

Run for Your Life

The Holy Spirit has given me a word for the church of Jesus Christ. By that I mean the body of Christ at large. This includes everyone who has the testimony, "I'm saved, by virtue of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ on Calvary." This message is for everyone who defines their Christianity that way.

As we read 1 Kings 18, we find the children of God in a time of great spiritual conflict. Once again they had strayed from truth. They had fallen far from the victorious days of Joshua. Even though God's people under Joshua hadn't conquered the Promised Land entirely because of their own spiritual neglect, those days were nevertheless considered victorious.

But now the children of God had fallen into terrible tragedy. And it was because of their refusal to separate themselves from the gods of the society around them.

You may recall Moses telling Israel, "The gods that you refuse to drive out of the land are going to be a snare to you. They'll be thorns in your sides. They're going to rob you of the true heritage God desires to give you, because you refuse to separate yourselves from them. And those same idols you refuse to give up will eventually swallow you."

That's exactly where we find the people of God years down the road, in 1 Kings 18. The Israelites were captivated by the false god Baal. Now, Baal was the god of personal increase and prosperity. And the people were captivated by their desire for personal increase. Baal worship allowed them to build for themselves, to prop themselves up, to make themselves prosper.

Baal worship also included practices of immoral sensuality. It allowed people to indulge their flesh and yet still have a sense of being in the presence of God. In other words, it was a licentious religion, very wicked, sensual and immoral. It encouraged people to live only by their senses. For example, if it rained and the crops were good, the people could reason by their natural senses, "Baal is pleased with us. He's pleased to prosper us and send us increase."

Obviously, because sensuality was the very core of their so-called worship, the people were led into horrid immoral practices. Yet, in the midst of this immoral religious practice, God raised up a voice of truth. You see, in every generation, and among every people, God Almighty is never left without a testimony - never. There will always be a word from him. It may not be popular, and it may not please the majority. But his voice will still be heard. He is God, he created the universe, he governed the world, he holds every one of us in the palm of his hand. And he will speak to anyone who wants to hear the truth.

Now, the prophet Elijah issued a challenge to wicked King Ahab, who was ruling in that time:

"Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table" (1 Kings 18:19).

This verse is referring to those false prophets who lusted for power. That was where they lived, so to speak, the table where they ate: to have power. Jezebel was queen at the time, Ahab's wife. And she had access to all the wealth and the prosperity of the nation.

"So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel."

Mount Carmel was very significant, because it was the place where Joshua had previously defeated one of the Canaanite kings. So, technically, Elijah was drawing the people back to a place of remembrance.

Likewise, the Holy Spirit will always do this with us. When we've strayed, he will always woo us. God's Spirit doesn't come to condemn the church of Jesus Christ, in spite of how apostate she may have become. Rather, the Holy Spirit still comes and tries to draw back all who have been alienated from the heart of God. This includes all who are in league with immoral leaders, or who lust for power, provision and everything else that society has to offer.

"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."

The Holy Spirit was speaking through Elijah here. You see, there was indecisiveness in the hearts of the people. Even though they were enjoying Baal worship, they all had a mysterious inner knowledge that it was really not of God. It was fun, and their senses were being touched, and they had a sense of provision; but, deep down, they knew it was not of the Lord. And that's why they were indecisive. They could go on indulging in Baal practices, but they couldn't yield themselves fully to Baal. They had a deep inner knowledge that this truly was not the altar of God.

"How long will you halt?" Elijah asked them. The word in Hebrew for halt here means to hop, to skip over, to spare, or to dance as a lame man. Elijah is saying to the church of his time, "How long will you continue to skip over the truth? How long will you continue to spare yourself any deep dealings and callings of God? How long will you continue to worship as a lame man, when you could behold the Lord? Why do you halt between two opinions? Why do you stop at this place halfway between heaven and hell? Why can't you make up your mind where you're going to live, which side you're going to commit yourself to?"

Elijah was issuing a strong challenge. Yet, Scripture says, "the people answered him not a word."

Here is an incredible thing. The people knew this was a man of God. If somebody had mentioned the name of Elijah to them, they would answer without hesitation, "He is a man of God. Wherever he goes, the fire of God goes. And wherever he is, there's a sense of awe. There's a sense that God goes with this man everywhere he travels. Oh, yes, Elijah is a man of God."

