



The Watchmen

A VOICE FROM THE WALL

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When Should I Leave My Church

By Tim Challies

Occasionally I attempt to think back to all of the questions I receive from readers of this site [Challies.com]. I try to think of things I have been asked many times but have never written about. One that came to mind recently is rather a simple question: Under what circumstances may I leave my church? Quite often I receive emails from readers who are concerned that their church no longer preaches sound doctrine or perhaps no longer offers skillful teaching. And they want to know if the Bible allows them or even compels them to move on.

We live in an age of consumerism and this leaves us accustomed to prioritizing our needs and, even more so, our desires, above all else. We march out of stores that do not carry the products we want at the prices we demand; we customize our lives, from the clothes we wear to the cell phones we carry. In all things we are sovereign, we are discerning consumers who demand that things be done our way.

But church is an area where consumerism ought to be the furthest thing from our minds. At church we are part of an involuntary community which is pieced together by God. We are placed under spiritual authorities and are to be subject to them. We need to be very careful, then, to examine our hearts and examine our motives before withdrawing membership from a church. Sadly, though, there are certain situations in which this becomes a necessity.

There are good reasons to leave a church and there are bad reasons to leave a church. I dare say that there are far more bad reasons than good reasons. There are times where you

must leave and times when you may leave. In this brief article I want to point to a few of those good reasons. Perhaps another time I can focus more on the really, bad ones.

You Must Leave

Most of the reasons you must leave relate to leadership. If the leaders of a church show contempt and disregard for the Bible and for sound doctrine, you are called to separate yourself from them. And it may well be that the only way to do this is to leave your church (though in some circumstances you may be able to have the leaders removed).

Here are four situations in which the Bible tells you that you must leave a church.

If the teaching is heretical (Galatians 1:7-9). If the leaders of a church are teaching what is outright heresy, you must separate yourself from that church. Staying to fight the battle is likely to make less of a statement than separating yourself from the church and its leaders, declaring them the heretics they are. The Bible declares that they are accursed, that they are anathema. Of course before you do this, be sure that what they are teaching truly is heresy and not merely something you disagree with.

If the leaders tolerate error from those who teach (Romans 16:17). We are called to separate ourselves from leaders who tolerate unbiblical alternatives to the doctrines that are most fundamental to the faith. These people, in allowing such teaching to stand, cause division. God demands

that you remove yourself from such a church.

If there is utter disregard for biblical church discipline (1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14). If a church refuses to call its people to the Bible's standard of holy living and if it refuses to exercise church discipline, you must remove yourself from that church. A church that tolerates blatant sin is no true church at all. My wife and I once had to leave a church for this very reason—the church refused to discipline a man and woman who were living together as husband and wife even though they were not married.



If the church is marked by utter hypocrisy (2 Timothy 3:5). This passage refers to a particular kind of hypocrisy in which the church has the appearance of being marked by godliness and yet denies that the Holy Spirit is the true source of this godliness. It is happy to look like it is Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered and yet it is actually a mockery of God in that the leaders deny his power and presence.

Reformed churches have typically spoken of three marks of a true church: the faithful preaching of the Word of God, the proper administration of the sacraments and church discipline. We can find each of these represented above. If these marks are missing, if there is gross hypocrisy or heresy, if there is no demand for holiness among the leaders or membership, if there is error being tolerated by those who preach, the Bible tells you to separate yourself from that church.

“If these marks are missing... the Bible tells you to separate yourself from that church”

You May Leave

There are also reasons for which we may choose to leave. Though they are not the kinds of reasons that will force you to leave a church, they may well still be reasons that are good and wise. In all cases, a decision will require great care and much prayer.

If you desire better teaching. The Bible does not forbid you from leaving one church to go to another one that offers better teaching. In general this should

be done not merely because a particular pastor is a better teacher but because another church has a more sound understanding of what comprises good teaching.

If you desire to use your gifts. If you have sought to use your God-given gifts and talents within your current church and have found no place to use them, you may wish to find a church where those gifts will be useful and where they will be appreciated.

If you desire a more convenient location. A decision may simply come down to convenience, where attending one church may save you a lot of time or allow you to serve in a local community instead of a distant one.

If it better serves your family. It may be that your children are the only ones within a church. Moving to another church may give open up many opportunities for them to grow in the faith or to serve within the church.

And we could go on all day. There are few reasons for which you must leave a church and many for which you may. As a general rule of thumb, be very slow to withdraw your membership and leave a church only with the greatest of care and the utmost humility.

- Tim Challies



Tim Challies is a follower of Jesus Christ, a husband to Aileen and a father to three young children. A native of Oakville, Ontario, He has authored "The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment" and "Sexual Detox" along with the forthcoming "The Next Story" (April 2011). He blogs every day at <http://www.challies.com>; worships and serves at Grace Fellowship Church; edit Discerning Reader and am a co-founder of Cruciform Press.

