

THE PULPIT

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Volume A1, Issue No. 01 - 1999

THE GENUINE PROPHET

EVERY TRUE PROPHET OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS AN EVANGELIST. HIS MINISTRY DREW PEOPLE BACK TO GOD AND HIS WORD. THE CALL TO RIGHTEOUSNESS WAS THE STANDARD WHICH SEPARATED THE GENUINE PROPHET FROM THE IMITATION, AS THE PROPHET JEREMIAH WROTE IN JEREMIAH 23:22. IF YOU COME ACROSS SOMEONE WHO CLAIMS TO BE A PROPHET, BUT WHO IS NOT INVOLVED IN CALLING PEOPLE TO A RIGHTEOUS WALK WITH GOD, YOU MAY BE DEALING WITH A COUNTERFEIT. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE GIFT OF PROPHECY HAS ONE PRIMARY PURPOSE: TO REVEAL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS AND BRING CONVICTION. PAUL WROTE THAT, AS A RESULT OF PROPHECY, "THE SECRETS OF HIS HEART ARE DISCLOSED; AND SO HE WILL FALL ON HIS FACE AND WORSHIP GOD, DECLARING THAT GOD IS CERTAINLY AMONG YOU" (1 COR. 14:25). THE LORD REVEALED THROUGH JEREMIAH ANOTHER CRITERION FOR DISTINGUISHING A TRUE PROPHET FROM A FALSE PROPHET: "I HAVE HEARD WHAT THE PROPHETS HAVE SAID WHO PROPHECY FALSELY IN MY NAME, SAYING, 'I HAD A DREAM, I HAD A DREAM!'... THE PROPHET WHO HAS A DREAM MAY RELATE HIS DREAM, BUT LET HIM WHO HAS MY WORD SPEAK MY WORD IN TRUTH. WHAT DOES STRAW HAVE IN COMMON WITH GRAIN?" (23:25, 28). GOD IS WARNING HIS PEOPLE AGAINST PROPHETS WHO VALUE THEIR DREAMS ABOVE HIS WORD. GOD IS NOT SAYING THAT DREAMS ARE UNIMPORTANT. INDEED, HE OFTEN SPOKE TO PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE THROUGH DREAMS BEFORE THE FULL REVELATION OF SCRIPTURE WAS COMPLETE. BUT IN COMPARISON TO THE NUTRITIOUS GRAIN OF HIS WORD, DREAMS ARE MERE STRAW. IF YOU FEED STRAW TO CATTLE, THEY'LL DIE. THEY WILL SLEEP ON IT, BUT THEY WON'T EAT IT BECAUSE IT HAS NO NUTRIENTS. SIMILARLY, DREAMS MAY BE OF SOME VALUE, BUT THEY ARE NEVER TO BE EQUATED WITH GOD'S WORD AS THE BASIS FOR OUR FAITH OR OUR WALK.

THE APPEARANCE OF ANTICHRIST

THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF A COMING FIGURE WHO WILL OPPOSE CHRIST. IN REVELATION 13:7 THIS FIGURE IS CALLED "THE BEAST" WHO HAS BEEN "GIVE POWER TO MAKE WAR AGAINST THE SAINTS." THE WORLD WILL BE "ASTONISHED" BY HIM AND FOLLOW HIM (13:3). THIS ANTICHRIST WILL BE "GIVEN AUTHORITY OVER EVERY TRIBE, PEOPLE, LANGUAGE AND NATION" (13:7). HE WILL "BLASPHEME GOD" AND "SLANDER HIS SERVANTS" (13:5-6). IN 2 THESS. 2 HE IS CALLED "THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS," WHO "WILL OPPOSE AND WILL EXALT HIMSELF OVER EVERYTHING THAT IS CALLED GOD" (2:3-4). SOME PEOPLE SUGGEST THAT ONE WORLD GOVERNMENT WILL BE FORMED TO DO HIS BIDDING. REVELATION SAYS THAT EVERY ONE WILL BE FORCED TO RECEIVE THE MARK OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:16) - A PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION TECHNIQUE SO THAT WHEN THE TIME COMES THE ANTICHRIST CAN MAKE HIS MOVE. IN SOME WAYS OUR COMPUTERISED WORLD SEEMS TO FIT THE BILL. WHO WILL THIS ANTICHRIST BE? NERO, HITLER, AND SADDAM HUSSEIN HAVE BEEN NOMINATED AS CANDIDATES. AS THE APOSTLE JOHN SAYS IN HIS LETTER, THERE WILL BE MANY ANTICHRISTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY (1 JOHN 2:18). CHRISTIANS HAVE HAD TO ENDURE MANY ANTICHRISTS WHO HAVE SOUGHT TO DEMOLISH THE CHURCH. WHAT'S MORE, AS HISTORY MOVES TOWARD CHRIST'S RETURN, OPPOSITION WILL INCREASE. SO, TO SURVIVE THIS OPPOSITION, THE CHURCH WILL HAVE TO "STAND FIRM" IN CHRIST (GAL. 5:1).