These people knew that Elijah spoke for the Lord. Yet, when this man of God put the question before them, "Who is it that you're going to serve?" they didn't answer. They couldn't answer.

Strangely enough, that's the way it is in many evangelical churches. A man of God will stand before the people preaching God's Word, clearly cutting between soul and spirit, and joint and marrow, and going straight to the thoughts and intentions of the heart. But the people sit and offer no response.

God's question is always the same: "Will you come back to me? Will you come to that place of remembrance?" In Elijah's case, the people answered not a word. There was no response at all. Perhaps they were hoping that the conviction would just go away. After all, they knew in their hearts that Baal was not God. That's why they could neither yield fully to the idol nor answer Elijah's question.

We may ask ourselves, "Why this mysterious silence?"

Some of God's people probably felt they had been genuinely touched at the altar of Baal. False religion does offer a certain sense of comfort. It can make you happy, make you dance, give you a sense that you're prospering, give you a sense of satisfaction. People worship false gods all over the world, and in some places they're having a lot of fun doing it.

And now these Israelites were saying in their hearts, “I know God isn’t at work through Baal. But I’ve been touched at this altar. Tell me, Elijah, why should I leave this to go with you? Come on, all these other prophets can’t be wrong. There are 850 of them, and you’re only one man, one voice.”

I’ve heard this same claim so many times from Christians. Over the years, I’ve tried to counsel people who have been involved in ludicrous things, foolish things, all in the name of Jesus Christ. I’ve tried to open the Bible and show them their error straight from God’s Word, but they merely push it away. Their response is always the same: “But you don’t understand. I’ve been touched there.”

Yet, inwardly, they know differently. Their hesitation always tells me something. I always know, for example, when a person is involved with adultery or fornication. When I see a man I’ve been counseling who’s with a woman, I ask, “Is this your wife?” He hesitates before he answers me. He wishes she were his wife, because he has found someone whom he thinks will meet all his needs. But she’s not his wife. He may answer me, “Well, yes, we’re married.” But his real answer is in his hesitation. It gives away his heart.

Jeremiah, a prophet of his day, cried out to God with a deep burden in his heart. He thundered to God’s people a word that came from heaven:

“But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone” (Jeremiah 5:23).

The word for gone in Hebrew means they’ve already left in their heart. Now, the people are standing there listening to Jeremiah. But the Lord is whispering to the prophet, “They’re already gone from me, Jeremiah. They may be looking straight at you as you preach to them, but they’re gone.”

That is a tragedy, because this same scene has repeated itself throughout history. There are many people today who call themselves by the name of Christ but who are gone. They left Jesus long ago in their hearts, and now they know little or nothing about him. They know that what they’re pursuing isn’t God. Yet, in their hearts, they’ve left the one they know is real.

”Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God...”

They no longer have any desire to fear the Lord. They claim, “That’s so old-fashioned. It’s ‘old school.’ It’s long-ago Pentecost in America. We’re of the new generation now. There’s a new thing happening in our midst. We serve a different God.” The truth is, they’re already gone. They no longer say, “Let us now fear the LORD our God...”

We simply don’t want the fear of the Lord. We don’t even want to talk about it. Instead, we want to be able to come to the altar, have sensual worship and practice immorality. We don’t want any fear of God in our lives whatsoever.

Here’s the rest of the verse: “...Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these things.”

There was a deep dividedness in these people’s hearts. They wouldn’t lay down their idolatry. And because they wouldn’t lay it down, it took away all their desire to fear the Lord.

A divided heart will take from you your desire for God. It’s like a barrel full of oil with a hole drilled in the bottom. It takes a while for the oil to drain, but eventually it will all go. If your heart is divided, then all your desire for the Lord, as well as all your discernment, will go.

“...and your sins have withholden good things from you.”

We’re coming now to the key to this passage. It starts in verse 26:

“For among my people are found wicked men: they lay in wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men.”

I can hear this thundering cry of Jeremiah. If only the church of his day would have awakened to see that they were being warned. They were being given a direct word from God, that wicked men lay in wait for them.

These wicked men Jeremiah refers to are like somebody who wants to snare a rabbit. They hide in the bushes and set a trap for the unsuspecting animal. Such men set snares for those who aren’t yielded to God, who are still living by unbridled lusts. These wicked men know that God’s people, in the very depths of their souls, aren’t yielded to the Lord, but rather are halting between two opinions.

”As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich.”

