

The Need for Evangelical Reformation, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

Looking back to John the Baptist, to Jesus the Messiah, to the apostles of Christ, if you'll permit me this analogy, you could say that they were a reforming movement to what was an apostate Judaism of the time. That was the most visible and dominant form of religion in Jesus' day, was Judaism, and it eventually ended up being a Christ-rejecting, Christ-crucifying religion. Shared more in common with modern Muslims than it does with anything biblical.

John, Jesus, the apostles, they feared God, they spoke on the authority of God's Word, they preached the truth, they called for repentance, and they dealt with the consequences. They weren't concerned, first and foremost, to recover a name, but to recover the substance of true religion. They left the naming of their movement, actually, to their opponents. It was called, The Way, early on, Acts 9:2. They were called Christians first at Antioch, and that was not a compliment. That was Acts

11:26, they were called Christians. They were called in Acts 24:5, "the Sect of the Nazarenes."

Well, whatever the Jews and the Romans called them, the popular religious mainstream, which was apostate, considered them a problem, dangerous, turning the world upside down with their teaching. Saw them as destructive force. So, they rejected, and persecuted, and eventually tried to end them altogether by killing them.

Same thing happened in the 16th century when Martin Luther, when Tyndale, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, others, hoped to reform Christianity. At first, they did that within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic church. They're trying to be good Catholics. In fact, Martin Luther thought, "Well, once the pope sees my theses, he's going to agree."

They were a reforming movement coming out from within an apostate form of Christianity. They were calling for a return to Scripture in the *Solas* of the Reformation. Once again, the Roman Catholics branded the protestants as heretics and authorized

everyone to reject them. They formally excommunicated them and then they called upon people to practically push them out of society. Marginalize them, persecute them, burn them at the stake, why? Because the protestant reformers were dangerous, harmful to the public good.

I'm no prophet, but, looking at the biblical and historical evidence from the past, I think the past can safely predict the future. I think we can safely predict that this same pattern is going to be repeated. We're looking at an increasingly adrift Christianity, an apostate form of Christianity at the popular level in Evangelicalism. There are faithful, reforming voices that have been -nored, and mocked, marginalized. The more insistent they become, the more their view, voices are turned off, de-platformed, ridiculed. Whoever survives those tactics are canceled altogether.

John MacArthur lost a lot of friends over the statement on social justice and the Gospel. Phil Johnson, shamefully treated for trying to press for clarity on those issues. Voddie Baucham has been marginalized, ignored for his critiques of the racial reconciliation movement, systemic racism, black lives matter,

critical theory. His book, "Fault Lines," they're trying to get it away off the internet so you can't even see it. Tom Ascol has been ostracized for his very valid, honest, straightforward, in good faith critiques on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention about Resolution Nine, and he's shut down. He protests about Ed Litton's plagiarism, all ignored. His concerns about Resolution Nine, all ignored.

Listen, unless God grants a reprieve, unless he gives us a special season of grace for churches in this country, these United States, I, I think popular Evangelicalism, the most visible form of Christianity of our time, it's going to seal its apostacy, homogenize its opposition to the truth, and line up with the world. It'll become increasingly intolerant of true Christianity to the point, as it's already doing, of marginalization. But I think, even, it could come to a point of persecution, whether that's joining in, that's with a soft totalitarianism, or even a harder form, a violent form.

So, with that overview in mind turn in your Bibles to the final chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 66. And it's at this point, I want to issue a warning to Evangelicals, Isaiah 66:1-6,

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

“‘He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig’s blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; I,’ will also, ‘choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that,’ which that, ‘in which I did not delight.’

“Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: ‘Your brothers who hate you, cast you out for my name’s sake have said, “Ah, Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy”; but it is they who shall be put to shame. The sound of an

uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!’”

