



In this issue:

Our Calling p. 1

Apostasy p. 2

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ p. 5

My Last Word for the Congregation p. 6

Our Calling

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.’” 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

We are continuing in this issue to present articles submitted on the subject of Last Words. If you knew this was the last sermon, the last article, the last letter that you would write, what would you say?

Bruce Langham considers our temptation to wind up in apostasy, as described in Hebrews chapter 6. Could we unwittingly be guilty of renouncing our faith? Are we on the verge of defection? King Saul returned from Amalek declaring that he had done the will of God. Was he self-deceived, or was he trying to convince Samuel that it was really the people who were at fault? Could we unknowingly slip into an apostate state due to the tremendous pressures of our own culture?

John Johnson asks us to consider why many of us strive to learn our trade more than we study to learn what God's word says about how we are to live our lives? There are some similar themes underlying these questions. Are we being swept up in our culture and the temptation to be more concerned with our financial future than we are in the future of our soul? We are called to press toward the mark of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

M. Samson, from Mumbai, India, writes a final letter to the congregation in which he reminds us that we have been called not only to believe in Jesus but also to suffer with him. Do we want to build up the body of Christ? Are we willing to live for him?

In each of these articles we see different aspects of our calling in Christ Jesus. No flesh should try to glory in his presence, but we should strive to glory in the Lord!

...lsg



Apostasy

Sometimes events happen to me to for no apparent reason, and make me think, “What’s up with that?” So, I try to reason them out and if that does not work, I write these thoughts out which I have in my head. Sometimes I find writing things out are better than thinking about them. It helps me to concentrate better on the situation.

I was listening to a sermon on Hebrews 6:4-6. The King James version of these 3 verses reads: “4. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, 5. And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, 6. If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

Whoever was the writer of the book of Hebrews was hitting upon a subject I have grown interested in. This subject is apostasy. I have heard the word used but I did not know what it meant. So, I decided to go get a definition for apostasy. It means renunciation of a religious faith or the abandonment of a previous loyalty: defection. I then looked up that word defection. It means conscious abandonment of allegiance or duty (as to a person, cause, or doctrine). Interesting!

A few days later, I was surfing the internet and I saw that Robbie Coltrane had been hospitalized here in the states for flu like symptoms. I then saw that Geraldine McEwan had died in England. She played Mrs. Marple for a while and then was in another television series I liked called Mulberry. So, I started to wonder, since my wife is from England, what famous people came from her area of the country. Not that these people did, just got me thinking about it because my wife is very proud of her area of England. I did a search and found out all sorts of famous people had come from my wife's part of the country. I saw that Cary Grant was from her area of the world, and Sir Arthur Harris who was in the charge of the RAF in WWII. I then saw the name John Keble from her hometown. Sound familiar to you? Well there is a song that we sing called Sun of My Soul that he wrote. He was an English churchman and poet.

Something else he did though, was write a sermon about National Apostasy, which he presented on July 14, 1883.

I read this sermon and was amazed at what was going on in England during this time frame and what appears to have been going on in this country now for a while. The text of this sermon came from 1 Sam 12:23 which reads: “23. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:” Perhaps I should mention that this was the time that the children of Israel had asked Samuel for a King. They wanted to be just like everyone else. The prophet Samuel was not impressed; but God allowed it, and this is how we get King Saul.

To help with context, we read in 1 Sam 12, starting with verse 5:

“5. And he said unto them, ‘The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand.’ And they answered, ‘He is witness.’ 6. And Samuel said unto the people, ‘It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. 7. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers. 8. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. 9. And when they forgot the Lord their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. 10. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, “We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee.” 11. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. 12. And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, “Nay; but a king shall reign over us:” when the Lord your God was

your king. 13. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers. 16. Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. 17. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king.' 18. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. 19. And all the people said unto Samuel, "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king." 20. And Samuel said unto the people, 'Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; 21. And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. 22. For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. 23. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: 24. Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. 25. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.'"

So, the children of Israel get a king, and he reigns, and then we fast forward to the battle with the Amalekites and the King of Ammon, Agag. The Lord told Saul to wipe them out completely. This was not done.

Again, we read in 1 Sam 15:18-26:

"18. And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.' 19. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord? 20. And Saul said

unto Samuel, 'Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal.' 22. And Samuel said, 'Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.' 24. And Saul said unto Samuel, 'I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and

What happens when we turn our loyalty and defect over to the will of man ...

obeyed their voice. 25. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord.' 26. And Samuel said unto Saul, 'I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.'"