TRUE DISCIPLE

AN AFRICAN PASTOR WAS OVERWHELMED BY REBELS WHO DEMANDED THAT HE RENOUNCE HIS FAITH. HE REFUSED. THE NIGHT BEFORE THEY TOOK HIS LIFE, HE WROTE THE FOLLOWING LINES ON A SCRAP OF PAPER: I AM PART OF THE "FELLOWSHIP OF THE UNASHAMED." I HAVE HOLY SPIRIT POWER. THE DIE HAS BEEN CAST. I'VE STEPPED OVER THE LINE. THE DECISION HAS BEEN MADE. I AM A DISCIPLE OF HIS. I WON'T LOOK BACK, LET UP, SLOWDOWN, BACK AWAY, OR BE STILL. MY PAST IS REDEEMED, MY PRESENT MAKES SENSE, AND MY FUTURE IS SECURE. I AM FINISHED AND DONE WITH LOW LIVING, SIGHT WALKING, SMALL PLANNING, SMOOTH KNEES, COURAGELESS DREAMS, TAME VISIONS, MUNDANE TALKING, AND DWARFED GOALS! I NO LONGER NEED PRE-EMINENCE, PROSPERITY, POSITION, PROMOTIONS, OR POPULARITY. I DON'T HAVE TO BE RIGHT, FIRST, TOPS, RECOGNISED, PRAISED, REGARDED, OR REWARDED. I NOW LIVE BY PRESENCE, LEAN BY FAITH, LOVE BY PATIENCE, LIFT BY PRAYER, AND LABOUR BY POWER. MY FACE IS SET, MY GOAL IS HEAVEN, MY ROAD IS NARROW, MY WAY IS ROUGH, MY COMPANIONS FEW, MY GUIDE RELIABLE, MY MISSION CLEAR. I CANNOT BE BOUGHT, COMPROMISED, DETOURED, LURED AWAY, TURNED BACK, DILUTED, OR DELAYED. I WILL NOT FLINCH IN THE FACE OF SACRIFICE, HESITATE IN THE PRESENCE OF ADVERSITY, NEGOTIATE AT THE TABLE OF THE ENEMY, PONDER AT THE POOL OF POPULARITY, OR MEANDER IN THE MIDST OF MEDIOCRITY. I WON'T GIVE UP, SHUT UP, LET UP, OR BURN UP TILL I'VE PREACHED UP, PRAYED UP, PAID UP, STORED UP, AND STAYED UP FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST. I AM A DISCIPLE OF JESUS. I MUST GO TILL HE COMES, GIVE TILL I DROP, PREACH TILL ALL KNOW, AND WORK TILL HE STOPS. AND WHEN HE COMES TO GET HIS OWN, HE'LL HAVE NO PROBLEMS RECOGNISING ME.

RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT

GOD'S WORD IS THE BASIS FOR RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT. IS THE PERSON PROCLAIMING THE WORD OF GOD? IS IT BIBLICALLY TRUE? ACCEPTING THE FACT THAT GOD'S WORD IS BOTH FOUNDATIONAL AND CENTRAL, HOWEVER, IS NOT THE ONLY CRITERION. SATAN WILL QUOTE SCRIPTURE. HE EVEN HAD THE AUDACITY TO QUOTE IT TO JESUS. ANY ORGANISATION CAN MAKE UP A DOCTRINAL STATEMENT. I HAVE EVEN ENCOUNTERED HARD-CORE SATANISTS WHO HAVE INFILTRATED THE CHURCH AND OCCUPIED LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN MINISTRIES. PAUL WARNED, "FOR SUCH MEN ARE FALSE DISCIPLES, DECEITFUL WORKERS, DISGUIISING THEMSELVES AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST. AND NO WONDER, FOR EVEN SATAN DISGUISES HIMSELF AS AN ANGEL OF LIGHT. THEREFORE IT IS NOT SURPRISING IF HIS SERVANTS ALSO DISGUISE THEMSELVES AS SERVANTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS; WHOSE END SHALL BE ACCORDING TO THEIR DEEDS" (2 COR 11:13-15). SOME INDULGES THE FLESH IN ITS CORRUPT DESIRES AND DESPISES AUTHORITY, WHICH ARE TRAITS IDENTIFIED IN 2 PETER 2:10 AS THOSE OF A FALSE PROPHETS. I'M ALWAYS AMAZED AT HOW GULLIBLE SOME PEOPLE ARE AND HOW EASILY DECEIVED. "HE'S SUCH A WONDERFUL SPEAKER!" "WHAT A CHARISMATIC PERSON!" "I COULD FEEL THE ELECTRICITY IN THE AIR!" THEY'RE NOT JUDGING RIGHTEOUSLY;; THEY'RE JUDGING BY APPEARANCE (OR WORSE, BY HOW THEY FEEL). JOHN WROTE, "DO NOT JUDGE ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE, BUT JUDGE WITH RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT" (JOHN 7:24).

FEAR NOT

WHEN THEY HAD PRAYED, THE PLACE WHERE THEY HAD GATHERED TOGETHER WAS SHAKEN, AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND BEGAN TO SPEAK THE WORD OF GOD WITH BOLDNESS (ACTS 4:31). FEAR IS A POWERFUL CONTROLLER. IT EITHER COMPELS US TO DO WHAT IS IRRESPONSIBLE OR IT IMPEDES US FROM LIVING RESPONSIBLY.

AS I TRAVEL AMONG OUR PASTORS, I'M OVERWHELMED BY THE REALISATION THAT THE NUMBER ONE MOTIVATION IN THEIR LIVES IS FEAR OF FAILURE. FEAR OF FAILURE, FEAR OF THE DEVIL, FEAR OF MAN, FEAR OF EVERYTHING IS PLAGUING OUR SOCIETY AND CHURCHES. DO YOU KNOW THAT THE MOST FREQUENT COMMAND OF JESUS IN THE GOSPELS IS "FEAR NOT"? IN ANTICIPATION OF ISRAEL'S ENTRANCE INTO THE PROMISED LAND, GOD TELLS HIS PEOPLE FOUR TIMES "BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS" (JOSHUA 1). THE WRITER OF PROVERBS SAYS, "THE WICKED FLEE WHEN NO ONE IS PURSUING, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ARE BOLD AS A LION" (PROVERBS 28:1).

THE FACT THAT GOD DOESN'T LOOK FAVOURABLY ON COWARDS AND UNBELIEVERS IS MADE EVIDENT IN REVELATION 21:8: "BUT FOR THE COWARDLY AND UNBELIEVING AND ABOMINABLE AND MURDERS AND IMMORAL PERSONS AND SORCERERS AND IDOLATERS AND ALL LIARS, THEIR PART WILL BE IN THE LAKE THAT BURNS WITH FIRE AND BRIMSTONE, WHICH IS THE SECOND DEATH." DOES IT SURPRISE YOU THAT COWARDLY, UNBELIEVING PEOPLE ARE LISTED IN A ROGUE'S GALLERY WITH MURDERERS AND LIARS? IT IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE TO BE BOLD (ACTS 4:31). THE EARLY CHURCH DIDN'T PRAY FOR "DIVINE APPOINTMENTS"; THEY PRAYED FOR BOLDNESS. GOD'S KINGDOM CAN ONLY BE ESTABLISHED BY FAITHFUL AND COURAGEOUS PEOPLE.

PERCEPTIONS AND EMOTIONS

IN GENERAL SENSE, YOUR EMOTIONS, ARE A PRODUCT OF YOUR THOUGHT LIFE. IF YOU ARE NOT THINKING RIGHT, IF YOUR MIND IS NOT BEING RENEWED, IF YOU ARE NOT PERCEIVING GOD AND HIS WORD PROPERLY, IT WILL BE REFLECTED IN YOUR EMOTIONAL LIFE.

