

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## Mediocre Christianity

### *Apostasy and Its Attributes, Part 3*

In Christ's parable of the soils, four types of people are depicted in the body of Christ.

Matthew 13:19-23, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

This parable gives us the four responses to the message of the Kingdom of God: The ignorant; the fearful; the distracted; the genuine.

Now it is tempting to trace the failure of the first three to their circumstances: Misinformation, persecution; and the cares of life. However there have been many in the body of Christ who have endured these circumstances and more, and yet have remained true to the Lord. So why ultimately — aside from the grace of God — do some remain faithful and others falter?

Our text answers this question. It details the failure of a child of God — Eli. It gives us insight not only as to why and how he failed, but also as to why we fail in our quest to walk with God.

## Kingdom Principle

As we address this ultimate cause for apostasy in the body of Christ we have seen that the soil of apostasy lies in spiritual privilege. We have found that the high places of apostasy stem from the idolatrous thoughts and action of the heart. And now we are going to focus on the catalyst or the cause of apostasy. Where this catalyst is present: there will always be a falling away. Where this catalyst is absent: the result will be fidelity in one's walk with Christ.

So, just what is this catalyst? What is the ultimate cause of apostasy?

To answer this, we first must examine a very important principle found in the Kingdom of God. Notice the text:

1 Samuel 2:30, “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; **for them that honour<sup>1</sup> me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.**”

This verse expresses an important truth that accompanies life in the Kingdom of God. It hinges on three words: honor, despise, and lightly esteemed. Let's look at each of these.

## Honor

The word *honor* is used twice here. We have seen this word quite often in our study of Scripture. In fact we saw it last week. The word is *kabad* and references that which, by virtue of its moral or ethical weight, influences an individual's thoughts, actions, or beliefs.

For example, if you are driving down the road and you see a police car and you put your foot on the brake, then from the perspective of the Bible, you are rendering “honor” to the policeman. If you feel the compulsion to wear certain clothing because “that's what everyone's wearing,” then from the perspective of the Bible, you are giving “honor” to public opinion. If you are inclined to heed one person's advice over another, then from the perspective of the Bible, you are giving “honor” to the one you listen to. This is the idea behind “honor” in the Bible. It speaks of influence, weight, or that by which you are moved or driven.

Now with this, notice the principle taught in this verse is this: If the Lord is that which influences you then — and get this — God Himself will give you weight. This means that His holiness rests heavy upon you such that you long to be holy. This means that you live in light of His sovereignty — and thus you don't complain when the traffic light turns red, you can't get it right the first time, you are inconvenienced by the world around you; but recognize that it is all from the hand of the Lord This means that His goodness is your comfort. That His mercy is your joy. That His will is your passion.

This sounds rather odd for we are not used to speaking like this. So what does this mean? To answer this we have to go back to creation. When God made us He fashioned us in His image.

Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Now as image bearers we have been endowed with certain characteristics. Paul called the Christians in Ephesus to remember this.

Ephesians 4:22-24, “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created [we could say, Recreated] in righteousness and true holiness.”

This verse implies that part of being made in the likeness of God is the possession of righteousness and

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<sup>1</sup> כָּבַד kabad

holiness — two characteristics that were lost in the fall and yet regained in Christ. Righteousness speaks of a moral blamelessness, which makes us beautiful in God's sight! Holiness speaks of being wholly dedicated to the Lord such that we want to do His will.

In other words, when God fashioned us, he made us beautiful in His eyes with an internal longing to serve Him. This is how every man, woman, and child has been made.

Colossians 3:9-10, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

This verse teaches that what was lost at the fall and yet restored through redemption is Knowledge. In the Hebrew and Greek, knowledge speaks of a love relationship with the Father in which we enjoy deep fellowship with Him.

And so not only are we beautiful in His eyes with an inward passion to serve Him but we also were created to walk with Him in intimate communion.

Such is our creation! Unlike the animal world and the rest of creation, we were fashioned to have a relationship with God. And thus amazingly we read these words:

Genesis 3:8, "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden."

God created us with the intention of walking with us! And though man fell, nevertheless God's will could not be thwarted...

Genesis 15:1, "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

## **A Friend of God**

Over 4000 years ago, the Lord approached a man by the name of Abram in order to have a relationship with him. And yet, it just wasn't with Abram that God walked. This is where all of redemption is headed. Speaking of the New Heavens and New Earth John wrote this:

Revelation 21:3, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

Brothers and sisters, do you see that we were created and redeemed so that we might have a relationship with God?

