

Spiritual Adultery and Fornication in the 21st-Century Church

Just a few decades ago it was easier to tell the difference between a real Christian and a non-Christian, a saint and a sinner. There was not the kind of wiggle room we have today when we say of some professing Christian, "He's a Christian, but he's really messed up." Or "He's got a good heart, but he lives with his girlfriend." Or nowadays, "She believes in Jesus, but she's gay."

Certainly when a person is truly converted, he does not become perfect or completely sanctified overnight, but at some early point in his Christian walk any genuine believer should be showing evidence and fruit of a true conversion. A grace that does not change us is not the grace of God.

Not only is the church vastly different than it was a few decades ago, but it is such a phantom of the original that it would be difficult for the early apostles to recognize it. Except in a few nations in the world where there is great persecution and other obscure places, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recognize the spirit and the message of today's Christianity.

Back in the days of the early church, being in ministry leadership was the greatest sacrifice anyone could make and it reflected the message of the greatest sacrifice that was made—the cross. To be in ministry leadership today could be as easy as ordering an ordination certificate through the mail, taking a few Bible courses, polishing your sermon presentations, learning some leadership and church-growth principles, including how to win friends and influence people, and you're in. I know this sounds a little sarcastic, but the

point is made nonetheless.

In the early church's purest form, the cross was the power of God and the center of Christianity, ruling the lives of the early believers. They had as their examples apostolic men who apprenticed under Jesus and who hazarded their lives for the sake of the gospel. There was no mistaking the pattern and the purpose of the lives of those first-day apostles. It is the reason they had power to make radical disciples who were distinct from the world. What they preached and what they practiced enabled them to transform the minds and hearts of so many. We have so little power to transform people's lives today because we do not preach and live the cross.

The cross is not just about Jesus Christ dying for the sins of all mankind; it was a death to purchase mankind. We were bought by His precious Blood, remember (1 Cor. 6:20, 1 Pet. 1:18-19)? The cross is symbolic of our own death and separation from the world. Christians are people who are *in* the world but not *of* it. They do not partake of the carnal amusements and follies of the world that compromise their separation. They are not addicted to entertainment, obsessed with sports, caught up in worldly fashion, and indulging their lives in the flesh.

The Word of God likens the church to a chaste virgin who is presented to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). Defilement of this separation is called spiritual adultery and fornication.

"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Who is your friend? And who is your enemy?

In the church of Thyatira, a false prophetess named Jezebel apparently was causing many in the church to defile themselves by spiritual fornication. The Lord severely rebuked the church

for allowing this condition to continue.

“Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20-22).

History also offers us the possibility that this could have been physical fornication. Ancient types of labor unions called guilds controlled all commerce in Thyatira. The city was famous for the common practice of sealing business contracts by making an offering to a god in a temple, and then having sex with a temple prostitute to seal the deal. Either way, whether spiritual or carnal fornication, it was causing Christians to compromise their separation from the world.

Another factor that contributed to the defilement of early Christians occurred sometime toward the end of Paul’s life and years before John died. This was the time a philosophy called Gnosticism arose. It taught Christians that the body is inherently sinful and evil, but the spirit is born again and pure and holy. Therefore one could live how they pleased in this life, because in your spirit you were righteous and heaven-bound.

This gave professing Christians justification to live like the world while remaining a “Christian.” It also kept them from being martyred for their faith if they wanted out. This heresy greatly threatened to dilute the message and ministry of the cross.

Over time this belief system meant people could be “believers” in Jesus or fans of Jesus without actually being “disciples” of Jesus and answering the call to be separate from the world. We are seeing this today in various forms and philosophies and teachings.

John also addressed this demonic doctrine of Gnosticism that could lead to spiritual adultery and fornication and

admonished Christians not to love the world.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-17).

Lest any professing Christian take this lightly or throw this off as some legalistic form of doctrine, or a turning back to the law, let me remind you that Jesus called it the depths of Satan.

“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the *depths of Satan*, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come” (Rev. 2:24-25).

One translation says that the false teachers of John’s day called this doctrine of Gnosticism, which permitted spiritual adultery and fornication—thus defiling the Christian’s separation from the world—as the deeper truths of Christianity. What some were calling “deeper truths” Jesus said were the depths of Satan. Things haven’t changed too much in this regard from what we are seeing in our modern day.

We must recover the spirit and the message of true Christianity. God is working to restore to the church its true character, power and authority. Without the preaching and practice of the life of the cross, we won’t get there.

Beware of a cross-less Christianity that breeds spiritual adultery and fornication.

Bert M. Farias, founder of Holy Fire Ministries, is the author of *The Real Gospel* and co-host of the New England Holy Ghost Forum. He is a missionary evangelist carrying a spirit of revival to the church and the nations. Follow him at Bert Farias on Facebook or @Bertfarias1 on Twitter.