

The Sound of Judgment

By Paul de Parrie

“But now you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains,” Jesus told the Pharisees.

The Pharisees of Jesus time were so ensconced in tradition that there was — in their minds — little difference between the Torah and the Traditions. It was, however, their dogged, prideful insistence that they *could already* see that made them impervious to having their eyes opened. Had they merely been blind, their sin could easily have been dealt with. But, because they were unwilling to examine their presumptions in light of the Word, their sin became completely their own — the responsibility, theirs.

This displays the two-fold purpose in reproof, rebuke, and exhortation. First, to expose the evil and prick the conscience

with the result of a conversion of the heart. Second, to inform the hearer and make him responsible before God for his deeds. In both cases, the justice of God is vindicated. The one will have obtained the judgment of acquittal through the blood of Christ; the other condemnation for knowingly rejecting the offer of His mercy.

The kings of Israel offer an illustration. God often sent them prophets to warn them of impending judgment. The sudden and decisive death of King Ahab in battle, for instance, was not a case of a man being “blind-sided” by the Lord. The story reveals that he *wanted* to hear a specific message so badly that God actually appointed a deceiving spirit (demon) to bring him a false prophecy. (2 Kings 22) On the other hand, the remarkable mercy shown to David was largely due to his willingness to instantly repent when confronted by his own evil deeds. (2 Samuel 12) Unlike King Ahab, David had been immersed in the Scripture all his life yet he *still* fell into sin and needed to be rebuked on such an elementary matter. Had the prophet Nathan thought, “Oh, well, David surely knows that what he has done is sin and this is *such* a negative message. . .” David would have died in sin and perhaps taken much of the nation of Israel down with him.

So the command to reprove, rebuke, and exhort is not to be some rarely exercised option but a consistent practice demanded by grace and mercy and the need for judgment...One must believe in sin to believe in a savior from sin. And God’s ultimate judgment depends on our

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exposing the evil deeds of darkness so that the unrepentant are without excuse.

God will vindicate His use of the blood of Jesus Christ in each case with either a just forgiveness of sins or a just condemnation of them.

The Bitter Pill

“Woe!” Jesus said. “Woe!” Almost like an incantation, Jesus pronounces doom on the “righteous” of His time. (Matthew 23) The message is real — and to a real group of people whom He actually addresses. But there is more than that. This is more than a diatribe against long-dead Jewish leaders and certain sects among them. God records this event for *our* edification — and, perhaps, for our accusation.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 23 are raw, uncut, and devastatingly accurate. After a particularly trying verbal bout with the Jewish

religious leaders, Jesus launched into an unstinting exposure of the evil that lay beneath the religious surface of these leaders.

This was not an angry diatribe to merely embarrass the Pharisees but a critical examination of how even God’s religion can go wrong — and do it with the appearance of godliness. It was a bitter pill for these proud, self-assured men to swallow, but if they had chosen to swallow it, it would have resulted in their salvation.

It is important to note the choice of words. Jesus chose to call them hypocrites, a Greek word referring to a stage actor who spoke through a mask. These oversized masks contained mechanical devices to augment the sound of their voice. What a description of these Pharisees! Actors hiding behind an oversized, false front and having their words amplified for a show to the people.

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“If ye love wealth greater than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest for freedom, go home and leave us in peace. We seek not your counsel nor your arms. Crouch down and lick the hand that feeds you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen.”

—Samuel Adams

Incrementalism--from page 27

context, politics is about compromise. But when life and death decisions are in view, politics is not necessarily about compromise at all. That is a fact that any person who presumes to teach others about matters of government should understand long before they stand up to teach.

The most generic definition for politics is this: "The art of seeing who gets what, when, where and how much."

That definition spotlights the broad overarching purpose of all political activity: the allocation of available resources. That definition also provides insight into why compromise is often simply not an option in the real world of politics.

