

Newsletter October 2014

In *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity* Book II, Chapter 13.1 we began a section on the subject of *Institutional Churchianity*. Churchianity can best be defined as a corruption of Christianity in which the church itself becomes the primary object of worship exceeding any true worship of Jesus Christ. In Chapter 13.2 we discussed sacramentalism, wherein ritual baptism and the Lord's Supper became exclusive church ordinances that were elevated as the only supposed means of salvation to displace salvation by grace alone through faith alone. In following chapters, we discussed the legalization of the Lord's day through a false correlation with the Sabbath Day (cf. Newsletter, December 2013) and the legalistic observance of various other religious holidays by the temporal church. We then examined worldly methods of financing utilized by the institutional church to support its extended properties and enterprises along with the common practice of hiring paid ministers and directors to expand and manage church affairs both religious and financial.

All of this extra-biblical activity on a human scale has led to a secular institutionalization of today's temporal church, through which it has largely abandoned true biblical Christianity and the exultation of Christ in favor of a humanistic religion that exalts mankind and his accomplishments. This dense humanistic idolatry has overwhelmed them in everything that they do as their worship services increasingly become more man-centered rather than God-centered. Replacing direct expository teaching of the Bible from today's pulpits, we hear instead a sanitized version of Scripture text specifically tailored to motivate self-esteem and designed to offend no one's conscience (cf. 2Ti.4:3). Worship music has largely degenerated into a secular performance intended to satisfy the prideful nature of younger adherents, which are being taught that the church is a place to have fun – not a place of humble worship of the living God. This expanding secular evil is demonstrated in two of Jesus' parables that are commonly referred to as the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven. Although these parables are directly applicable to the broader interim kingdom of this age (cf. Newsletter March 2014), the temporal church, which is its anchor and cornerstone, is not immune to this expanding evil inasmuch as it must function within that kingdom through its imperfect human constituents.

Beginning with the parable of the mustard seed (cf. Mt.13:31,32), we find that each pod of the mustard plant is filled with thousands of tiny seeds barely visible to the naked eye, yet each tiny seed can grow into a mature plant having a great and useful purpose. In like manner, it can be said that the Christian faith began with the teachings of one humble itinerant Jewish Rabbi, who opposed the corrupt religious authority of his day, and following his death on a Roman cross, his teaching was spread by a small group of insignificant men consisting of simple fishermen, common laborers, and even a dreaded tax collector. As with a tiny mustard seed, this was not an auspicious beginning for the growth of a successful worldwide movement when viewed from a human perspective. Notwithstanding this humble beginning, true Christianity through the intensive work of the Holy Spirit rapidly grew into a mature movement yielding substantial influence through increasing numbers of redeemed men and women who each in turn widely distributed the Gospel. So effective was this divine message of peace that the expansion of Christianity soon threatened to overcome the rampant polytheism that was at the very foundation of the Roman Empire. This threat resulted in Roman persecution of Christians (cf. Book III, pages 94,95), which actually only spurred the faith to even greater heights of purity as pseudo-believers abandoned the movement to be replaced by an increasing number of genuine believers.

When through a satanically inspired act of survival the Roman Empire embraced the Christian movement to smother and gain control over it, simple Christianity became enveloped in a massive Roman political institution (cf. Book III, Chapter 17.7). Allegorically, the temporal church had grown from what was once a useful garden plant that gave sweet flavor to the Gospel into the grotesque tree of churchianity that overshadowed and choked out the true faith as it grew in size and power. The institutionalized Roman church had little patience for the propagation of the Gospel through peaceful discourse – replacing evangelism with an aggressive effort to “convert” the unregenerated masses by force if necessary. This placed believer and unbeliever alike under the powerful authority of the corrupt Roman church hierarchy, which aspired to aggrandizement. Roman institutionalized churchianity became the formidable enemy of true Christianity as it rapidly expanded into a worldwide parody of the true Visible Church (cf. Book III, Chapter 17.11).