Now with this relationship naturally comes certain desires and blessings. For example, the longing to walk with God and the desire for purity, and the desire to please the Lord also come with the promise on the part of God to protect us from His and our enemies, grow us in grace, strengthen us when we are weak, comfort us when we are sorrowful, and give us peace in the midst of the storm.

And thus when we read here that God “honors those who honor Him,” we understand this to mean NOT that God will become man-centered and so exist for our glory and pleasure but that God will honor “two things.” First, He will honor the desires of our heart when it comes to our relationship with Him! He will deepen our walks with Him. He will refine us as gold. He will walk with us. He will grow us in His grace. He will strengthen us in His love. Secondly, God will honor the promises that accompany the covenantal relationship with Him. He will protect us. He will be our God; we will live as God's people. He will comfort us. He will guide us. He will lead us by the hand!

Understand that God grants this [He “honors us”] not by way of reward but by way of relationship. This is not mechanical, it is organic. It is not of merit but of cause and effect. In other words when a child walks according to his parent’s desires, seeks a relationship with them, and endeavors to honor his mother and father these acts or desires are honored not by way of reward (you hug me, I’ll hug you) but because of love. Such is God’s response to us!

That's the idea here when we read about God honoring those who honor Him. He created us with a passion to serve and walk with Himself. When we do this, God honors us by giving us more of Him!

## Despised and lightly esteemed

Now in contrast notice the next two words: “and they that despise<sup>2</sup> me. This word *despise* carries the opposite meaning of *honor*. This term is use forty-three times in the Old Testament. It does not mean to hate, but “to accord little worth to something.” Thus, this word speaks of taking another's thoughts, actions, or beliefs lightly.

Now when this occurs, while “love” may appear to be in the heart, the reality is that our actions speak of negligence and rebellion. Accordingly, the word is translated as “despise.” Now if we “despise the Lord” — if we have affection in our heart toward God and yet habitually and continually take lightly His commands; look down upon His worship; not regard Him; reject Him; and long to be filled by the passing pleasures of sin — then this passage says that we will be lightly esteemed<sup>3</sup>.

This term esteemed is a rather interesting word in the Hebrew. Used 130 times in the Bible, it is closely related to the idea of “curse” — though it falls short of this expression. To be cursed in the Bible is to lose the blessings that accompany a relationship with God. Here the word is esteemed and references the practical effects of losing the blessings of God, and thus could be translated as “slightness” or “of being of no consequence when it comes to the things of the Lord” or “of being light, wispy, or airy.”

And so, to be “lightly esteemed” is to be bereft of the benefits of the covenant. To be “lightly esteemed” is to fail to know and enjoy the blessings of a relationship with God.

When we read “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse<sup>4</sup> him that curseth<sup>5</sup> thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”

In other words, the one who seeks to make you light — who desires for you not to know and enjoy the blessings of the covenant — I will place him in that state! This is Jacob’s response to his mother’s

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<sup>2</sup> בָּזָה bazah

<sup>3</sup> קָלַל qalal

<sup>4</sup> אָרַר 'arar

<sup>5</sup> קָלַל qalal

encouragement to deceive Isaac.

Genesis 27:12, “My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse [literally a slightness] upon me, and not a blessing.”

To be “slight” is to be bereft of God and His blessings. Notice, it is not to be someone that God hates, rather, it is to be void of His favor — His covenantal care, protection, spiritual provision. Speaking of Judah, God said this in reference to their exile:

Jeremiah 24:9-10, “And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.”

Do you understand the idea here?

It is one and the same as to what happens to a “child of God” when they are excommunicated from the body of Christ. They are delivered over to Satan — bereft of all covenant blessing and privilege — that, being so bereaved they might be restored. Paul said this of the unrepentant man:

1 Corinthians 5:4, “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

That is the idea of being “lightly esteemed” in Scripture. It is to have a relationship with God, and yet to be bereft of its benefits! It is to know the Lord, but fail to enjoy His fellowship!

And that brothers and sisters is the flip side to honoring the Lord. If instead of honoring Him we take Him lightly, the consequence will be a “leanness of soul” brought about by being bereaved of the Lord and His benefits!

That is a very important principle that accompanies life in the Kingdom of God. Honor God and He will honor you with more of Himself! Take God lightly and you will be lightly esteemed! Now having seen this principle, notice “The Heart of Apostasy” as manifested in Eli's life...

## **Heart of Apostasy**

1 Samuel 2:30, “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

In other words, not only did he take the things of the Lord lightly and give preference to man and use the ministry for personal gain<sup>6</sup> but here we read that he took God Himself for granted!