ONE OF THE BEST SCRIPTURAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS AND EMOTIONS IS FOUND IN LAMENTATIONS 3. IN VERSES 1-6, JEREMIAH EXPRESSES DESPAIR AS HE WRONGLY PERCEIVES THAT GOD IS AGAINST HIM AND THAT HE IS THE CAUSE OF HIS PHYSICAL PROBLEMS. WHAT WAS JEREMIAH'S PROBLEM? HIS PERCEPTION OF GOD WAS WAY OFF CENTER. GOD WASN'T THE CAUSE OF HIS AFFLICTION. GOD ISN'T A WILD BEAST WAITING TO CHEW PEOPLE UP. BUT JEREMIAH WASN'T THINKING RIGHT, PERCEIVING RIGHT, OR INTERPRETING HIS CIRCUMSTANCES RIGHT, SO HE WASN'T FEELING RIGHT OR RESPONDING RIGHT EITHER.

SUDDENLY, JEREMIAH'S COUNTEenance CHANGES: "THIS I RECALL TO MY MIND, THEREFORE I HAVE HOPE. THE LORD'S LOVING KINDNESS' INDEED NEVER CEASES, FOR HIS COMPASSION NEVER FAIL. THEY ARE NEW EVERY MORNING; GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS" (LAMENTATIONS 3:21-23). WHAT A TURN-AROUND! DID GOD CHANGE? DID JEREMIAH'S CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE? NO. HIS PERCEPTION OF GOD CHANGED AND HIS EMOTIONS FOLLOWED SUIT. YOU ARE NOT SHAPED SO MUCH BY YOUR ENVIRONMENT AS YOU ARE BY YOUR PERCEPTION OF YOUR ENVIRONMENT.

LIFE'S EVENTS DON'T DETERMINE WHO YOU ARE; GOD DETERMINES WHO YOU ARE, AND YOUR INTERPRETATION OF LIFE'S EVENTS DETERMINES HOW WELL YOU WILL HANDLE THE PRESSURES OF LIFE. IN REALITY WE HAVE VERY LITTLE CONTROL OVER OUR EMOTIONS, BUT WE DO HAVE CONTROL OVER OUR THOUGHTS, AND OUR THOUGHTS DETERMINE OUR FEELINGS AND OUR RESPONSES. THAT'S WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT THAT YOU FILL YOUR MIND WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND HIS WORD. YOU NEED TO SEE LIFE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE AND RESPOND ACCORDINGLY.

CONFESSING WHAT WE BELIEVE

ONE PRIMARY MEANS BY WHICH WE EXPRESS OUR BELIEF IS CONFESSION - VERBALLY EXPRESSING WHAT WE BELIEVE (ROMANS 10:9). IN FACT, GOD REQUIRES US TO TAKE OUR STAND IN THIS WORLD. JESUS SAYS, "FOR WHOEVER IS ASHAMED OF ME AND MY WORDS IN THIS ADULTEROUS AND SINFUL GENERATION, THE SON OF MAN WILL ALSO BE ASHAMED OF HIM WHEN HE COMES IN THE GLORY OF HIS FATHER WITH THE HOLY ANGELS" (MARK 8:38). IN REBUKING THE PHARISEES, JESUS SAID, "FOR BY YOUR WORDS YOU SHALL BE JUSTIFIED, AND BY YOUR WORDS YOU SHALL BE CONDEMNED" (MATTHEW 12:37). AND IN MARK 11:23, HE SAID, "WHOEVER SAYS TO THIS MOUNTAIN, 'BE TAKEN UP AND CAST INTO THE SEA,' AND DOES NOT DOUBT IN HIS HEART, BUT BELIEVES THAT WHAT HE SAYS IS GOING TO HAPPEN, IT SHALL BE GRANTED HIM." NOTICE THAT JESUS DOES NOT SAY WE SHALL HAVE WHATEVER WE BELIEVE, BUT WE SHALL HAVE WHATEVER WE BELIEVE AND CONFESS.