The Current End-Times Apostasy of the Church - Part 2

By Dave Hunt

Continued from last issue ...

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH has been in full-blown apostasy for 1,300 years [having] persecuted and killed true Christians. It has never repented of this evil and is now enjoying the support of leading evangelicals in a way that would have shocked biblical Christians only 50 years ago. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) brought together the leading bishops and cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church in order to counter the Reformation. The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent contain more than 100 anathemas condemning every point of the true gospel and damning to hell those who believe it. For example: "If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law [Catholic rituals] are not necessary for salvation but men obtain from God through faith alone the grace of justification, let him be anathema";¹ "If anyone says that baptism is not necessary for salvation, let him be anathema";² "If anyone says that in the Mass a true and real sacrifice is not offered to God [but] a mere commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross [and] not a propitiatory one, let him be anathema."³ On December 31, 1995, honoring the 450th anniversary of the opening of Trent, Pope John Paul II declared that its anathemas are still in full force: "Its conclusions maintain all their value."⁴

Yet Charles Colson, in his book, *The Body*, denied that indulgences are still offered by Rome.⁵ I sent him a copy of the seventeen pages on "the revision on indulgences" from Vatican II,⁶ including Pope Paul's anathema pronounced upon those who deny that the Church has the power to grant indulgences today.⁷ Colson never responded to acknowledge his error, which has led multitudes astray--and, unless it was done recently, did not correct it in subsequent editions. Isn't this apostasy?

In Augsburg, Germany, on October 31, 1999, the very day of the month on which, in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his

95 theses to the Wittenberg door, representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) signed a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). The choice of the city where the Augsburg Confession (the foundation of Lutheranism ever since) was read could hardly be coincidence. The Reformation was being overturned! Indeed, Charles Colson has said that "justification by faith alone doesn't mean today among evangelicals what it meant in the reformers' time."⁸

For 1 billion Roman Catholics, nothing has changed. Catholics continue to pray to Mary for salvation and to wear her scapular (as John Paul did from childhood to his death), which declares, "Whosoever dies wearing this scapular shall not suffer eternal fire." To wear that in reliance upon such a promise would be an abomination to any true Christian. Yet tens of millions of Catholics continue to believe that "the merits and graces Christ won on the cross" can be received only in small installments that can never fully save and that come only through the sacraments of the Church by Mary's agency, so they must therefore still offer good works and suffering for salvation--finally in purgatory.

The very doctrine of indulgences that angered Luther and sparked the Reformation remains a mainstay of Catholicism. In fact, shortly after JDDJ was signed, John Paul II offered new indulgences for the "Jubilee Year of 2000," such as: walk through one of the four "holy doors" that the pope opened for that year in Rome, and receive a plenary indulgence. [A plenary indulgence is a remission of the entire temporal punishment due to sin so that no further expiation is required in purgatory. (New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07783a.htm>)]

When the pope opened his eyes and rose from praying on his knees in front of the first "holy door" he had opened (this one at St. Peter's), he saw George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury,



Martin Luther at the Wittenberg Door

"To wear that in reliance upon such a promise would be an abomination to any true Christian."

spiritual head of the Church of England, kneeling in agreement beside him. Doesn't this denial of the gospel by Carey qualify as full-blown apostasy?

John Paul II boasted that pilgrimages to Rome for plenary indulgences began in 1300 under Pope Boniface VIII--a "pope" who had both a mother and her daughter among his many mistresses and who gave indulgences to his troops to destroy the historic city of Palestrina, slaughtering its 6,000 inhabitants and reducing it to a plowed field, which was sown with salt. Yet Boniface was hardly the most evil of the popes whom the present pope looks proudly upon as Peter's successors who have handed that authority down to him. In 1302, Boniface issued the "infallible Bull," *Unam Sanctam*, making absolute allegiance to the pope a condition of salvation--still in full force today.

Martin Luther said, "We are not the first to declare the papacy to be the kingdom of Antichrist, since for many years before us so many and so great men have undertaken to express the same thing so clearly." But it is no longer fashionable in "Protestant" circles to state the truth. We fear giving offense, forgetting the far greater offense of condoning a false gospel that is sending hundreds of millions to hell. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association published a special "Crusade Edition" of *Halley's Bible Handbook* removing from it everything Halley had so carefully researched and documented on the evil of the popes and the slaughter of true Christians through the centuries. If this cover-up to avoid "offending" Catholics is not contributing to apostasy, then what is?