If "politics" is the art of seeing who gets what, when, where and how much, there obviously might come a point where things can no longer easily be divided without some people losing the ability to survive. Like the situation on a space shuttle with a murderous crew member, the point comes where "politics" is about deciding who dies so others may live. It is at precisely that point that "politics" ceases to be about compromise and becomes an either/or choice with no possibility of renegotiation.

There is another definition for the word "politics" that shines even more light on why compromise is not necessarily a part of the political process. This definition states, "Politics is war by other means."

When Christian "teachers" like Flip Benham are not equipped to understand that Holy Scripture makes it clear "politics," under specifically defined circumstances, does not require compromise at all but instead requires "politics" to become the context for God's people separating themselves from evildoers, then those teachers truly become the blind leading the blind.

If the history of Christianity in America does not teach this lesson, then students have simply failed to take the course called American

history. Flip Benham, like so many other "pro-life leaders," prove they either never showed up for that class or slept through it.

In the United States of America no Christian citizen can escape the fact that we inherited the responsibility to participate in two ministries of God: the ministry of the gospel and the ministry of government.

Since the Second World War, Christian teachers have pretended that Christians only participated in the ministry of the gospel when, as everyone else in the world knew full well, all the people sitting on those pews in all those Christian churches across America provided not only the material resources the government used to accomplish its will but provided the manpower and the spiritual support for the activities of the government of the United States of America as well.

About thirty years ago, all those Christians decided to stand down and tolerate legalized abortion. Ever since then, one way or another, Christians have supported Christian teachers who developed exegesis designed to explain that Christians in the USA were all right with God; that our toleration of legalized abortion was not sin.

At least Flip Benham has the grace to know this was a lie. May God also give him the grace to understand that the political process offers ways to change things without compromising the Word of God.

The Abortion Abolitionist magazine understands politics enough to know when the time for compromise is past. The future issues of this magazine will be devoted to defining the ways available to us, under God, ways that will lead inevitably to the abolition of legalized abortion in the USA and will not require us to compromise God's Word in the process.

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by Neal Horsley

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He calls them blind, fools, children of hell, vipers, and more. But the astonishing thing is that these derisive words fit very well with the lengthy quote in Romans from the previous segment that describes *all mankind*. So the words may apply to us as well. The Pharisees were simply acting out normal, fallen human behavior. And it is the same fallenness that we all share — in Christ or out. In Christ we are able to combat and overcome this fallen nature, but entering into Christ means swallowing the bitter pill of our own degenerate sinfulness.

"If we confess our sins," John the Beloved tells us, "He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:7 KJV) But the verse before this gives us warning, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Nor are we permitted to acknowledge our sins in some manner that minimizes them. They are no mere mistakes, but the cruel, awful, twisted results of rebellion against God. The price for one "small" sin is death — either your own death or the substituted death of the spotless Son of God. There are no small sins. They all have great consequences.

The Leaven of the Pharisees

Leaven — a wonderful substance that, though used in small amounts, permeates an entire lump of dough causing it to double

or triple in size. The yeast produces gasses within the lump which bubble inside increasing the size. Because of it, breads become a delight of soft, chewable, delicious food. This process of leavening has been known through all recorded history — and it was known to Jesus.

In one case, the Kingdom of God was like leaven permeating the world. This was a positive portrayal of yeast. But the majority of references place leaven in a bad light. In one dire warning, Jesus told His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees — which is hypocrisy. (Luke 12:1)

The comparison between hypocrisy and leaven is almost humorous. The leaven "puffs up" the dough and makes it larger than life — much like the oversized masks of the Greek actors (hypocrites). The amplification of their voices may be compared with the gasses produced by the fermentation of yeast. The danger, however, is very real.

In Matthew 23, it seems that Jesus exposes various leavening agents that had distorted the Jewish faith. Each one, though first brought in small doses, had made the "lump" a monstrous caricature of what God had first established. The true faith of Israel was distorted and eventually destroyed by the infusion of carnal yeast. The appearance of religion remained, but it was nothing like the faith established by Abraham.

