

Me, an Idolator?

Have you ever stopped to think WHY what was once a worldwide Church of God gave away all the Bible Truth it once understood? What could cause such apostasy? Does the Bible itself explain, for there cannot be any doubt that God visited His wrath upon His Church and brought about its fragmentation.

If the Bible does explain, is it not beholden upon us to avoid the cause in future, if we hope to be prepared for Christ's return?

While many reasons have been supplied for what occurred, there is just one biblical answer, so let us start our search in Revelation 22:15, which indicates who will be excluded from His Kingdom, *'Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.'* Here are listed the most perverted, - murderers, idolaters and liars, all of whom clearly break biblical commandments, the keeping of which provides the opportunity to receive the gift of eternal life, verse 14, *'Blessed are they that **do his commandments**, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.'*

Of these serious offences, most seem unlikely to be found within the church and as we are not aware of their presence, Christ's comments in Matthew 22:36-38 may provide some indication of which offence could be the most likely cause of His great anger, *'Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. **This is the first and great commandment.**'* Could this provide the cause we are looking for?

Christ obviously regards this commandment as vitally important - *'Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and **him only shalt thou serve.**'* Matthew 4:10. The King James margin cites Deuteronomy 6:13 as the source of Christ's words and it is no co-incidence that this is the *very first* of the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:3, *'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.'* Just one of the offences listed in Revelation 22:15, is apparently the most serious of all!

Returning to Christ's comment in Matthew 22:38, Christ then continued to address the gathered Pharisees in the following verses and in chapter 23, and these verses illustrate what we *must not do*, if we are to have no other gods before the Eternal.

In Matthew 23, Christ provides an important principle which should be clearly apparent in His Church, and he repeats it for emphasis! Matthew 23:8-10, *'But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.'* In God's Church we are all brethren and Disciples of Christ. We have no superiority one over another. We are all equals, who have but one master, Christ Himself! ('master' - Greek kathegetes - one who guides or leads the learner.)

It is significant that Christ repeated this for emphasis, because we all naturally respect those who teach us from God's Word, especially when we are young in the faith. So does Christ

mean that we don't need teachers at all? Acts 8:31, Ephesians 4:11, '*And he said, How can I, [understand] except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him' ...And it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors and teachers.*' ISV. Obviously not! We all need teachers to help us while we are spiritual babes, and even afterwards we can all learn from each other, and Christ makes His intention clearer by the very next verses in Matthew 23:11-12, '*The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*'

Christ is referring here to the warning He gave to His disciples in Matthew 20:25-27, '*But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.*' This great danger is actually brought about when we begin to look to a man or men as the prime source of all spiritual knowledge and guidance, *rather* than Jesus Christ. Our human nature being what it is, such adulation leads first to superiority and then to power, dominion, and eventually idolatry!

This happened in Christ's day, and in Matthew 23 we see a whole series of woes stemming from this error in the Pharisees, who loved to be called Rabbi and display their superiority and dominion.

They loved their control over people and used their power to cast out those who refused to bow before their authority, John 12:42, '*Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.*' Does that still happen today?

Plainly, Jesus Christ made us aware that he will not tolerate a rival. He requires His espoused Church, as individuals, to build a close, one on one relationship with him, no man intervening, - through His word and their prayer. He is not prepared to accept unfaithfulness in His future bride, which is why she is always pictured as a virgin.

Most of the churches of this world are so far away from a recognition that they even need to keep God's Commandments, that Satan does not regard them as competition, but rather as his tools. In his determination to defeat God's plan, his target became those who *did* look to all scripture and follow Christ's words and example. Somehow he needed to undermine their progress towards becoming the Bride of Christ, and what better way than to persuade them to become unfaithful to their betrothed?