This brothers and sisters is the genesis of all rebellion against God- this alone explains why we can read the word of God, understand what is being said, and yet not be moved in the slightest!

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<sup>6</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 2:29

## David and Bathsheba

Recall the story of David and Bathsheba. This occurred at a time in David's life when rather than going out to battle he stayed behind in Jerusalem. This is so shocking because it is on the heels of the multiple chapters detailing David's victories in warfare<sup>7</sup>. David went out to battle. He fought against God's enemies and the Lord blessed him through it all. Thus when we come to 2 Samuel 11 and read this we know something is up.

2 Samuel 11:1, "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem."

And sure enough there was. One evening he spied another man's wife<sup>8</sup> and took her to himself. Then he lied, deceived and tried to hide his sin. And when it looked like he couldn't conceal his transgression he resorted to murder.

This is pretty shocking actions coming from a man who wrote half the Psalter! And yet we ought not be shocked — for God Himself tells us why David committed such evil. In Nathan's rebuke of David, we read the following two indictments:

2 Samuel 12:9, "**Wherefore hast thou despised** [the same word as in our text ] **the commandment of the LORD**, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon."

David's sin with Bathsheba can be traced back to taking the word of the Lord lightly.

### A Changed View of God

Why did David sin?

David sinned because he got to the point in his life where God's word represented nothing more than theology to him. No longer were they the words of life by which he fellowshiped with God. Rather, he got good at gazing upon the pages of Scripture and walking away unchanged!

David did not sin because he neglected the word of God. He sinned because he despised it. He took God's word lightly!

And yet, that is not all.

2 Samuel 12:10, "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised<sup>9</sup> [ the same word as in our text] me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife."

Family of God, this despising of God's word is ultimately the cause of David's downfall. Not only did

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<sup>7</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 8:-10

<sup>8</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 11:2-15

<sup>9</sup> בָּזָה bazah

David take God's word lightly, he got to the point in his life where God and His benefits were of little consequence to him. And such was the genesis behind Eli's sin and his downfall in our text! Sometime between his ordination and his deposition from office, Eli's view of God changed.

God no longer was the Great I Am; the King of kings and Lord of lords; Apple of his eye, Highest thought that he could ever think, or the Pinnacle of every earthly desire to Eli. Amazingly, God had become manageable. His word had become common-place. His commands became optional. His will was negotiable. His benefits were passé.

## **Consequences**

What was the result?

1 Samuel 2:30, "Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

This is just one of the many consequences that Eli and his house suffered on account of his apostasy. We will turn our focus to this verse and the consequences of apostasy in the next chapter, yet for now notice: Because Eli failed to honor God, God withdrew His presence and blessing such that no longer would Eli be allowed to walk with God as a priest!

From all of this, I hope you see the genesis of all apostasy in our life. It is the futile thought and desire that something other than God can satisfy or is worthy of your affections. It is vain to think that there is anyone or anything higher than God.

Apostasy sprouts when one abandons God as the fount of life and seeks refreshment from the things of this world. It looks down on the promises of God, and opts for the protection, provision, and nourishment of another individual.

Apostasy is not neglecting God, but holding Him in contempt either on account of a familiarity with the things of the Lord or on account of the passing pleasures of sin. It is taking God lightly!

## **Jeremiah**

God's primary indictment against Judah just before the exile was this:

Jeremiah 2:13, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

The heart and soul of apostasy or the genesis of all falling away from God is found when we are fulfilling our greatest needs with something other than God. And this is what you and I are doing every time we willingly sin!

You say, "OK I'm ruined and guilty of seeking the answers to life's most fundamental questions by hewing out my own cistern. Yet, how do I go about reversing the process? After all Eli was confronted years before his demise, and he didn't change how is it that I will be any different?"

Brothers and sisters, in response to this question I am reminded of David's plea in Psalm 139. In this

Psalm David writes in awe about the fact that God is omniscient. In fact so great is God's knowledge that He knows us better than we know ourselves! In light of this truth, David took the opportunity to make this request of God:

Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

This is a bold prayer. It is praying for God to put you on the "operating table" next to the scalpels, needles, scissors, and many other painful tools that are designed for our tempering. And so, if we have been guilty of whoring after the nations and endeavoring to build and rebuild broken cisterns with David let us humble ourselves this day, fall at God's feet, and beg for His penetrating glance to reveal if there be any hurtful way in us! And as the Spirit through the Word reveals this and more, let us ask God to root them out!

In other words: Let us not flee from God in anguish, but let us flee to Him all the more and never leave his side.

Let us never forget, "that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 3, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.