Here is one sure warning sign of such deceitful men: they are always focused on money. They’re always talking about it and coming up with new gimmicks to get it. Jeremiah is saying, “These are dirty birds in a dirty house. They become rich by deceiving the people. They may become great in the eyes of men, but not in the sight of God.”

“They are waxen fat, they shine...”

According to Jeremiah, you can tell these wicked men by their glossy advertisements of themselves. They shine in their appearance.

If you read some of today’s Christian magazines, especially the charismatic ones, you’ll know what Jeremiah is talking about. You see fat, rich, shining false prophets, advertising for themselves. These men are permeating the church of Jesus Christ today. And they’re “dirty birds in a dirty house,” filling God’s house with filth.

“...they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.”

They care nothing about the pleas of those who are in genuine spiritual need. The only ones they care about are themselves.

The Lord then speaks through Jeremiah:

“Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means...”

This last phrase, “by their means,” signifies natural strength. These shepherds are preaching a gospel of self-reliance, of natural power. They know nothing of the covenant-keeping power of God. They know nothing of the surrendered life, or the exchanged life, as it’s also called. They know nothing about the Holy Spirit coming to enable a man or woman to live for God. That isn’t the focus of these teachers’ message.

Then, the Lord says, through Jeremiah, “...and my people love to have it so...”

I've been dumbfounded in the last several years to see the absolute foolishness that has permeated the church of Jesus Christ in North America. Yet the people love these foolish things. They're being led down a garden path to hell, but they love it.

"...and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

The word "end" in Hebrew means in the last days. God is asking, in other words, "What will you do? You've been led into the gospel of natural strength. So, what will you do when all hell breaks out on the face of the earth? What will you do when the last days come upon you?"

Let's turn back to 1 Kings 18.

"Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD..." (18:22).

We know Elijah wasn't completely correct in saying this. Scripture reveals there were 7,000 others who hadn't bowed their knee to success and prosperity.

"...but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks (two sacrifices); and let them choose one bullock (choose your sacrifice) for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God."

Now, that fire is not what you might think it is. Fire isn't a feeling. It isn't a presence. It's not a tingling, or some sensory experience. Elijah is talking about something else here. We'll come back to the subject of this fire later.

"And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken."

The people answered Elijah, "That's a good idea. We'll lay out our sacrifices. And whichever god answers by fire is the one we'll know is the true God."

"And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many."

Elijah was saying, in other words, "You choose your sacrifice and prepare it first. Yours is a quicker work than mine. It will take no time at all. But put no fire under it. Then call on the name of your gods to consume your sacrifice."

What kind of the false sacrifice is there today that this passage might be referring to? It could be, for example, relying on a church survey to determine what people want when they come to God's house. Or, it might be purchasing a building by arranging for corporate financing. The corporate world isn't offended by your gospel, so they'll buy into your plan readily. In fact, the unsaved can be very comfortable in your church, because they can prosper and live immoral lives, yet never be challenged by God's Word. This is the "quick work" Elijah is referring to.

Yet, that which isn't of God can never have a durable foundation. This is true not only in the church, but also in the life of the individual Christian. We don't grow as Christians merely by listening to one teaching tape after another, or by running from one sensory experience to another. Rather, there should be a slow building process going on. And it all must take place on the cornerstone that is Christ. Jesus says we must fall on that cornerstone and be broken on it. If our walls go up on something other than that foundational cornerstone, they'll go up

crookedly. We may start by being only one degree off, but by the time we're nearer to the top, our whole structure will topple over.

This is why so many churches seem to rise up so fast and go so high. But if you look at them 15 or 20 years down they road, they've left a trail of disillusioned people and an empty building.

At this point, the prophets of Baal began to try calling down the presence of God:

"And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made."

Every man took his turn to leave his sacrifice on the altar. Perhaps this was meant as a display for the other prophets of Baal: "Look how holy I am. God's going to answer me. Look at my dedication to God." That's what is in the hearts of false prophets who don't know God: "Look at me."

For a brief moment, while they were on top of the altar, they shined. Then they either jumped off or were knocked off, and the next person took his turn to leap on the altar. All of them were calling out to a god that didn't exist.

"And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them."