So, what he had long ago achieved in the Roman Catholic Church, he utilised once more, by inspiring prominent young ministers to request that same system of church government, which had long been recognised as 'the image of the beast', and powerfully preached against within God's Church. Only with the authority of *that* kind of hierarchy, they claimed, would they be able to control the huge numbers who were entering into God's Church. They succeeded in their arguments and the end-time prophecy found in Ezekiel 8:1-6 was fulfilled in our time! '*And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the*

*month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me. Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber. And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of **the image of jealousy**, which provoketh to jealousy. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain. Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry. He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the [Spiritual] house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from **my sanctuary**? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.'*

By the craftily named 'Government of God', God's spiritual Temple now housed an evil idol, consisting of whole ranks of clergy, with one who felt able to speak for God at the top. Satan had achieved his goal.

As a result of that great offence to the Eternal within His Temple, the Church, in the following verses of chapter 9:4 & 6, God singles out those who have sighed and cried over this idolatry, for protection. They will not suffer the Great Tribulation, unlike their brethren who have been deceived into worshipping the image of the Beast. Revelation 20:4, '*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, **neither his image**, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.'*

So dramatic were the bitter fruits of God's withdrawal, that soon even the sleepy members could not stomach the oppression which resulted and, gradually, the complete departure from all they had come to believe, from God's word. They began to leave, en-masse. This greatly alarmed their faithless shepherds who saw their prosperous futures melting away along with their departing flocks.

Quickly they scrambled after their congregations who were in the process of reorganising, and insidiously worked to re-introduce the dominion they had enjoyed, which Christ had so clearly condemned in Matthew 20:25-27. Now they would again be able to glory in their eminence and superiority, Matthew 23:5-6, '*But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.'*

Now that attention was focussed on the men controlling 'the Government of God', rather than Jesus Christ, anyone questioning their authority was pointed to the words of the self-proclaimed apostle, and told that if they could not accept his authority, they would be happier elsewhere, or simply told to leave.

Deceived and oppressed by the fraudulent use of the words ‘Government of God’, many were cowed into submission, though apparently some were actually happy to be told what to believe by these ‘masters’ because it relieved them of the responsibility of searching the scriptures themselves, Jeremiah 5:26-31, *‘Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good things from you. For among my people are found wicked men: they lie in wait, as he that sets snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they have become great, and grown rich. They have grown fat, they shine: yea, they pass over the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not defend. Shall I not punish for these things? says the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? An appalling and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and **the priests bear rule by their own power**; and my people love to have it so: and what will you do in the end?’* They forgot that down through the ages some Christians had been martyred rather than worship the image of the beast.

Why is the use of the term ‘Government of God’ fraudulent? Firstly, Christ’s own words deny that a hierarchy, power and authority should exist in His Church today, though under quite different conditions, they will exist in the Kingdom of God. The apostle Peter also confirms that they are not permitted or appropriate in the Church today, 1 Peter 5:2-3, *‘shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you but not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.’* ESV

The reason is, that in God’s Kingdom those holding such supreme power and authority will be prescient members of the God family, having married Christ upon the sea of Glass in heaven. Like Jesus, they will be able to read the hearts of men and judge justly. Revelation 14:1-3, *‘And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.’* They did not gain that privilege by seeking for power, position and dominion in this life, but by following the humble example of service set by Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 2:21, *‘For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.’*

However, those seeking or wielding unauthorised power and authority in this age within the Church, will never be granted such power in God’s Kingdom, because they have in effect placed themselves as antagonists in God’s eyes, ‘casting a shadow over my Eternal being and glory in the eyes of the worshipper’ – Merrill F Unger. They have actually introduced idolatry into God’s Church for their own gain and advantage, making merchandise of *their* words and diverting God’s people from the wholeness of scripture, while sadly, as we have seen, *‘my people love to have it so’*, thereby divesting themselves of the opportunity of entering God’s Kingdom, unless they repent.

God would rather see us stand quite alone for His word, than to fail to enter His Kingdom along with an impressive but apostate church. Take courage then, and look to Christ's words brethren, for with Jesus Christ you will never be alone, and all can be *'redeemed from the men,'* (the actual Greek) and become one of *'the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb'*, Revelation 14:4. Only by avoiding this prophesied idolatry can we have right to the tree of life, Revelation 22:14-15, *'Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, **and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.**'*

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