That passage was bad news for an apostate Judaism, it’s bad news for an apostate Roman Catholicism, and it is bad news for any apostate form of Evangelicalism we see today. Bad news. Bad news for Evangelical elites, architects and managers of big Eva, institutional Evangelicals who have wandered from the truth. This is a warning for those who embrace any apostatizing form of religion.

Just a few points, here. God addresses the apostate majority, as you can see, in the first four verses, those who represent the majority position in an institutionalized form of Israel’s religion. Look at first, number one, God rebukes the apostate majority. God rebukes the apostate majority, and he does so on two points: for failing to discern his true nature, and for failing to discern the nature of his true people.

Look at verses 1 and 2 again. “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool; what is the house that

you would build for me, what's the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD.'" The apostate majority gets God wrong at a most fundamental level. They think that God is best represented by visible signs of success, by things that can be seen, and touched, and admired, that which impresses men: large buildings, big rocks cut well covered with gold, big budgets, huge numbers. Evidence, all evidence that they don't know God.

When the Lord asks, "What is the house," and "what is the place," that's rhetorical. He's not asking about his address. He's not looking for a suitable place to dwell and get comfortable. This isn't a matter of where, as in location. It's a matter of size, as in nothing fits him. Nothing is big enough to contain the uncontainable, infinite God. In his essence he is infinite, eternal.

"All these things my hands have made, thus the, all these things came to be." In other words, Do you, do you really think you can arrange wood, and stone, and gold, and materials that I created and called into being, you think you can arrange that into a structure that fits me? Can anything I've created

suitably represent me? Do you, you really represent me, you people who take pride in and glory in these external things? Do you really think you represent me by defending a visible, physical form? They thought so.

When trying to find cause to condemn Jesus the Sanhedrin found witnesses to testify, Matthew 26:61, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" That was sacrilege against an external form of visible, physical representation. Same charge made by that same body against Stephen, Acts 6:13-14, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for [we've] heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place. [He'll] change the customs that Moses delivered to us."

Stephen, to answer for his teaching, he's called to account before the Sanhedrin. He gives, in Acts chapter 7, a masterful defense, an apologetic. He demonstrates from Israel's history this pattern in Israel's leadership to refuse the inward work of God's Word, preferring instead outward forms of religion, which is the pattern, the very pattern of idolatry. They treated God's

temple more like the shrine of a false god. It's gold and ornate beauty was the evidence of God's favor.

So, as Stephen comes to the climax of his argument in Acts 7:47, he points out, Look, "it was Solomon who built a house for God." Not you; Solomon. Then he quotes Isaiah, "Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool. What kind of a house will you build for me, says the Lord, what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?' You stiff necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so did you."

They didn't like that. The institutional leaders of Israel's religion, a Christ-rejecting, apostate Judaism, they are unregenerate. That's why they always resist the Holy Spirit. That's why they're always ignoring and twisting his prophetic word. They confined God to their building. And, by confining God to their building, to their institutions, they patted themselves on the back for defending it against the likes of Stephen. They saw him as the problem, him as the one worthy of death. They're blind to the fact that men like Stephen, men like Jesus Christ,

are the men that God favors. End of verse 2, "...this is the one [who,] whom [I'll] look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

So, since the apostate majority gets God wrong, it cannot identify God's people either. They think that they themselves are God's people because they're defending God's buildings and stuff, but they're unregenerate. They're ignorant of God. They're prone to reject and persecute his true people. So, God rebukes them.

Secondly, number two, God rejects the apostate majority. He rebukes the apostate majority and now he rejects the apostate majority. The apostate majority engages in the same forms of religion as true believers, but God sees through it, and he rejects them for their acts of worship. Look at verses 3 and 4, "'He who slaughters an ox, like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck.'" On and on it goes. It's even starker in the original. It shows a contrast between what the apostate worshipper thought that he was doing, and the way God truly, sees and interprets his acts of religion.