These prophets were cutting themselves only superficially, and crying aloud, "Look at this." But the Bible says God's Word is "quick and powerful"; it doesn't produce small, superficial cuts in us. It goes straight into our soul, spirit, bone and marrow, straight to the thoughts and intents of the heart. God's Word is a two-edged sword, a very sharp one, and it cuts very deep. Those who truly love God know that his Word comes to us as a surgeon's knife. It removes the cancerous nature from us and replaces it with God's own nature. This type of change doesn't happen merely because we come to an altar. It happens because we agree with what God's Word says, and we trust Him for the power to change.

I believe these false prophets were sincere. They truly believed in what they were doing. But it's not enough to be moved by sincerity; there's got to be truth behind what you preach. It doesn't matter how sincere any person is. What he preaches must be the truth. It has to touch our hearts and convict our lives.

"And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded."

The prophets worked themselves into a position of exhaustion. It wasn't enough for them to leap on the altar. Now they began to prophesy.

The Hebrew word for prophesied here is "naba." It can mean to speak or sing as a prophet by divine power. The word has a positive application, but in this instance it is negative. It means to rave, to play the madman, to act insane through agitated, spasmodic bodily movements. In other words, these prophets were acting abnormally. They were shaking spasmodically, a trait that is always applied to false prophets.

1 Samuel 18 show us what happens to a man who knows God but walks away from him and yet continues to lead God's people.

The Bible tells us that Saul was anointed by God to lead his people. At that time in Saul's life, the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied. Saul was turned into a different man by God's Spirit, and he began to lead the Lord's people.

Saul had every chance that you and I have today. But there was a stubbornness in his heart, and he was unwilling to yield himself wholly to God's Word. That's why the prophet Samuel wept for Saul for quite a long time, even after God had rejected Saul. Finally, God told Samuel to stop weeping for Saul, because he had chosen another man, one who was after the Lord's own heart.

In 1 Samuel 18:10, we find Saul sitting as Israel's king, the leader over God's people.

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul..."

I'm not going to get into the theology regarding whether God literally sent an evil spirit on Saul. But I can say with confidence that God allowed this evil spirit to come upon Saul's life.

"...on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house..."

Here's Saul prophesying, yet an evil spirit is upon him. The Hebrew term "naba" is used again for the word prophesied. This time it means to rave or act insane through agitated, spasmodic movements, as applied to false prophets.

"an evil spirit came upon him and he prophesied in the midst of the house and David played with his hand..."

In this scene, Saul is prophesying, while David is simply worshipping God. Then we read:

"...and there was a javelin in Saul's hand."

This is very significant. David was worshipping God, and Saul was prophesying. The whole scene looks holy. If you were to walk in, you would think, "The Lord's presence is here. There's a man worshipping over there, and there's another man prophesying over there."

Now, just because Saul was visited by an evil spirit doesn't mean that what he was saying was necessarily wrong. Yet there was something in Saul's prophesying that the undiscerning eye couldn't see. The man who was prophesying was full of rebellion. He was filled with envy, self-ambition and hatred. He hated the true anointing and worship of the Lord. And the reason there's a javelin in his hand is because Saul could never surrender his own life completely to God.

There sat Saul prophesying, looking so holy. Yet he was looking to kill the anointed of God, David. In this scene, we see the true that exposes the false.

Now let's go back to 1 Kings 18:

"And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob..." (30-31).

At this time, Israel was split into two kingdoms. God was saying, "If this is truly my altar, then there is no division here. There is no separation between black and white and brown and red and yellow. If it's the place where I'm going to send my fire and my presence, then there is no division here."

The fact that Elijah took twelve stones is very significant. It's a virtual slap in the face for those who are constantly saying, "We're on the righteous side, and they're on the unrighteous side. There are wrongs between us. We have a history that goes back a long way. We're all here, but we're divided."

"...and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed."

I did some research on this trench and found out it was about three feet wide, encircling the altar. Thirty-six inches makes for quite a trench. It must have taken Elijah some time to dig. Then, afterward, he had to rebuild the altar with the proper number of stones. Yet he was in no rush. (That's why he had told the Baal prophets, "You go ahead. Do your sacrifices, because they're a quick thing. What I'm going to build will take a while.")

"And he put the wood in order..."

At the center of all Christianity is some wood that has to be dealt with. It's wood that God himself planted on a hill called Calvary, some 2,000 years ago. And on that wood the Lord laid a sacrifice.

How we view that wood, that sacrifice, determines whether or not we'll ever grow as Christians. If we begin to comprehend what was done there, to lay hold by faith of the complete, absolute victory that was won for us on Calvary and trust the Holy Spirit, he will make it a reality in our lives.