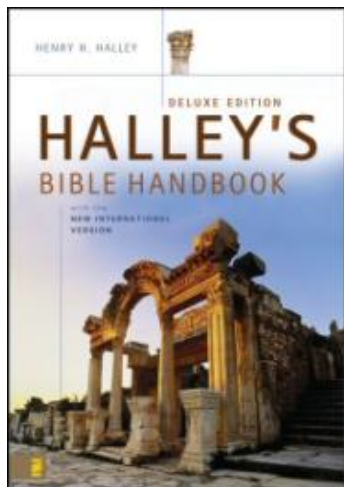
Zondervan published a revised version of the *Handbook* in 2000, which also contains no reference in its index to Albigenses, Waldenses, and millions of other evangelical Christians slaughtered by Rome. This new version declares: "The Roman Catholic Church responded to the Protestant Reformation by reforming and renewing itself,⁹ worked toward ecumenism during the latter half of the 20th century, and has engaged in cooperative ventures with evangelicals and fundamentalists. There are Catholics

whose theology is virtually indistinguishable from evangelical theology."¹⁰

What a perverted promotion of apostasy! When challenged about this, Stan Gundry, Vice President and Editor-in-Chief of Zondervan, responded, "The purpose of the rewriting was not to cover up the ugly truth about traditional RCC belief but to give a more balanced portrayal of the history of Christianity."¹¹ How could white-washing essential facts - and leaving out the slaughter of millions of Christians by the RCC - give a "more balanced" history?

Incredibly, Zondervan is now owned by FOX News, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch. He has been knighted by the pope as a member of the Pontifical Order of St. Gregory the Great after donating \$10 million for construction of a new Catholic cathedral in Los Angeles.¹² Murdoch has consistently made TV shows aimed at destroying the family and pursues his godless ambitions through a vast empire, of which "Christian publishing" has become one part. Christian publishers began to put profits ahead of sound doctrine [and] sold out to the world monetarily as they already had spiritually. Is this not part of the "end-time apostasy of the church," the major sign that Christ gave of the nearness of His return?

For at least 50 years, Billy Graham has... sent Roman Catholics who come forward at his crusades back to the Catholic churches they had left. Billy has praised John Paul II as a preacher of the true gospel,¹³ has declared that he and the pope agree on almost everything, and has hailed Bishop Fulton Sheen as the "greatest communicator of the 20th century."¹⁴ Although Sheen preached a false gospel, claimed to turn a wafer into Christ and to offer Him repeatedly in a propitiatory sacrifice for sins, Billy thanked him for their "common commitment to evangelism" and expressed his gratitude to Sheen "for his ministry and his focus on Christ."¹⁵ Yet Sheen's hope of heaven was that Mary would let him in because of his 40 pilgrimages to Marian shrines at Fatima



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and Lourdes.¹⁶ When Sheen died, Billy said, "I mourn his death and look forward to our reunion in heaven."¹⁷

J. I. Packer, a signatory to ECT, who called John Paul II "a fine Christian man,"¹⁸ had many years earlier declared, "Catholics are among the most loyal and virile brothers evangelicals can find these days."¹⁹ Likewise John Stott said, "Evangelicals should join others in the Church of England in working toward full communion with the Roman Catholic Church."²⁰

There are evangelical leaders who generally preach the true gospel, yet they commend, approve of, and praise those who clearly deny the gospel. *Are they not contributing to apostasy?* What could be the difference between leading multitudes to embrace a false gospel by preaching it oneself or leading them to believe a false gospel by commending those who preach it? Would not one approach contribute as much to the eternal doom of souls as the other?

Norman Vincent Peale declared, "God is energy. As you breathe God in...visualize His energy, you will be reenergized."²¹ "Just as there exist scientific techniques for the release of atomic energy, so are there scientific procedures for the release of spiritual energy through...prayer."²² "Any method through which you can stimulate the power of God is legitimate [and] scientific use of prayer."²³

Yet Billy Graham praised Peale many times, endorsed his books, even declaring in an interview on national TV that he knew no one who had done more good for the cause of Christ than Ruth and Norman Peale. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone who had *done more harm to the gospel!* Based upon Billy's endorsements, how many souls followed Peale's false gospel into hell? Surely, this is at least *contributing* to apostasy!

Graham likewise endorsed and praised Robert Schuller, though his denials of the gospel are no less reprehensible than Peale's. Schuller has defined sin as "lack of faith in yourself. Jesus Christ has saved me from my sin, *which is my tendency to put myself down...*

Negative thinking is the core of sin. *Jesus died to change us from negative thinking to positive thinking.*²⁴ [He] bore the cross to sanctify your self-esteem. *The cross will sanctify the ego trip!*²⁵ [Emphasis added]

Graham praised Pope John Paul II, stating, "I don't know anyone else that I could put as high as he is. He's traveled the whole world spreading the Catholic faith. And I've admired him."²⁶ He and I agree on almost everything."²⁷ Isn't it apostasy for the leading evangelical to praise the pope for spreading a false gospel and damnable heresies?