Religious Sins

Jim could hardly believe his eyes as he rounded the corner of the supermarket aisle. There, at the end of “Canned Goods,” near the frozen food section, was Pastor Allan — laughing — arm around a petite blonde — who was not his wife.

The pastor leaned over and kissed the strange woman.

Jim blushed and stepped back behind the potato chip display. What do I do? he wondered. Then he offered a silent prayer of precisely the same disconcerted words. Instantly, he knew what he must do — he must walk up and confront the couple.

But hesitation rode in on the wings of the respect he had always had for Pastor Allan. How could he face him at such a time?

Jim wanted to run away — to pretend he had not seen or that he had misunderstood what he had seen. But he had seen and the only way to insure that he had not misunderstood was to talk to the pastor and the woman — now.

Jim’s stomach knotted as he steeled himself to round the corner again. In the ensuing conversation, Pastor Allan tried to explain how Jim needed to “understand” his position — why Jim should say nothing of the affair. Jim told the pastor that he saw no option except his confession of sin and resignation as pastor.

“I’ll pray about those things,” said the pastor. “I’ll let you know my decision at the end of the week.”

God, however, was unprepared to wait a week. Within days, the huge center beam of the church roof broke on the nearly-new building where Allan was pastor. The beam plummeted straight down and crushed the pulpit like an exclamation point.

In the flurry that followed, the adulterous affair came to light and the pastor resigned. Allan — unashamed — divorced his wife, continued with the other woman, and ended up on the pastoral staff of another church over a thousand miles away.

This may sound like a “preacher story” used to make a point, but it is not. This was a real pastor who had found religious justification for his deeds.

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What was it that made the Pharisees so impervious to rebuke? It was religion.

It is much simpler to reprove the worldly adulterer than it is to approach one who has cloaked adultery in Biblical doctrine. The Pharisees had created an appearance of righteousness by linking their evil deeds with spiritual sounding reasonings. This was most clearly demonstrated when they excused a man’s responsibility to his parents if he would say, “Corban,” thereby dedicating his wealth to the temple and other religious works. Conveniently, this tradition allowed children to abandon the care of their parents and spend the “corban” money on themselves. (Mark 7:9-13) It wasn’t a matter of shame for them — in fact, it was positively their religious obligation to ignore the needs of their aging parents.

There is no excuse harder to break than a firmly held religious excuse. With it, people can justify anything. Most of all, it prevents us from seeing ourselves as we really are.

Mirror, Mirror

The bright, fiery scar running down my chest was ugly. My gnarled hair, week-old growth of beard, and sunken, ringed eyes looked back at me. Despite my being overweight, I looked strangely gaunt and pallid. The phrase “death warmed over” sprang immediately to mind.

I looked bad — very bad — but it was true.

I did not like how I looked a week after my heart attack and bypass surgery, but it would have done me little good to pretend that it was any better than it really was. I tried to imagine the impact it must have had on my children. What must they have thought to see me in this condition? It would be useless for me to try to lie to them about the situation — to pretend that everything was normal. Even if I wanted to fool myself, I would not fool my four-year-old.

What was needed was truth. I had to see my condition for what it was and respond appropriately.

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Billy Graham once said that the Bible tells the truth about God and the truth about man. The Word also acts as an unflinching mirror for the Church. It is easy for us to measure the Church of past centuries by the Word or to measure other present day denominations by the Scripture, but the rose-colored glasses go on when it comes time to look at the Church as a whole.

However, we, the Church, who say we see, are without excuse. We have the words of Jesus as a mirror to see our true condition — and we ignore what we see. In Matthew 23 and the prophets, we find that death-warmed-over look that we wish to deny but cannot be hidden from a four-year-old child — much less from a world that delights in exposing our hypocrisy.

We might ask ourselves, “Why would Jesus want our faults exposed? Doesn’t that besmirch His name?” Yet, the Word tells us that judgment must begin at the house of the Lord. (1 Peter 4:17) Christ is preparing His bride to be without spot or wrinkle. It would be much more damaging to God’s name to have that bride wallowing in the mud at His coming — and blind to the fact, besides!