"He sacrifices an ox," this is what it says in the original, murderer. He sacrifices a lamb; he breaks a dog's neck. He offers a grain offering, pig's blood. He burns incense; he blesses an idol. That's God's view. Apostate majority thinks God is favoring them, thinks God accepts their external forms of religion. They think he sees all the good that they do, and he's pleased. All their social programs, all their enterprises, all their big, national, international, well-known things, God sees it all.

All the religious works, he sees it in exactly the opposite way. They couldn't be more wrong. In fact, he sees it in the worst way possible. He sees through all those external forms. He sees what no man can see on the outside. That's why we should not judge based on external things. He sees the heart, end of verse 3, "These have chosen their own ways, and," look at that, "their soul delights in their abominations." He calls all that external form of sacrifice, abominations. So, take all that external junk we see in Evangelicalism: abominations. If the heart is not right, God sees it as abominations.

And, keep in mind, look, these are the moral people. These are the upstanding people in society. They're the seminary presidents, they're the institutional leaders, they're the highly sought-after conference speakers. They aren't literally breaking dog's necks to offer in sacrifice. They're not literally defiling the altar, pouring pig's blood on top of it. Nah, but the rejection of God's Word turns all their acts of worship and sacrifice into abominations. End of verse 4, what is their fundamental flaw, their sin? "when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they didn't listen; they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight."

In our time, it's the time that Paul described that's come upon us, "when men do not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and they turn away their ears from the truth and they turn aside to myths." Morally, culturally, ecclesiologically, institutionally, doctrinally, ethically, politically, Evangelicals are adrift. They're in steep decline. They seem headed for total shipwreck. If they don't repent, God will rebuke them. He will reject them, and then, thirdly, he'll repay them. God will repay them.

Number three, God recompenses the apostate majority. He recompenses the apostate majority. The word, recompense means he's going to repay them. He's going to pay them back. He owes them something. His justice demands it. First, God will recompense apostate, the apostate majority with terror, verse 4, "[I'll] choose harsh treatment for them, bring their fears upon them." The word translated, harsh treatment, comes from a peculiar word meaning, to make sport of.

Second, God is going to recompense this apostate majority with shame, end of verse 5. "Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: 'Your brothers who hate you, cast you out for my name's sake, they've said, "Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy"; but it's they who shall be put to shame.'" They claim to do the Lord's work, act like they speak for the Lord, but they're hypocrites. They speak with condescension and derision upon people they should respect and honor. "To God be the glory, brother, we just want your joy." All the while they kick the righteous out of the fellowship, slander, misrepresent the godly, cancel them, shame them.

When John MacArthur responded with a boldness and clarity to government overreach in the republic of California, when he led the way for churches to stand up to political and cultural pressure, rather than appreciate Pastor John MacArthur, some that we counted as friends chose to criticize him, and they did it in the most subtle, but revealing way. Sure, you can choose to keep Grace Church open, but is that the wisest approach? Is that the most judicious thing to do, and to encourage others to do? Is that the most loving thing to do to your neighbor? Brother, we just want your good. We're just concerned for the consciences of the weak who might come underneath your pressure.

James Coates, pastor in Alberta, Canada, refused to be bullied by the Alberta health services and he kept his church open. He was swiftly arrested and imprisoned. And those who reprimanded Pastor Coates were, other Canadian pastors, Evangelicals. And they sounded a lot like Isaiah 66:5. Can't this brother love his neighbors by following the health orders? I mean, we're doing it, going online, doing online church. He should do like us. It's not loving to spread a deadly disease. Stop grandstanding, Pastor Coates. We know what you're about. Glorify God.

They intend to shame people like John MacArthur and Pastor James Coates. It's they who shall be put to shame, God says. Adding to the terror, adding to the shame, verse 6, there's a campaign of what I would just call shock and awe. "...sound of an uproar [for] the city! ...sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!" Those are all vivid, very vivid descriptions of battlefield noise. An uproar portrays this crashing, clanging of an encroaching, approaching army, preparing to attack or in full-on attack mode, which is a thunderous and terrifying sound.