If we look at verse 24, and see what Saul said to Samuel, "because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice," we see here the face of apostasy. Things may be done for what may seem to be the right reasons at the time, but it is still the abandonment of loyalty to God. I also ask you to look at what happened to Saul in verse 26. The Lord hath rejected thee!

We initially started with Hebrews 6:4-6. Look at the first words of verse 4. It is impossible. Does this sound familiar to what we just read from Samuel? The Lord hath rejected thee from being King over Israel. From God, to Samuel to Saul. No muss, no fuss, no jury, no nothing. Saul was rejected and he knew it. No way back.

So why all this history lesson for just 3 verses in Hebrews? We today have been blessed to live, like in England, in a free society. We can pretty much do and say what we want in this country and the freedoms we have will protect us. We also have the choice of being religious or not. Again, a free-

dom we enjoy. If we read the Bible, which I hope we do, we are commanded to obey the laws of man and more importantly the commandments of God. Yet there seems to be this underlying problem with all of this. What happens when we turn our loyalty and defect over to the will of man rather than the will or written word of God? Are we a Christian nation? President Obama did not think so (which is a subject for another time), and I believe this as well, our enemies do not think so either. While our laws are founded upon religious principles and truth, how can we take this Bible and defend some of the laws which have passed? We all should be able to determine the laws which we know are inconsistent with the word of God. Like Saul, it started with fear of the people and obeying their voice. Some of us may be thinking right now, the people elect the Congress, so are we at fault then? If this is what we are thinking, then perhaps we can see now why I am talking about this subject. We get the government we elect. If we have defected to a cause or a belief or a doctrine, then maybe we need to look at ourselves.

In the truest sense of the word, apostasy is reigning in our land. We have churches which stand for the love of our savior Jesus Christ, that he is risen from the dead and one day will return to take his children home with him. It is in my mind, the bastion of common sense and the "gospel" as we know it. If we follow God's word, then his promises and his word would have such an effect as making the world as we know it now, a wonderment to us all. A world that we could look at through history and determine, why didn't we think of this years ago? Since we did not, we have serious problems! But since I cannot take the world on from a pulpit and just one sermon, how does this word affect us here in the church today? Good question!

Apostasy is a deadly sin. One could say, without a shadow of a doubt, it is the unpardonable sin. We sing a song. "Shall I crucify my savior? Crucify my Lord again? Once oh once I crucified him, shall I crucify again?" Well apostasy seems to make that song in a way, null and void. We can crucify him again but if we do, woe is us. Verse 6 of Hebrews says: "If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame." Having said this, it would seem the first step in this process is to fall away. Well how do we do that? How do we fall away? What stands between us and the Lord? Does family,

friends, work, school? What else out there affects whether we attend church or not? And if it does not affect our attendance, what would? What would have to happen for us to turn our back on Christ and leave his church for good? For some it is a lack of knowledge on who we are here to worship. If we are here to praise God and we do not praise God while we are here, why not? What has changed? Apostasy is not like the flu so that one day you are healthy and three hours later you are sick as a dog. We refer again to a few verses in Hebrews 6: "...for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, 5. And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,...."

To do these things, we would have to be pretty

How do we fall away? What stands between us and the Lord?

invested in what was going on with the church. Did the church change or did we change? Any excuse we come up with basically boils back down to choices we make. Whether we like someone or not is not a reason. I am pretty sure when it comes to the day of judgement, that liking me or disliking me is not going to make a bit of difference. What will make a difference is our life in Christ.

With all of this in the balance, do we understand why this subject is important? Falling away is like rust on our car. Chances are it was not there when we bought it. But if it was, it will only get worse until we do something about it, while we still can. Verse 6 says they fall away. Well, how far do we have to go to fall? Ever have that feeling in bed when it seems you are falling, and you jerk fully awake? How far did you fall? Chances are maybe an inch and your body woke up to catch you from hurting yourself. Is this lesson different? How far are we going to go before we catch ourselves and determine, enough is enough?

I hope this helps us to think more about our Christian life and the apostasy in this life which can surround us.

Bruce Langham
Fort Smith, AR

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I believe that we are living in the last days according to Paul's letter (2 Tim. 3). We certainly do not know the day or the hour, as Christ said (Matt. 24:36). We also do not know our final day or hour of life, so if I had to write a last letter of encouragement to the Lord's people, this is what I would write.