The pope and his Church reject the biblical truth that Christ paid the full penalty for sin once and for all on the Cross. At the very heart of Catholicism is the lie that a wafer is turned into Christ to be endlessly sacrificed for sin in the Mass, that infant baptism makes one a child of God, and that no one can be certain of heaven. There could be no clearer denial of the biblical gospel with its promise of eternal life for all who believe. Yet Billy Graham boasted of his friendship with Roman Catholic leaders and expressed only approval, never once warning those who believe Rome's false gospel that they are lost.

Charles Dullea, Jesuit Superior of Rome's Pontifical Biblical Institute, urged Catholics to *attend* Graham's crusades because "A Catholic will hear no slighting of his Church's teaching authority...no word against Mass or Sacraments or Catholic practice."²⁸ Indeed, Graham called the Mass "a very beautiful thing and certainly straight and clear in the gospel I believe."²⁹ He has recommended Catholic books and literature, including a biography of Pope John XXIII... which he called "a classic in devotion," and that contained... John XXIII's devotion to Mary and the Saints, worship of the host, and trust in the sacraments for salvation.³⁰

It is indisputable that John Paul II trusted Mary instead of Christ for his eternal destiny. In a February 1980 addendum to his Last Will and Testament of March 6, 1979, John Paul II entrusted "that decisive moment [of death] to the Mother of Christ and of the Church [and] of my hope."

"yet they commend, approve of, and praise those who clearly deny the gospel"



“Ecumenism is one more form of the denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ”

Embroidered inside all of his robes was the phrase, Totustus sum Maria , "Mary I am all yours."

In "The Holy Father's Prayer for the Marian Year," John Paul II asked Mary to comfort, guide, strengthen, and protect "the whole of humanity" and added, "Sustain us, O Virgin Mary...and obtain for us the grace of eternal salvation." She would have to be God to do so. Yet like Graham, Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptists' Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, emphasized that any disagreements Protestants may have had "with John Paul II are [irrelevant] to the foundations of the faith." Land praised the pope's "staunch defense of traditional Christian faith."³¹ Pat Robertson enthused, "Pope John Paul II stands like a rock in his clear enunciation of the foundational principles of the Christian faith."³² Is it not apostasy to promote those who preach a false gospel and damnable heresies even though one does not preach such lies oneself?

Ecumenism is one more form of the denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which "is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."³³ Schuller exhorted "religious leaders [to proclaim] the positive power of world-community-building religious values."³⁴

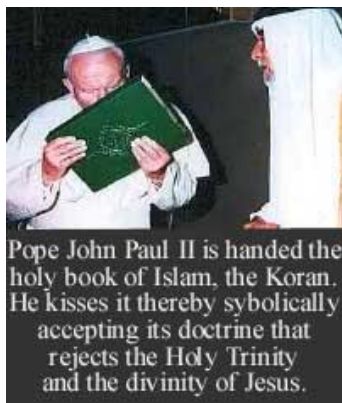
One of these strange "allies" is Roman Catholic apologist Peter Kreeft of Boston College who, in the spirit of Rick Warren and his P.E.A.C.E. Plan, advocates a coalition of all religions to fight society's social ills. Kreeft imagines that prayer to Islam's Allah or any Hindu idol is compatible with Christianity... He claims that God is blessing Islam... Confucius is God's "prophet" in purgatory on the way to heaven;³⁵ Buddha and Muhammad are both already there³⁶ ; through the Mass, the entire universe is being transformed into one giant Cosmic Eucharistic Christ;³⁷ and everyone will be united in the Eucharist and Mary.³⁸ The fact that both J. I. Packer and Chuck Colson gave their enthusiastic endorsements on the back cover of his book, *Ecumenical Jihad*, tells us much of the nature of today's apostasy.

Ted Haggard, former Senior Pastor of

New Life Church in Colorado Springs, and [at the time] President of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), said that "New Life doesn't try to 'convert'" Catholics [or] discourage its members "from becoming Catholic or attending Catholic Mass."³⁹

Those commending instead of contending against untrue religions encourage the lost in their false hope and deceive the world as well as the church. The fact that a major element of the last-days apostasy would be a false "signs and wonders" movement among professing Christians involving false prophets was declared more than once by our Lord: *"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."*⁴⁰ He must be referring to pre-tribulation events. "Christian" leaders would hardly be performing "signs and wonders" in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ after Antichrist is in charge of the world. Those performing false signs and wonders do so in Christ's name, calling Him Lord, yet they are not Christians at all, as Christ will say, "I never knew you!"

- Dave Hunt



Pope John Paul II is handed the holy book of Islam, the Koran. He kisses it thereby symbolically accepting its doctrine that rejects the Holy Trinity and the divinity of Jesus.