Many would have thought that institutionalized churchianity could not have survived the powerful spiritual thrust of the Reformation Movement (cf. Book III, chapters 18.1 and 18.2) once the all-important

Pauline doctrine of the grace of God was restored to the church through various reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. However, the concurrent Renaissance movement (cf. Book III, pages 219-224) along with a strong nationalistic undercurrent motivated a parallel reform effort in Europe such that much of the false doctrines, traditions, and mysticism that should have been eradicated continued unabated within institutionalized state-sponsored churches. As later churches sprang up in the undeveloped North American continent, uninhibited by any established secular government, the biblical reform effort continued on for a short while until it first became splintered through wild experiential evangelicalism (cf. Book III, page 329) and religious liberalism, and then it once again became stagnant through strong denominational obstinance.

Mustard is not a staple food, but a condiment that is commonly added to food to enhance its flavor. Add too much, and the food becomes rancid. In like manor, enticing philosophical teaching introduced to make the Bible more attractive to the fallen masses must eventually overwhelm Truth rendering it tasteless under its enticing error. While many true Christians struggle to maintain the faith within the temporal church's secular structure, a far greater number of pseudo-believers seek a false refuge from conscience in an outward practice of religious ritual and ceremony in which sin continues to rule their lives. The temporal church is certainly not our mother such that we can look to her to provide life; Christ alone is our true salvation and certain refuge, not the great tree of the temporal church. Evil men who so frequently roost within various places of authority in the branches of the temporal church seek to live off of the fruit and flesh of the children of God. In return, they appease their great appetite for evil, by injecting enticing doctrines and delusive rituals that differ greatly from those contained in Holy Scripture – applied like a spiritual condiment to attract the unwary into the delusive web of churchianity.

Our Lord further demonstrated this expansion of secular evil within the interim kingdom and the institutionalized church on earth more directly with his parable of the leaven (cf. Mt.13:33). Leaven is always representative of expanding evil, sin, and pride when we read of it elsewhere in both the Old and New Testament (cf. Ex. 12:15; Mt.16:6; 1Co.5:8 etc.). Jesus used the word “leaven” to describe the hypocritical doctrines and legalism of the Pharisees as well as the meaningless traditionalism of the Sadducees (cf. Mt.16:11,12; Mk.8:15). Even a small amount of false teaching through committed repetition can over time fully corrupt the Truth. As Jesus demonstrated in this parable, a very small amount of evil, sin, and religious pride would be found hidden away within the interim Kingdom, where it would eventually expand to overwhelm all knowledge of Truth. Bread is leavened to improve the taste; in the same way, simple faith is being leavened in the temporal church through false teaching and delusive rituals to improve its general appeal. If leaven in bread continues on unchecked by the heat of the oven, the dough will become so corrupted that it is uneatable and must be thrown out. Likewise, a small amount of evil in the kingdom and the church will eventually expand, if unchecked by the truth of God's Word, until the church as well as the entire world becomes fully corrupted.

Today's temporal church has become greatly infested with those who are not genuine Christians, and they, not the elect, largely control those churches through their highly organized political skills. In the United States, all temporal churches must operate as a secular non-profit political organization under state control in order to maintain a tax-deductible status; this forced entanglement with human government has led to increased secularization. Many churches today are much like the first century church of Laodicea that can be seen as prophetic of the church in our times (cf. Re. 3:14-20; Book III, pages 87 and 93). They are swollen with religious pride and material wealth, but they are impoverished of the true faith that alone can give them life. Although professing to provide great insight into truth, they only perpetuate a spiritual blindness through their false teaching (cf. Mt.15:14). They are but pretentious secularized human institutions, which are lukewarm with regard to any direct association with Christ – even as He stands outside their congregation knocking at a door of obstinate political religiosity that bars his entry into their midst (cf. Re.3:20).