"He put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood."

The apostle Paul tells us we are to present our lives as a living sacrifice. Once we get back to the cross - that is, we yield our lives to the purposes of God - we can say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ." That means our will, our plans, our ambitions, all are crucified. "Nevertheless I live, and yet not I but Christ lives in me."

Paul goes on to say, "I live this life by faith in what Christ did for me." In other words, "This is the source of my life: I have come to Christ." God has taken Paul and put his life on the cross, and now Paul is dead. Yet Paul lives because he has faith in what was purchased for him on Calvary. And he trusts God to give him the life that he promised him.

There comes a time when we all have to lay down our lives for the purposes of God. Being a Christian isn't just a Sunday School picnic. It's not an invitation to have continuous good times. It's a war for the souls of men.

Elijah instructed, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood." When they had done this, he told them, "Do it again a second time." When they were finished, he said, "Do it again a third time," and they did it again.

This whole process reflects the person who has yielded his life fully to God. The truly yielded person lays down his life for the purposes of God. He tells the Lord, "Cut me into pieces if you have to. I don't mean little superficial scratches, Lord, with a bit of oozing blood, to give those around me a sense I'm holy. Cut me deeply. Go to the core of who I am without you, and remove it from my life. Pour water on it, and then, when you've done that, do it again and again."

That is the continuous cry of every genuine Christian: "Do it again, God. Every time you reveal something that's in me, and I get free of it, a new sense of life comes into me."

"And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water."

The sacrifice was soaked. This represents our being soaked in the Word of God. If you've been soaked in God's Word over time, then you've grown in your discernment of the truth. Now when the false comes, you know it to be false. You know the difference between the false and the real, because you've been soaked in the Scriptures.

“And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near...”

Elijah came as near as he could to the altar. After all, there was a three-foot trench of water round about it, and that trench was full. Note that the prophets of Baal publicly leaped on the altar; they wanted to be seen as God's men of the hour, anointed servants of the Lord. But Elijah backed away from the altar, technically speaking. He came as near as he could to the altar, but his nearness wasn't about the altar; it was about being near to God. Elijah drew near to the Lord, but he was careful to back away from the altar. If he had been at the altar when the fire came, he would have been consumed.

I believe this is a litmus test for any man or woman of God. Such servants will back away, or distance themselves, from the glory of God. They won't touch it. And they won't allow others to praise them. The only praise they look for comes not from man but from God. And the glory they seek isn't for themselves, but the kind that changes others - that is, the glory of God himself.

“Elijah came near and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God and that thou hast turned their heart back again.”

Here is the cry of a genuine man of God. Elijah is saying, “I'm here for one reason only. I've come to present to God my sacrifice - my life, my works, everything he has put into my hands to do - that his people may know he is God, and turn their hearts back to him.”

The genuine servant of God lives for no other reason. His purpose in life is to turn the people of God back to the Lord. He seeks to bring the true presence of God into the church, and to the false turned aside.

“Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.”

The writer of Hebrews says, “Our God is a consuming fire.” If you've been in the presence of God, then a consuming work is going on in your life. What's old is being consumed by the presence of God, and it's passing away. And all things are becoming new. You're being changed as you behold the Lord, even through a glass. In other words, even if you don't see him, you're still being changed. How? You're looking in the right direction, and the Spirit is changing you from image to image and glory to glory.

May we all be able to stand before heaven and say, “I asked God to come and do a work in my life. I asked Him to change me. And the fire of God came. He is consuming everything out of my life that offends His nature and the working of His kingdom.”

“...and the wood, and the stones, and the dust...”

The Hebrew word for dust here is “aphar,” meaning dry earth. In other words, the fire of God comes and consumes the dry earth in our lives - that is, our powerlessness, or our lack of God's presence. Don't forget what we were created from: the very dust of the ground. When the fire of God comes into your life, he consumes your fear that God isn't at work in you. Then you become aware that you have the power of Almighty God residing in you. “Aphar” also means a fine dust blown by the wind. When God comes into our lives with his true fire, he consumes that part of us that has a tendency to be blown about by the wind.

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul tells us:

“He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers...”

Paul is speaking of God’s servants to the church. And here is their purpose:

“...for the perfecting of the saints...”

They’re meant to bring everyone into a position where they are yielded to the Lord and have found his will and purpose for their life.

