a beautiful marksman. How does he sanctify that for Jesus? This wooly-headed thinking--there's very little place for cynicism and sarcasm, but there is a place, and I believe it's right here. O, the apostasy of an evangelicalism that is afraid to call people to a life of radical discipleship.

Not only is it seen in the message but in the climate of the church life itself. According to the Scriptures--and would that I had time to develop this through the early chapters of Acts--that which characterized the church in the flush of the outpouring of the Spirit was the presence of God. "Fear came upon all. They were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. They were all of one accord. No man dared join himself to them, but the Lord added such as should be saved. And they were walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. And the disciples were multiplied." Those were some of the descriptive phrases of the church in its period of great blessing. And what is our decadent evangelicalism marked by now? They have the mentality that when sinners come in, we ought to make them feel at ease and comfortable. So the minister stands up and says, "It's lovely to have all you lovely people here. You're lovely; we're lovely. Everybody turn around and shake hands. Have a little chit chat. We don't want you to be uptight and think that religion is something to be serious and sober. We're a lovely bunch of people." Then they have a little chorus, a little entertainment, a few solos, a few duets, and a few quartets. And I'm not saying that all special music is entertainment. Don't anyone go out and say that I said it. I didn't. Don't say that I did, or you're breaking the 9th commandment. I'm serious because usually the only ones who would go out and say it are those for whom it is entertainment, and I touched on a raw nerve, and you don't like it. But the great majority of the so-called special music in evangelical churches is nothing but entertainment. You know the proof of it? Look

at the Christian recording business. It's a multimillion even billion-dollar business. People want to be entertained with the world's mood and with the flabby, diluted lyrics that wouldn't convict a flea.

Paul says, "When the unbeliever comes amongst you, what should strike him?" 1 Corinthians 14:25: "And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." What should be the dominant characteristic of our public gatherings? Whether the expression is the exuberance of holy joy, whether it is the more sober spirit of holy mourning, whether it is the intense spirit of rapt attention to the Word of God in the full range of holy emotions--and the Bible recognizes the full range--above all else, this is what should grip us: it's not just a bunch of people in the same place singing the same songs, hearing the same preacher. There is a presence: God is in the midst of His people. That thought rarely, if ever, enters the average evangelical church. So long as the bills are paid and the people are happy, and the program is up to snuff, all is well. My dear people, how long will God bear with this?

That's what happened in Israel, didn't it? Read the 1st chapter of Isaiah. Read the 58th chapter of Isaiah. They were keeping all their meetings and even had more than God required. They had their feast of the new moons. They had their fast days. They were offering up multitudes of sacrifices until God says, "What unto Me is the multitude of all of this orthodox in framework, orthodox evangelical worship? I'm tired of it. Get rid of it. Wash you; make you clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before your eyes. Learn to do good; cease to do evil." And I believe if there's a word of God to the apostate evangelical world in our day, it is that. Away with all of our ceremonies and committee meetings and slick promotionalism and back to the place where we're on our faces saying, "O God, come to Your temple." You know the first thing He'll do if He comes? He'll come and purge the sons of Levi that they may offer a sacrifice in righteousness. He'll come like He came to that temple in Jerusalem when with eyes like fire, He brought those strands together into a scourge. And the Son of God--I say it reverently--went into a holy rage. And you read those verbs in the original, and they are vigorous and almost frightening. He was like a madman. It says He threw over the changers' tables. He drove out the oxen. Can you imagine a huge ox turning around and seeing this man coming with burning eye and a scourge. The poor ox's eyes get as big as saucers, and he runs out the temple door. "My Father's house shall be a house of prayer: intimate, vital, soul-communion with God. You've made it everything else." And sad to say, one can get almost anything he wants in the average evangelical church but the sense of the presence of God.

It's not a pleasant picture, is it, dear people? But I say, this is our great second national sin. What do we do? We cry to God. We start in our own hearts. You leaders here, you start with your own fellow overseers. We start with searching and trying our ways. We cry to God. We pray that God may yet send Jonahs to the Ninevehs of our land. And I use that incident purposely--non-covenanted nations. And someone came out of the covenant nation (the parallel in our day would be someone out of the church) who addressed the pagan city. And from the king down to the animals, they put on sackcloth and ashes and had a national repentance and restoration to righteousness. It doesn't mean every individual was saved. But many were because Jesus said they're going to rise up on the day of judgment and condemn the people of His own generation. Many were saved, and many others had their sins checked. And for three generations, the judgment pronounced upon Nineveh was withheld as

a fruit of that revival. I commend the book of Jonah for your prayerful study as part of the answer for what we ought to pray that God will do in this dark and needy hour.

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