What they dreaded has come upon them. What they never expected themselves. We're the guardians of God! We're the gatekeepers of the temple! We protect temple and city. We're holy! These self-appointed representatives, speaking for God, acting on his behalf, they never, ever, ever expected God to turn on them. God couldn't have been clearer when he warned the apostate majority through the prophet Isaiah. Man, they loved that temple. They loved it! But they did not know or love the God of the temple. They didn't tremble at his Word. Since they

didn't repent, God sent the Babylonians to destroy the temple in 586 B.C., carried away the people into exile.

God couldn't have been clearer when he warned the apostate majority through Stephen, quoting the prophet Isaiah back to them again. Again they, they sure love that temple. They didn't love the God of the temple. They didn't tremble at his Word. Since they did not repent, he sent the Romans to destroy the temple in 70 A.D., kill more than a million Jews. Horrific reports of the slaughter inside of Jerusalem.

The Evangelical majority of today should heed the warning. God does not change. His Word does not change. He is immutable; he is unchanging. He still expects us who have his Word to heed his Word. The Evangelical majority keeps a Bible close. It could pull up verses on an iPhone. It puts it up on a jumbotron in their megachurches. They don't know their Bibles! Why? Because they don't know or love the God of the Bible. And God will recompense them for disregarding his Word.

Number four: God rewards the righteous minority. God rewards the righteous minority. He looks out for the remnant, the faithful. Back to Isaiah 66:2, end of the verse, "This is the one to whom I will look, he who's humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." Three precious virtues, in God's sight, of the righteous remnant: humility, contrition, and the fear of the Lord.

The humble and contrite are the poor and the weak. They're those with no positions of influence, no titles of authority, no sitting in seats of power; humble and contrite before God. They are beautiful people, beatitude people, poor in spirit, mourning over their sin, meek toward men. Oh, they're hated and rejected by the religious majority. They're eventually, verse 5, excommunicated. But they don't tremble before men. They're God fearers, not man-fearers. Tremble before God, they tremble before his Word. One commentator said, "They have an eager, yet fearful haste to execute his will."

They're adoring, obedient children, ready, zealous to do their father's will. So, when God says, "This is the one to whom I will look," he means a loving look. He means a tenderhearted

look toward them. He's got fatherly approval in his look, in his gaze, a loving acceptance. And it's a sustained look, here. Keeps on showing love and care and affection and favor and generosity. And he never changes, his favor never ceases to those who tremble at his Word.

When Isaiah says in verse 5, "Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word," the assurance is this: "look, justice will come. Hold on a little longer. Justice will come. You're ignored, you're marginalized, you're maligned, you're per, de-platformed, canceled; the evil of an apostate majority, trust me, will be recompensed."

Keep fearing God, stay humble, stay contrite, keep waiting, stay faithful. God sees them, he knows them, he blesses them. He speaks words of tender comfort and deep assurance. All-seeing eye of God's favor rests upon them. He knows our situation, he sees our trials, sees our persecutions, he delights in us, and he will deliver if we tremble at his Word.

So, for that trembling remnant, for the humble and contrite who cling to Christ, God's powerful words give strength, and comfort, and confidence, and assurance. And so, Isaiah 35:3-4, "Strengthen the weak hands, make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He'll come and save you.'"

In the meantime, let's stay faithful, but let's do what we can to call big Eva to repentance, in hope that God will spare them. We may feel as small as ants pointing our boney little fingers up at that big boot about to step on us or over us, but our words are not our own; they're God's. "Is not my word like a fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? The battle is not by might, it's not by power, by my Spirit, says the LORD." So, keep speaking out in humility and boldness. Yeah, they may kick us out of Evangelicalism. We won't know what to call ourselves. Don't worry about it. We'll just leave the naming of our new movement to our persecutors. Amen.

PILLAR OF
— TRUTH — 