“... for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

The word sleight here is like a magician’s sleight-of-hand. When God’s fire comes, it consumes the “aphar,” or dry earth, meaning that fine dust that’s so easily blown about by the wind. You see, once you’ve known the real, then you know the phony thing that comes in with the blowing wind.

“Aphar” also means the grave. The fire of God consumes the grave, that is, the curse of death. It consumes our inability to be changed or be raised from the dead.

In addition, “aphar” means the world. The fire of God consumes the world in us. It removes our association with the world from our hearts.

Finally, apha means gold dust. By definition, this means “that which appears to be God but is not.” The fire of God consumes that which appears to be the Lord but is not.

Several years ago, a particular gospel landed on the southern shores of the United States.

This new gospel was one of laughter, of jokes, of foolishness. I remember witnessing it not long after it began. I told my wife, “Well, at least it doesn’t take any discernment to see that this is absolute lunacy.”

Much to my shock, this gospel swept almost the whole western world. It invaded great corners of the charismatic and Pentecostal church. I remember crying out to God, “How could this be, Lord? How could such a thing happen to your church?”

The fact is, we’ve forgotten something. Here we are in New York, where the twin towers have come down, and the Pentagon has been attacked. We can rightfully say the walls have come down, and the justice of God is touching a nation that has rejected truth. But we forget that judgment begins in the house of God.

The arrival of this false gospel was the judgment of God on a slumbering church. The church has wanted prosperity and security. It has wanted no cross, no strong Word, no repentance, no cutting to the core, no living water. It has wanted only to feel good.

As I saw this false gospel taking hold, I prayed, “Mighty God, you’ve got to come again. Your people have been captured. They’ve been taken captive by Baal.”

“When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.”

Obviously, we’re not called to physically harm anybody in our generation. If anyone ever makes that suggestion, you can know it’s not the gospel of Jesus Christ. It has nothing to do with the kingdom of God.

The Hebrew word for escape in this passage means “smooth.” In other words, “Let them not slip away. They’ve been exposed. So now you know what they really are, because you’ve seen the true presence of God. Now, don’t let them slip away. Don’t let them keep deceiving you with their smoothness anymore. Get away from their altars. Take them to the brook, so to speak, and put an end to their influence over your life.”

Here is the message: “Get away from their altars. Run for your life!”

2 Corinthians 6:16-18:

“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as the God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

The unclean thing here isn’t homosexuality or pornography. Paul is referring to unclean altars, the table of devils. When he says, “Come out from among them,” he’s telling us, “Run for your life! This isn’t just about some erroneous theology or a conflicting viewpoint. Your very life is at stake!”

My mind is forever branded with a story I heard about police officers from the city of New York. As people were fleeing from the crumbling buildings, police officers and firemen and others were running toward the building, saying, “Run for your life!” They did this at their own peril. In fact, in some cases I believe they knew they were going to die. But they had a sense of duty.

After hearing this, I cried out to the Lord, “Oh, Jesus, don’t let my sense of duty for your kingdom be less than the one these beloved firemen and policemen had for the people they saw dying in a falling tower.”

We live in a generation when truth has fallen in the streets. I want to be among those not running away from the conflict, but running into it, crying, “Run for your life!” I want to say, “Run from gospels that focus only on success and prosperity. Run from those that use the name of Jesus Christ only for personal gain. Run from those that are picking your pocket in the name of Jesus. Run!”

Run from gospels that focus only on self-improvement, or on three steps to a better personality. Run from churches where men and not Christ are glorified. Run, get out of that place!

Run from churches in America and Canada where there is no Bible, no cross, no searching Word, no repentance from sin. Run when there’s no mention of the blood of Jesus. It’s an unclean place, so run!

Run from churches where the worship leaves you cold, where there’s no sense of God’s presence, because they don’t know God. Run!

Run from churches where you’re comfortable in your sin. If you enter God’s house with sin in your life, but you’re not convicted of it, you’re sitting at a table of devils. Run!

Run from pulpits that are filled with politically driven men who use the pulpit of God for a personal agenda. Run!

Run from those who preach division between races and cultures. Run! Get out! They know nothing of God.

Run from ungodly, spasmodic movements and endless empty prophesying. Run for your life!

Run from preachers who tell only stories and jokes. Run like you've never run before. Run from those who use one gimmick after another to get your money. Run!

