

## Newsletter Teaching for 8-1-07

### Do You Hear the Warning?

We are hearing it with greater frequency and urgency. People from different parts of the country are saying essentially the same thing: *God is holding the Church to greater degrees of accountability.*

It's not that His standards of holiness are increasing. The standards have not changed; God is the same Holy God of the Old and New Testaments. It is that God is increasingly giving fair warning of His judgment. And He expects us to hear and heed the warnings lest there be painful and difficult consequences.

As the Church, we can be deceived by thinking that we merely live in an age of Grace—and that certainly God would never judge His Church or our nation. That is especially true of the mentality here in America. Our lack of the fear of the Lord is disconcerting to other believers around the world as they watch and listen to our example. Don't be deceived: The ways of God are always true, and ***He is giving us warning to turn back to Him in repentance for our lack of holiness.***

### It's the Truth!

That might seem like a very harsh statement, but it is certainly not unbiblical. In the Old Testament, holiness is a major theme woven throughout every Book. God demands holiness of those who come to Him (Exodus 29:37; Deut. 23:14). "Holy to the Lord" is spoken by God over His people as a standard that He has set and He expects to be kept (Exodus 39:30; Lev. 23:20; Ezra 8:28).

The New Testament is just as clear about the call of God for His people to be holy in every aspect of their lives (Eph. 1:4; Eph. 5:27). Listen to the words of Peter in 1 Peter 1:15-16:

*But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God—who chose you to be his children—is holy. For he himself has said, "You must be holy because I am holy."*

God's standard of holiness is not up for debate or interpretation. "In everything you do" means just that—every area of our lives, including relationships, conduct, thought, speech, ambitions, work, and ministry. As *The Message* version states, every area of our lives must represent *a life energetic and blazing with holiness.*

### Losing Sight of Holiness

It does not take much in today's society to lose sight of the high standard of holiness that God expects of His people. Issues of immorality surround us, and eventually even the Church becomes complacent and desensitized to the abhorrence of sin. We find ourselves immersed in the standards set by the world through media, entertainment, and culture. Think for a moment about your television viewing habits. Do you easily absorb images today that would have disturbed you just a few years ago? Have you compromised on the rating and types of movies you are willing to endure for entertainment's sake? What are you allowing your children to read and see because of the peer pressure in school?

As the children of God, we are called to live by a different standard. Even in ministry we can find ourselves compromising integrity or trying to look like the world in an attempt to make our mission "successful." Or we can get so involved in our mission that we lose sight of the One who called us in the first place.

As a test, pay attention to the number of times you hear the name of ***Jesus*** mentioned in your church, as opposed to all the promotion about "vision" or various ministries. In many cases we have lost sight of the One who is more precious than the most successful ministry campaign or strategy. When we have lost sight of Jesus, we have lost holiness.

## **They Did Not Listen**

If you were to begin in Genesis and mark all the passages that state outright or imply that the people of God “did not listen,” you will find that it is a prevalent theme throughout. The Book with the greatest number of such passages is Jeremiah. Jeremiah had the unenviable task of speaking to a people who basically had already sealed their fate. Jeremiah reminded them over and over again how they did not listen to the warning that God had given to them—and now it was too late.

We each need to ask the question for ourselves and for our churches: *Have we been guilty of not listening to the warnings of God?* The more we see the spiritual and moral decline in our churches and society, we have to admit that, for the most part, we are much like Israel of old. We are having a hard time hearing the Lord speak His warnings.

## **A Warning to Leaders**

Ezekiel 14:3 is a powerful passage that is relevant for today. God states: *“Son of Man, these leaders have set up idols in their hearts. They have embraced things that lead them into sin. Why should I let them ask me anything?”*

Those in leadership can be especially vulnerable to allowing idols to be set up in their hearts. Our ministries, vision, or even our calling into ministry can become idols. Embracing or elevating anything that takes us away from a pure and holy devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ can “lead us into sin” of idolatry.

God especially examines closely those in places of leadership because of the influence they have on others. Their examples, whether righteous and holy or compromising and ungodly, will influence the hearts and minds of those who look to them. *Much of the warning that God is issuing today is for leaders to examine their hearts to see if they are truly living out their calling to holiness.*

We all need to be much in prayer that when the Holy One searches our hearts, He will show us everything that is not pleasing to Him. Our hearts need to desperately cry for His mercy as we seek to live with holiness and purity in every area of our lives. With His help, we can heed the warnings!