Footnotes:

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5. Chuck Colson, The Body (W Publishing Group, 1994), 271.
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7. Paul VI, IndulgentiarumDoctrina, Norm 12.
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10. Ibid., 1009-10.
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12. <http://www.traditioninaction.org/Cultural/D003cpKnighthood.htm>.
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20. Arthur Johnston , Battle for World Evangelism (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1978), 328.
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25. Robert Schuller, Living Positively One Day at a Time (Hour of Power, 1983), 201; Robert Schuller, Self-Esteem: The New Reformation (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1982), 115.
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30. Lawrence Elliott, I Will Be Called John: A Biography of Pope John XXIII (NY: Readers Digest Press, 1973).
31. Adelle M Banks, Religion News Service , April 11, 2005 .
32. Pat Robertson, The Turning Tide (Word, 1993), 279.
33. Romans:1:16.
34. The Orange County Register , 1993.
35. Peter Kreeft, Ecumenical Jihad (Ignatius Press, 1996), 96.
36. Ibid., 96-111.
37. Ibid., 158.
38. Ibid 144-45.
39. The Gazette , October 17, 2005 .
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“The Word of God is being rewritten, dumbed down, and dramatized in order to cater to the tastes of the carnal mind.”



Dave Hunt was Born in 1926. Dave enjoyed the advantages of a godly upbringing, and placed his trust in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord in his early teens.

The ministry of **The Berean Call** was founded by Dave in 1992.

It grew out of a previous organization, of which Dave was also a founding member since 1986. With T.A. McMahan working alongside him at **The Berean Call**, Dave was able to share his love for and defense of Christ in the subsequent newsletters, books, videos, and speaking engagements that resulted from this ministry. Dave and T.A. wrote three books together, including the best-known *The Seduction of Christianity*, which was groundbreaking in its boldness, exposing false teachings in the church and daring to identify the names of the ones behind the deception.

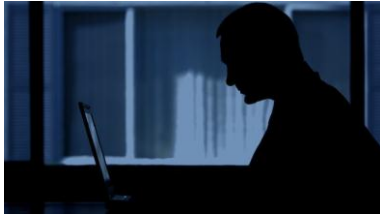
At least 4 million copies of his books have been sold, many of them translated into more than 50 languages. They include: *The Cult Explosion*; *The God Makers* (with Ed Decker); *The Seduction of Christianity* (with T.A. McMahan); *Global Peace and the Rise of Antichrist*; *Peace, Prosperity, and the Coming Holocaust*; *The New Spirituality* (with T.A. McMahan); *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*; *Occult Invasion*; *A Woman Rides the Beast*; *A Cup of Trembling*; *In Defense of the Faith*; *An Urgent Call to a Serious Faith* ; *What Love Is This?*; *Countdown to the Second Coming*; *Seeking and Finding God*; *Honest Doubts*; *Judgment Day!*: *Islam, Israel, and the Nations*; *Yoga and the Body of*

Christ; and his final book, *Cosmos, Creator, and Human Destiny*.

Dave Hunt left this world and entered into the presence of our Lord and Savior on April 5th of 2013. Dave has left us a legacy of inestimable value. We are blessed to be able to see and hear and read what he has taught about the evidence for God in a breathtaking number of materials. From explaining about the history of Christianity, to exposing the deception that has crept into the church, to teaching about the prophecies that are being fulfilled even today, this humble, brilliant man will go on teaching us for a very long time and we are honored to repurpose and publish his materials. We look forward to the day when we will see him again.

What will be the Cost to the Church?

By Tim Challies



“What will be the cost to the church if young men continue to give themselves to pornography?”



For months now the question has been in front of me. It has been there in the document I open every day, the document that contains a list of articles to write, and questions to explore. "What will be the cost to the church if young men continue to give themselves to pornography?" What do we, as Christians, stand to lose if so many of our young men continue to spend their teens and twenties in the pursuit of pornographic pleasure?

The question has been on my mind all the more as I've begun to scope out a teaching series in Proverbs. Proverbs warns us at many times and in many ways of the "forbidden woman." This is the woman whose lips drip honey, whose speech is smoother than oil. She is attractive and alluring; she knows just what to say and just what to offer to draw young men after her. And so they follow along behind her, oblivious to the fact that they are following her straight to foolishness, straight to harm, straight to hell.

In days gone by this woman may have been an adulteress or a prostitute. Today she takes the form of pornography. She is calling out to young men, she is offering herself to them, she is displaying all the pleasures she can offer, and they are following along. The Bible is honest and forthright about the cost (Proverbs 5:7-14):

Keep your way far from her,
and do not go near the door of her house,
lest you give your honor to others
and your years to the merciless,
lest strangers take their fill of your
strength,
and your labors go to the house of a
foreigner,
and at the end of your life you groan,
when your flesh and body are
consumed,
and you say, "How I hated discipline,
and my heart despised reproof!
I did not listen to the voice of my teachers
or incline my ear to my instructors.
I am at the brink of utter ruin
in the assembled congregation.