If you believe in a young earth (6000 yrs.), as I do, then let us look at a timeline. If not, look at what timeline you believe. Our lives form one small dot on that line. The timeline itself represents far less than the human mind can conceive in eternity.

My point is this: Why do many of us spend our income years preparing for what few years we may have left in order to have the best possible financial situation we can possibly have in our last remaining years? And why do many of us strive to learn our trade more than we study to learn what God's word says about how we are to live our lives? Might it have something to do with our trust in God's promise to supply our every need (Phil. 4:19)? And why are more and more Christians' lives reflecting the secular world striving to entertain ourselves more and more and having more and more things? I know we have to prepare for lean times and we have to prepare our children for adulthood with education and a certain amount of good entertainment is okay, but we need to be careful not to fall into Satan's pitfall of greed (Matt.6:19). I know it is hard sometimes to know what to budget for needs as opposed to our giving to the work of God, or dividing our time between study of God's Word, prayer and the everyday activities such as work and entertainment. Maybe I am the minority here, but I feel like I sometimes have a lot of trouble in this area of life, and I do not think I am alone.

Having said all the above, I would encourage all my Brothers and Sisters in Christ to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). For God has called His people who are called by His name (2 Chronicles 7:14), not the unsaved, to obey Him. We need not be obsessed with the world's affairs or to fear things as the world does, like the Corona virus.

I would encourage each of you (myself included)

to study to show yourself approved (2 Tim. 2:15) and to be faithful to the assembly (Heb. 10:25) and we must not forget the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19). Remember what Ecclesiastes 12:13 says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

Your Brother in Christ,

John Johnson
El Dorado, AR

Why do many of us spend our income years preparing for what few years we may have left in order to have the best possible financial situation we can possibly have in our last remaining years?

My Last Word for the Congregation

Praise the Lord! Thanks to the Lord and greetings to the congregation in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us think for ourselves, "What is our role in Christ, in the church?"

My dearest brothers and sisters, according to the scripture in Philippians 1:29, "For unto you it is given for Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him."

As Paul says to the Philippian Church through the scripture, the Holy Spirit reminds us all today that because of Christ this grace was given to us that not only we believe in Him but we also must suffer for Him. Everyone has faith in Jesus even the devil has it, but it is God's grace that we also suffer for Him. As it is written in the book of 1 Corinthians 12:12: "For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ." There are different parts in the body, but we all belong to only one body. Jesus Christ is our head, and we all are the members of the body of Christ.

In Ephesians 4:15 we read, "But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ." As we grow in the physical body, so we must grow in the Lord. God has told us that walking truthfully in Love, we must grow in all things. Are we moving in love and truth? Are we loving each other as our Christ loved us? Jesus Christ is the truth. Are we telling the truth in the church? Philippians 4:8-9 says, "For the rest, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things. The things which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, these do ye, and the God of peace shall be with you."

Paul exhorted believers to always set your minds on the things that are excellent. Finally, Paul says brother's whatever is TRUE, NOBLE, RIGHT, PURE, LOVELY, ADMIRABLE, if anything is Excellent or Praiseworthy think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me put it into PRACTICE.

Then the God of peace will be with you. While following all these things we must face difficult situations. When Jesus was walking according to the Father's will He also faced many difficulties. According to the gospel in John 18:11, Jesus says that the cup which the Father has given shall I not drink? Jesus drank, suffered, and died on the cross of Calvary. We also are called to suffer for God and to walk in the path of the truth.

In Ephesians 5:1-2 Paul says that our calling is to IMITATE God (Jesus) and walk in LOVE; there can be no higher calling than that. As dearly loved children of God we should be imitators of Jesus, and we should live a life of LOVE, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

For example, we as an individual or as a Church should live such a life as our Lord and Savior Je-

Everyone has faith in Jesus even the devil has it, but it is God's grace that we also suffer for Him.

Jesus Christ showed us to live; He set an example for us to walk in His footsteps. The Father was pleased with the life of Jesus and said in Luke 3:22, "You are my Son, whom I Love, with You I am well PLEASSED." We also read in Matthew 17:5, "This is my Son, whom I Love, with Him I am well PLEASSED. LISTEN to Him."

Now apply that to your life. Do you want to live like Jesus lived? Do you want to build the body of Christ? First, are you willing to live for Christ? Are you willing to Suffer for Christ? Are you willing to Suffer "the reproach of Christ?"

Are you willing to surrender your life fully to Christ? If anyone is ready to do this, then we can build the body of Christ. Blessings to the Congregation.

Your Brother in Christ,

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