Go now to Proverbs 7:6-8:

“For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, Passing through the street through her corner: and he went the way to her house.”

This passage has a physical application. But there's also a deeper, spiritual meaning here. I've always believed the woman spoken about in Proverbs 5 and 7 represents false religion.

“In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.”

The word for harlot in the Hebrew here means adultery or apostasy. A woman appeared clothed as an apostate. And subtil of heart means intelligent. In other words, she was presenting an intelligent argument to a very simple young man who had little knowledge of God.

“She is loud and stubborn...”

The word for stubborn in Hebrew means morally apostate, restless, having a lack of stability, as an untamed cow that will not carry its master's yoke. In other words, such a person is loud, morally apostate, restless, lacking stability, an untamed cow. This woman will not be yoked by her master.

“And her feet abide not in her house: Now she is without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner. So she caught him and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings wit me: this day have I paid my vows.”

She's saying here, “I'm a spiritual person. I have peace offerings, and I've paid my vows.”

“Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.”

This woman represents the person who claims, “I have revelation that nobody else has. Oh wait a minute, what's that, Lord? Speak to me now, oh God. What are you saying?”

Don't laugh. This very thing can be seen on television right now. But in reality, it's an altar of devils.

“I came to diligently seek your face and I found you. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt.”

She's saying, “There are wonderful things here. I've got provisions you won't find anywhere else.”

“I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.”

Myrrh was the burial spice of Jesus, incidentally. In other words, "I'm as close as I can be to being like Christ. It smells good in there. There's a sense of worship."

"Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the good man is not at home, he is gone a long journey: He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed."

She's telling her prey, "He's not coming back soon, so don't worry about it."

"With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks: Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

She goes after his very life. The word for life in Hebrew here means "breath, soul, spirit and mind." She's after the breath of God, that which the Lord wants to do in his life. She wants to rob him of it.

I close with Proverbs 5:3.

"For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil."

The Hebrew word for woman here is interesting. It means deviating. That is, "crooked, straying from the path" of truth.

Some of these prosperity and foolishness preachers are exactly this. They appear as smooth as oil, promising sweetness, but in reality they are devils. They know absolutely nothing about God.

"But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death: her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life (which is God's way), her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them."

She's like a serpent. You begin to think you're focusing on something that doesn't sound right, but then she quickly moves this way or that, switching directions. She just keeps moving. When you think you're getting close to what's bothering you, she moves. Her ways are moveable.

This is God speaking now:

"Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: Lest strangers be filled with they wealth: and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed."

Consumed here means overpowered by lust, sensuality, a false understanding of God. This is a different kind of consuming. It's a consuming that happens not by the power of God.

"And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly."

Perhaps this is said too late, before the throne of God: “How I hated instruction. What a fool I’ve been. How I despised a reproving word from God that was sent only to give me life, eternal and abundant. I didn’t heed the Word as it was instructed to me by those who spoke from God.”

“Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.”

God says, “If you will come to me in truth, out of your belly will flow rivers of living water. I will teach you how to dig your own well. I will open your eyes and lead you into truth. Drink waters out of the well of truth I’m going to give you.”

The Lord then tells us this water is not just for us:

“Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers’ with thee.”

God says, “I’m not going to give you water just to drink. I’m going to give you so much, it’s going to overflow and be dispersed. Everywhere you go, you’re going to know me, from the least to the greatest of you. You’re going to know the true fire of God.”

I’ve known many great men of God, and there’s one thing in common with all such men: they dug their own well. By God’s grace, a spring of water came in. They were not trying to spare the rod in their own lives. They said, “God, cut me. Cut me deeply, then wash me with your Word.” They laid their life down on the altar, saying, “Use me for your glory.”

“Let them be only thine own, and not strangers with thee.”

The Lord says, “Let the water you drink be the water I gave you. Let it not be from strangers.”

“Let thy fountain be blessed; and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.”

Finally, rejoice in your first relationship. “I’m your first love, so rejoice with me,” the Lord says. “Let me fill you again. Let me touch you again, build your life again. I loved you before you loved me. Come back and rejoice in my love.”

Oh God, don’t let the heathen rule over your house. Deliver your church. Deliver those who have been genuinely called by you. Holy Spirit, go after this generation of apostates. Draw those people who have turned to false altars. Let them testify again, “The Lord is God. The Lord is God.”

And let your true, holy fire come and consume our hearts and lives.

Carter Conlon - September 16, 2001