

Newsletter Teaching for 9-5-07

The Deception of a Well-Meaning Leader

In our intense desire to do the work of God and step out on His behalf, we can easily lose sight of a vital distinction that God makes for His followers. It is the difference between success and failure; between pleasing God or incurring His judgment.

Saul is an example of a well-meaning leader who ultimately walked in deception. Saul knew the commands of God, but tried to redefine “good” and “right” in his own eyes. He ultimately lost his position and life because *he presumed to find something good in what God had condemned.*

According to Major W. Ian Thomas in his book *The Saving Life of Christ*, Saul’s sin was not completely destroying the Amalekites as commanded. *Surely keeping a few of the spoils was appropriate*, Saul determined, but those actions were entirely the work of the flesh. It was costly to Saul to make his own determination about God’s righteousness and justice.

Sparing What God Condemns

One of Saul’s first assignments after becoming king of Israel was to execute judgment upon the Amalekites for their treatment of Israel when they came out of Egypt (1 Sam. 15:1-2). Although Saul went against the Amalekites, he spared Agag the king, along with the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings, and lambs. Saul spared them with the righteous purpose of offering them to the Lord—a seemingly good decision.

Ian Thomas writes: *This is the subtle temptation with which you too are confronted, for the Devil will come to you again and again and whisper in your ear that you are not as bad as the Bible makes you out to be, that there is always something good in what you are, apart from what Christ is—that there is always something salvageable in human nature, no matter how bad a man may seem to be.... In defiance of God’s word, God’s mind, God’s will, and God’s judgment, they tried to discern between good and bad in what God had wholly rejected* (pg. 105).

Thomas goes on to remind us of the subtlety of the flesh. *Let me remind you again that nothing is good or bad by virtue of what it is. It is good or bad only by virtue of its origin, and that is why you can be so easily deceived and impressed by the pseudo-righteousness and apparent virtue that stem from the self-life, with its perverted bent for simulating what is good* (pg. 105).

He then boldly challenges well-meaning Christian leaders: *In other words, the fact that you are a preacher, the fact that you are a missionary, the fact that you are a Christian worker, the fact that you are a witnessing Christian, does not make you spiritual, nor your activity righteous—no matter how deep your sense of dedication or the sacrifice involved....*

It is a shock to discover that you can go up into the pulpit with a Bible in your hand, preach a sermon entirely scriptural in its content, and yet if this be done in anything other than an attitude of total dependence upon Christ, in the very act of preaching you are committing sin...we have become accustomed to the elaborate machinery of the church, as an organizational enterprise in which carnal activity on the part of Christians is not only tolerated, but solicited—often in sublime sincerity and with a false sense of dedication on the part of those involved... (pg. 107).

A Hard Lesson

It is a hard lesson, but we need to investigate its truths. How much of our “religious activity” in ministry and church is really born out of the “good” of what God says He has condemned—meaning, our flesh. This is not easy to discern. But it would be the height of presumption to assume that just because our activity is sincere,

then it surely will be blessed of God. Each of us must stand before the Lord and ask Him to expose in our lives those things that are not born of His Spirit.

Major Ian Thomas calls it “the curse of Christendom.” It is quite easy to use worldly, fleshly principles to build a “successful” church or ministry. We may even be sincere in our intentions, yet it will come under the same kind of judgment from God as Saul experienced. The flesh offends God, and we must relentlessly battle against it.

As a consequence of Saul’s sin, it was an Amalekite who finally brought Saul to death and stole his crown (2 Sam. 1:10). Years later Haman, a descendant of King Agag, devised a plot to totally annihilate the Jews in the Book of Esther. The curse of the flesh continued on.

Our Lord has given us victory over the flesh, but not in our own efforts. It is only possible through the life of the Lord Jesus Christ living through us. Major Ian Thomas encourages us with this conclusion: *Do not be deceived by Amalek! Resist him with the rod of God held high, appropriating the victory already won. Carve your way through his ranks, for this is your victory, even your faith! Go on and go in, thanking the Lord Jesus for his life, as you have learned to thank Him for His death—for what He is, as you have learned to thank Him for what He did! Christ is your victory!* (pg. 111).

*“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, **that no man take thy crown!**”* (Rev. 3:11).

For the sake of God’s glory and His kingdom, let us give careful prayer and insight into our own lives and activities—that we might not give place to the Amalekites in our lives.