Solomon says that the young man who follows the forbidden woman gives away his honor and his time, he loses his strength and his labor, and he even calls for consequences to his flesh and body.

Ultimately, he calls down public humiliation and divine judgment upon himself. I have been considering one of these more than the others: strength.

We have the better part of a generation of young men who are giving their strength to this forbidden woman.

She is consuming their time and their strength. And this is not just any time and strength. Near the end of his life, at the conclusion to the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon would say, "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth." He would go on to extol these days of youth, these days when energy is high, when possibilities are endless, when there is joy and excitement and ambition. These days are unique and irreplaceable. Solomon calls on young men to "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." God wants *these* days, your best days, not only what is left over once you have had your fun and pursued all manner of false pleasure.

If we take Ecclesiastes 11 and 12 and hold it side-by-side with Proverbs 5, this is Solomon's message to young men: You will never have greater strength than you do now. You will never have more energy, more ready ability to find excitement and motivation. You will never be less encumbered by the cares of life or the responsibilities of family. God has given you these days and equipped you with strength and energy to live them well and to his glory. God gives you strength, he gives you passion, he gives you enthusiasm, he gives you the desire to pursue joy. So why would you use that God-given strength, that God-given passion, that God-given enthusiasm to pursue the worst, the most vile, the most fleeting joy of all? Why are you giving your strength to *her* instead of to *Him*?

What will be the cost to the church if young men continue to give themselves to pornography? The church will be weakened by young men who give so many of their best days to the worst purpose. The church will be weakened by future leaders who set themselves back by years or even decades by deliberately pursuing an addiction that consumes them. The church will be weakened by men who could be leaders, but who

pursue pornography and never escape its clutches. The church will be weakened as an entire generation of young men burden their pastors with constant counseling to escape a sin they wanted to pursue and an addiction they chose for themselves. The church will be weakened by families that are unstable because the husband has brought his love of pornography into his marriage. How many men could be serving in ministries, could be pastoring churches, could be training to preach, could be planting churches, except that they have given their strength to another? The cost is high. The consequences are fearsome.

Young man: The forbidden woman saps your strength. She steals it and never gives it back. Your pursuit of personal, pornographic pleasure harms the whole church. It harms your local congregation, and it harms the global church. We need your strength. We need your energy and enthusiasm. We need you now, not only what is left over after you've tried

everything else and found it wanting. If you love Christ and you love his church, then for his sake and ours, you will put this sin to death.

(Note: Here is something else to consider: How much better is it to reject sexual sin, to pursue sexual integrity, and to find a wife who does not sap your strength, but who gives you strength?)

- Tim Challies



Tim Challies is a follower of Jesus Christ, a husband to Aileen and a father to three young children. A native of Oakville, Ontario, He has authored "The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment" and "Sexual Detox" along with the forthcoming "The Next Story" (April 2011). He blogs every day at <http://www.challies.com>; worships and serves at Grace Fellowship Church; edit Discerning Reader and am a co-founder of Cruciform Press.

"Your pursuit of personal, pornographic pleasure harms the whole church"

The Parable of the Fig Tree

By J.R. Hall

Recently I was asked the question, "How do you interpret Matthew 24:32-35?"

Matthew 24:32-35 is a passage that references a 'Fig Tree' and it does so in reference to signs of the end of the age. Specifically:

"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

Many prophecy commentators would relate this set of passages directly to the rebirth of Israel. The justification for this mainly lies in Hosea 9:10 where we read, "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season".

The inference is that the fig tree in

Matthew 24:32-35 represents Israel. As such we may read the passage as, *'When you see Israel putting forth leaves (being reborn) then you know then that all these things are near. Assuredly this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place'*. If this is in fact the interpretation of the passage and the meaning of the 'Fig Tree', then we can arguably say that we are the final generation. For it was this present generation of ours that saw the rebirth of Israel in 1948.

However, for myself I am continually drawn to the synoptic passages in Luke.

"Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place." – Luke 21:29-32 [emphasis mine]

Note that in the Luke passage (vs. 29)





the words 'and all the trees' are present. As nothing in the Bible is by accident, I have to conclude that Luke's words are as valid as Matthews. Perhaps Matthew simply left some detail. Many times when comparing the synoptic gospels we find there are small differences in the stories. One might mention additional details, or extra descriptors, where another may not. We see this now in modern news reporting. When reporting on an accident scene for example, one newspaper might mention the accident occurred between a red car and a blue truck, whereas another might only report an accident between a car and a truck. In neither case have we changed the meaning of the report, but one merely augmented or gave additional insight.