CONFESSION GIVES EXPRESSION TO WHAT IS BELIEVED. THE CONFESSION OF THE MOUTH MUST ACCURATELY EXPRESS THE BELIEF OF THE HEART. TO DEFEAT SATAN, WE MUST SPEAK FORTH THE WORD OF GOD, WHICH IS THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT (EPH 6:17). IN OUR ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS, TWO DIFFERENT WORDS ARE USED FOR THE "WORD" OF GOD. THE MOST COMMON IS LOGOS AND IT INDICATES THE WHOLE REVEALED WORD OF GOD (JOHN 1:1). THE OTHER WORD IS RHEMA. THERE IS ONLY ONE WORD OF GOD, BUT THE EMPHASIS OF RHEMA IS IN ITS EXPRESSION. WE ARE TO HIDE THE WHOLE WORD (LOGOS) IN OUR HEARTS, AND WHEN SATAN ATTACKS, WE STAND AGAINST HIM BY CONFESSING GOD'S WORD (RHEMA).

CONFESSING WHAT WE BELIEVE GIVES PROOF TO OUR FAITH. CONFESSION DOESN'T CREATE FAITH; FAITH MAKES POSSIBLE TRUE CONFESSION. CONFESSION IS AGREEING WITH GOD. IT IS LIVING IN THE LIGHT BY LETTING OUR LIFE AND OUR MOUTH DEMONSTRATE WHAT WE BELIEVE IN OUR HEART.

DEMONSTRATING WHAT WE BELIEVE

EVEN SO FAITH, IF IT HAS NO WORKS, IS DEAD, BEING BY ITSELF (JAMES 2:17). FAITH IS AN ACTION WORD. WE CANNOT PASSIVELY RESPOND TO GOD. FAITH IS NOT JUST GIVING CREDENCE TO SOMETHING OR SOMEONE. FAITH IS DEMONSTRATED RELIANCE UPON SOMETHING OR SOMEONE.

FAITH HAS THE SAME OPERATING DYNAMIC AS AGAPE LOVE WHEN WE REFER TO LOVE AS A NOUN, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT CHARACTER, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, ETC. (1 COR. 13:4-7). WHEN WE SAY THAT GOD IS LOVE, WE ARE DESCRIBING HIS CHARACTER. PAUL SAYS THE GOAL OF OUR INSTRUCTION IS LOVE (1 TIM. 1:5); THEREFORE, THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IS CHARACTER TRANSFORMATION.

WHEN LOVE IS USED AS A VERB, IT IS EXPRESSED BY ACTION: "FOR GOD SO LOVE THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE..." (JOHN 3:16). IF WE SAY WE LOVE SOMEONE AND DO NOTHING ON THEIR BEHALF, IT'S ONLY SENTIMENTALITY AND NOT AGAPE LOVE. TRUE LOVE IS EXPRESSED BY MEETING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. FAITH HAS A SIMILAR DYNAMIC WHEN USING FAITH AS A NOUN. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT WHAT WE BELIEVE. BUT IF WE'RE TALKING ABOUT FAITH AS A VERB, THEN IT IS EXPRESSED IN THE WAY WE LIVE. JAMES SAYS IT LIKE THIS: "EVEN SO FAITH, IF IT HAS NO WORKS, IS DEAD, BEING BY ITSELF. BUT SOMEONE MAY WELL SAY, 'YOU HAVE FAITH, AND I HAVE WORKS; SHOW ME YOUR FAITH WITHOUT THE WORKS, AND I WILL SHOW YOU MY FAITH BY MY WORKS.'

YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS ONE. YOU DO WELL; THE DEMONS ALSO BELIEVE, AND SHUDDER" (JAMES 2:17:19). THE DEVIL BELIEVES IN THE EXISTENCE OF JESUS AND KNOWS THAT GOD'S WORD IS TRUE. BUT HE DOESN'T SEEK TO GLORIFY JESUS OR TO OBEY HIM. HE SEEKS HIS OWN GLORY, BEING A REBEL AT HEAR (ROMANS 1:25). WE DEMONSTRATE WHAT WE BELIEVE BY HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES. IF WE BELIEVE IT, WE WILL DO IT. IF WE DON'T, THEN WHAT WE BELIEVE IS JUST WISHFUL THINKING.

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