Holiness is an essential with God and if it takes exposure of our sin to the world to renew the Church’s commitment to it, it is worth the price.



Medicine Unused

Sin in the Church creates a sickness in the Body of Christ but the Scriptures offer a proper purgative medicine — church discipline as described in Matthew 18. Much of the current debased condition of the American Church is due to our unwillingness to use this corrective. Reproof and rebuke have come to be regarded as “unloving.” The false notion that God’s love is lavished unconditionally on everyone has led to the belief that uncritical acceptance of continuous sinners by the

Church is required — that no demands can be made of people to alter their lives.

The Sound of Judgment, from 29

Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointed out, "Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes." The American Church, however, recoils at such simple truth because we believe in a "non-judgmental" Jesus.

This comes from a false view of Jesus Christ which paints Him in pink, blue, and gold pastel hues — a somewhat effeminate, touchy-feely invertebrate who was satisfied to let people enter the kingdom on our own terms. This version of Jesus is of a God Who is so afraid to lose one person that He will not risk the hurt feelings of a rebuked disciple.

But Os Guinness notes another Jesus:

"Jesus was a forbidding and unsparing leader. He issued an invitation but made clear his demands. He supplied needs, but required sacrifice. He made promises, but emphasized costs. He was as offensive as he was appealing. No one who chose to follow him could have done so with his eyes closed."

Any realistic reading of Scripture will reveal the Jesus described by Guinness as a much more accurate portrayal than the American Wimp version.

The Price or the Possibility

"[T]hey slew those whom they overtook without mercy, and set fire to the houses whither the Jews had fled . . . [a]nd made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood." — Josephus, on the destruction of Jerusalem, 70 A.D.

Wars VI, viii, 5
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This was the price of the Jewish unwillingness to say "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" — the price of not heeding the Son of God's "woes." Nevertheless, God also paid a price — His Son's life — to serve as an eternal redemption for such rebellion.

In ancient Israel, God always presented His people with prices and possibilities. "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curses," He told them. "So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants . . ." (Deuteronomy 30:19) The prophets are replete with such calls.

But such challenges are not limited to Old Testament times. Read the letters sent to the seven churches in the Revelation.

Ephesus — "I will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent . . . To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life . . ."

Pergamum — "Repent therefore; or else . . . I will make war against them . . . To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna . . ."

Thyatira — "Behold, I will cast her on a bed of sickness . . . unless they repent of her deeds . . . and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds . . . And he who

overcomes . . . to him I will give authority over the nations . . ."

Sardis — "If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief . . . He who overcomes shall thus be clothed with white garments . . ."

Laodicea — "I will spit you out of My mouth . . . be zealous therefore and repent . . . He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne."

The offers of life and death, blessing and cursing, are still with us today. America was blessed by grace because of humility before God and militant, unflinching Christian obedience to His Word. The early settlers in America assumed that misfortunes were a sign that repentance and revival were needed. It is recorded in the daily journals kept by the Pilgrims, Puritans, and Quakers. Today, American Christians assume otherwise.

Can America face the kind of judgment that befell Jerusalem? There is nothing in Scripture to suggest otherwise. But, with a fearful expectation of judgment, there is always the hope of revival. Despite our staring down the muzzle of judgment, God has been known to relent — remember Jonah and the evil Ninevah. That savage land was rescued from God's fiercest wrath by the repentance of one man — the king. While the king's authority carried the national repentance, any man, used of God, may have similar impact.

Often we read of the Great Awakening and other revivals and long for such wonderful communion with God. But this communion has its price. God may have purchased our relationship with Him by the blood of Christ, but our price is the denial of our pride. We must be willing to look beyond our religiosity and listen to the voices of those He has sent. The commitment to cast off our settled ways and comfortable perspectives may be too high for some, but it is required for revival. Even if it is too late for the nation, a personal revival will certainly prepare the individual for eternity. The worthy seeker may save only himself — or he may start a fire in the Spirit that will ignite the next — and needed — reformation. END

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