I would suggest the same thing can be applied here. Inerrancy of scripture means that neither the Matthew account nor the Luke accounts contain errors. Therefore, since the Luke account added detail to the Matthew account, we must conclude that Jesus did in fact say, the "fig tree, and all the trees". If this is true then we would be reading too much into the mentioning of *only* the fig tree in Matthew 24. The fig tree is perhaps only mentioned because it was a popular tree and was within eye sight of Christ when he mentioned it.

What this means then is that these sets of passages are meant as nothing more than as a comparison of the signs as to watching trees in spring. For example: When I see that the days are getting longer, the snow begins to melt (for us Canadians), the trees bud, and the grass begins to green - I know that summer is near. Likewise, all these signs we are witnessing (right now and in this generation) are simply the signs that summer is coming.

The generation that sees all the signs as described in previous verses of Mathew 24 will be the generation that sees them all completed.

Whether or not we conclude Israel is the "fig tree" of these passages, we are still left with the question, "How long is a generation?"

Perhaps it is 70 years as Psalm 90:10

alludes to; or perhaps 120 years as Genesis 6:3 suggests. Even if we come up with a firm resolution for a generation, we might get caught up as to when our countdown begins? With the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948? Or maybe with the retaking of Jerusalem in 1967? I'm very cautious not to put finger on a date or even a specific time for I don't think it is for us to know. I do know, however, that we are commanded to 'watch'.

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." – Matthew 24:42

If it were just these passages in Matthew and Luke to consider when deciding if these are the end times, we might be left with a lot of speculation. However, and fortunately for us, God gives us all the other signs to serve as signs of the final generation. God wants us to know and recognize the season of the end.

In the study of eschatology it can be clearly argued that we are living in the *season* of the Lord's return. The reason is because so many of the unfinished prophecies of Scripture appear to be on the brink of fulfillment. More and more every day the headlines seem to proclaim the season of the Lord's return. While throughout history every generation of the Church might have declared the same reasoning, I believe we, more so than any other generation, see the signs of the times that were spoken about. The Bible says that the time of the end will be plagued by:

- *Perilous times (war)* – 2 Tim. 3:1; Matt 24:6-7; Luke 21:25
- *Unholy, fierce, murderous people* – 2 Tim. 3:1-4
- *Earthquakes in diverse places* – Luke 21:11; Matt 24:7
- *Famines, pestilence, disease, plagues* – Luke 21:11; Matt 24:7
- *A Russia/Arab confederacy* – Ezek. 28:2
- *A call for world peace* – 1 Thess. 5:3; Daniel 8:25
- *Great signs and fearful sights* – Luke 21:11; Luke 21:25-26; Rev. 16:8-9; Rev. 16:8
- *Israel being a 'sore spot' in world politics* – Heb 8:10; Zech 12:2; Jer 31:10-11; Joel 3:2; Isa 11:12; Ezek. 34:28.
- *Knowledge will be increased* –



Dan 12:4

- *Great apostasy and falling away* – 2 Thess. 2:3; 2 Tim. 3:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:13; Romans 1:22-32; Rev 18:23; 2 Thess 2:0-11; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 4:3-4
- *False prophets, false christs, false wonders* – Mark 13:22; Matt 24:11; Matt 7:22-23
- *Sexual immorality* – Rom 1:26-27; Luke 17:26,28-30; 2 Tim 3:1-4
- *Christian persecution* – Matt 24:9; 2 Timothy 3:3-4
- *Mark of the beast technologies* – Rev 13:17
- *Rebirthed Roman Empire* - Dan 2:33,41; Dan 7:7; Rev 13:1-2
- *One world religion, ecumenism* – Rev 17:5

seeing, or at least witnessing shadows of these things to come.

By studying the Scriptures like those I've listed above, we can see that there are indeed many 'signs' that we are to watch for to serve as notice that we are in the *season* of the Lord's return.

My friends, the Fig tree and *all the trees* appear to be budding. The question remains, "What are you doing about it?" Are you proclaiming the Gospel to all you know? Are you making disciples of all nations? Christ's coming soon and when he does, what might he find us doing?

- J.R. Hall

All of these things we are already

"... witnessing shadows of these things to come."

News Bites

Obama clears first hurdle towards Syria Strike

September 4, 2013 – Yahoo News

US President Barack Obama cleared the first hurdle Wednesday in his race to win domestic congressional backing for strikes to punish Syria's alleged use of chemical weapons.

Bashar al-Assad's defiant regime vowed to retaliate against any US action, but the White House won the support of a key Senate panel for its plan for a limited military response.