Conversely, church doors remain wide open to anyone else who will enter through them as visitors or curiosity seekers. In many churches official membership is being unwisely offered to all who wish to join their ranks without any serious regard to their true spiritual condition. This acceptance of the unsaved is largely motivated by the increasing need of additional finances to support a growing church institution and its worldly holdings. For that reason, it is quite rare to see a temporal church reject anyone applying for membership who appears to be sufficiently sophisticated of thought and organizational ability and/or is affluent enough to support

the church financially – as long as they are willing to go through prescribed church initiation rituals, of course. It is most unfortunate that the tradition of ritual baptism has become the *de facto* standard for admission over a valid confession and example of redeemed faith demonstrated through a regenerated lifestyle. Today, some church leaders believe they can mold unbelievers into true Christians after they become bound to them through baptism, not realizing that the converse is true; that is, the unregenerate will rapidly mold the church into an organization of their own liking. Because of widespread churchianity, many unbelievers finding the social activities of the temporal church quite pleasurable are willing to recite any written confession or endure any initiation rite to join in the socializing and merriment of a church, which they envision as being more like an exclusive religious country club. The pseudo-believer narrowly sees God as a god of love, unrestrained by his many other attributes (cf. Book I, Chapter 2.1), who would not require us to be bound by any absolute moral ethic that in any way opposes our human nature. As this radical thinking penetrates the church, we begin to hear various philosophical desecrations replacing sound biblical interpretation of Scripture from the pulpit, as more biblically conservative pastors are subverted or are replaced by their worldly congregation.

Therefore, we find that a program of popular church outreach can soon become one of world in-reach. Satan's determined strategy is that of infiltration and corruption, which is far more effective than any direct attack on the temporal church from without. The redeemed in our temporal churches must have their eyes wide open for any subtle infiltration and adoption of worldly methods within the congregation in which they reside; they must also stand firm in the doctrine of Christ with their ears to the ground for any approach of false teaching. At first, there may be no detectable changes in doctrinal teaching from the pulpit as worldliness begins to take hold in the greater congregation, but there will soon be noticeable changes in corporate worship and in various methods and procedures as the church's approach to solving problems and even toward evangelism becomes more secular in form. Instead of a critical study of Scripture text to gain correct insight to God's will and purpose for our lives, church Bible studies soon break down into mindless recitation of written creeds in various reformed churches, while in more liberal churches, everyone is encouraged to express their personal opinion about some topic of interest without sound guidance into what God is really trying to say to them in his Word. Eventually worldly humanistic applications of Bible verses and passages permanently displace true expository interpretations of the text thus negatively impacting overall church doctrine.

Even a genuine believer, who is not deeply into the study of God's Word for himself, may initially miss smaller secular incursions and could easily accept minor falsehoods for a time until the Holy Spirit reins him in through private Bible study. Therefore, the true believer in today's churches must be very careful not to neglect his own individual study of God's Word. Only individual Bible study allows the Holy Spirit to speak to us personally through his Word in the quiet place of our hearts where it can ultimately take root. Our personal understanding of all things must be consistently tested against the Word of God, and the indwelling Holy Spirit must validate the Word to our minds. To depend upon any other sources for Truth is to court disaster inasmuch as the messages from so many of our church pulpits are no longer trustworthy. The growing ignorance of major Bible doctrines by rank and file Christians has left temporal churches open to an external worldly influence that has rushed in to fill the void created by that ignorance. As a consequence, the false prophet of the antichrist already occupies many of the pulpits of today's temporal churches (cf. 1Jn.2:18).

As this newsletter is being written it is still possible to find a few conservative churches that strictly adhere to sound expository teaching of the Bible from their pulpits and make their worship services all about Christ alone. There we may find that members of the Visible Church are prominent if not altogether exclusive. Nevertheless, today's churches in general are largely made up of constituents of a secular society that do not truly know Jesus as their savior – never having undergone a spiritual rebirth from above – nor do they really care to know Him in any personal way, but only symbolically as a benevolent mascot having no real power or authority over their lives. In following monthly newsletters, we shall discuss various false doctrines and practices that have already resulted in a majority of today's temporal churches straying away from the great truths of the faith leading toward their complete secularization. This growing institutional corruption can be expected to spread until the great departure from the true faith of the last days (the final great apostasy) finally overcomes all of the temporal churches on earth (cf. Book III, pages 533ff). © Arthur J. Smith, October 2014