Secretary of State John Kerry also said that Washington had recruited other nations to its cause, promising that allies in the region would support American and French strikes.

The US Congress could vote as early as next week to authorize action, but the threat has done nothing to calm the chaos on the ground, and refugees continue to flee Syria.

The UN refugee agency and four states which have taken in hundreds of thousands issued a plea for the international community to end the "cycle of horror."

As Obama's big hitters lobbied Congress in Washington, the president used an appearance during a visit to Sweden to rally global support -- and to deny he is isolated.

"I didn't set a red line. The world set a red line," Obama said, referring to international rules banning the use of chemical weapons, even in wartime.

"My credibility is not on the line," Obama said. "The international community's credibility is on the line and America and Congress' credibility is on the line."

<Continued at link below>

From: <http://news.yahoo.com/top-us-lawmakers-rally-behind-obama-syria-plan-023928554.html>

Editor's Note: I'll let my friend Bill Salus begin the comment on this one.

"The ancient Hebrew prophecy contained in Isaiah 17 is presently poised to find final fulfillment, and it could easily be provoked by a poorly calculated political move by America," claims Bill Salus, author of "Psalm 83: The Missing Prophecy Revealed." "Current contemplations of the Obama administration to strategically strike Syria to punish the Assad regime for

using chemical weapons on his Syrian countrymen could be the spark that sets the entire Mideast ablaze. President Assad has threatened to attack Tel Aviv on several occasions during the Syrian revolution, and his latest threats have prompted Israelis to scramble for gas masks.

It is reasonable to presume that we are living in the days of Isaiah 17 and Psalm 83, and that a single U.S. missile landing anywhere in Syria could provoke the 'Mother of All Mideast Wars' that is predicted in the Scriptures!"

Regardless on the argument for Psalm 83, Isaiah and Jeremiah seem clear on the fate of Damascus.

"See, Damascus will no longer be a city but will become a heap of ruins" - Isaiah 17:1

"I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall consume the palaces of Ben-Hadad." - Jeremiah 49:24-27

It is not surprising therefore to hear of a possible conflict surrounding Damascus. The city has never been a heap of ruins, but has always existed in some form. Time will tell if this is the moment of the Isaiah fulfillment, but know this truly – it will happen at some time.

-BWM





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*"...Now these [Bereans] were more noble... in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."
- Acts 17:10-11*

Check Out our New WEBSITE!

See us at:
www.bereanwatchmen.com

Questions and Answers

What is the most important spiritual sign of the end times?

I think the most important spiritual sign of the end times in our day is the decline of the church and the increase in apostasy.

When I read the question, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" in Luke 18:8 I tend to take it very literally. Christ described the last church age as the age of Laodicea.

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and

knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. — Rev 3:15-20

While there are many tidbits in this passage worth exegeting, I want to concentrate on the fact that we are a church age that is truly luke-warm and wretched. We say we are rich, but we are poor. We say we need nothing, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Christ indicates that he would vomit us out of His mouth.

The church today is plagued with bad doctrines and doctrines of demons as was promised for the 'latter times' in 1 Timothy 4:1. We have the Emerging Church movement, Prosperity Gospel, Word of Faith, Spiritual Formation, Holy Yoga and Rock Star pastors with glitz and glamour preaching sermonettes for Christian-ettes as examples. We have motorcycles on the church stages, secular music, and wild entertainment from the pulpits. We are running churches like Cruise Ships when God designed them to be lifeboats. Good, solid, exegetical preaching from the Word of God is a thing of the past in many of the world's churches.

Christ warns,

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. — Matt 7:21-23

False converts and tares are growing up among the wheat within our churches, and we need to do something about it. We need to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the only way by which man can be saved. We need to stop entertaining the goats and get back to feeding the sheep. Old fashioned, Spirit filled, Christ honoring, sin hating, soul winning, Bible preaching is the hope of the church. It is the hope of the nation. It is the hope of the world. And yet like an endangered species, it is seldom seen or found.

And this is why our times are spiritually 'perilous'.

- J.R.Hall

Ministry News...

Urgent Prayer Request

Please pray for our friend Dr. Paul Wilkinson. He is the Associate Minister at Hazel Grove Full Gospel Church in Stockport, England.

On August 30th, 2013 while riding his bicycle, he was involved in an accident with an automobile striking him, causing very serious injuries. He was in surgery for many hours for repair

of multiple fractures. We ask for your prayers and that GOD will grant him a full and complete recovery. He's a good friend of ours at Berean Watchmen and our hearts are with him during this time.

Paul has done great work in exposing the anti-Israel crusade in the world under the guise of what can be called Christian Palestinianism. For more on

this subject, check out the Berean Watchmen website, and look under the guest article section – Paul Wilkinson.

Overheard

"What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace."

- John Wesley