

Articles and Sermons :: The Evils Within The Church

The Evils Within The Church - posted by savannah, on: 2010/4/21 19:23

THE EVILS WITHIN THE CHURCH
Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

Jude 1-25

JUDE, "the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James," speaks to us in the tone of an ancient prophet. His voice is that of Elijah or John the Baptist. It is "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." He speaks to the declining churches of his day. He speaks to the Church of the last days. It is against the evils within the Church that he specially warns. What a picture does he draw of error, licentiousness, worldliness, spiritual decay, and ecclesiastical apostasy! Who could recognize the image of the primitive Church in the description he gives of prevailing iniquity? The world had absorbed the Church, and the Church was content that it should be so...

It is a picture for the Church in our day to study, for we are rapidly becoming part of the world and falling into the snares of "the god of this world" (2Co 4:4). Nay, and we glory in this as "progress," "culture," and "enlightenment," as freedom from the bigotry of other centuries and the narrowness of our half-enlightened ancestors, who did not know how to reconcile contraries and to join what God has put asunder; how to believe everything alike; how to combine earth's pleasures and gaities with the joy of God; how both to pray and to dance; how to revel and to weep for sin; how to wear both the "white raiment" and the jeweled ball dress; how to maintain friendship both with God and with His enemies; how both to pamper and to starve the flesh; how to lay up treasure both on earth and heaven; how to drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; how to be partaker of the Lord's Table and the table of devils.

The names that he applies to these inconsistent brethren will seem to some hard and strange. "Spots in their feasts of charity," "clouds without water," "trees whose fruit withereth," "twice dead, plucked up by the roots," "raging waves of the sea," "wandering stars," yet naming the name of Christ and numbered among His disciples!

O darkness of the human heart! O subtlety of the flesh! O deceitfulness of sin! What is there that a man will not profess when it suits his purpose? What contradictions of life, creed, and conscience will he scruple at, when ambitious of position, fame, or wealth? O Church of the living God on earth, how art thou disfigured and defiled by those on whom thy name is written! How many are in thee who are not of thee, nay, who hate thee in their hearts while wearing thy livery; for whom the reveling and banqueting of earth have charms far beyond thy simple bread and wine; who are at home in the gay lighted hall of midnight mirth, but out of place in the upper chamber of thy Lord and Master; for whom the fair faces of earth have an attraction that thy holiness and beauty inspire not; for whom the luxuries of the social feast have a relish which they cannot find in that which is to thee better than angels' food, that flesh which is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed! (Joh 6:55).

In this day of half-discipleship, of double service, of religious worldliness and worldly religiousness, how needful it is that the awful words of the Apostle be studied by the Church of God! We need them now! Ere long we shall need them more. Every day do we see, read, or hear of things and scenes in connection with professing churches of Christ that make us ask, "The Church or the world, which is it?" Are we not often constrained to say to ourselves, "Are Christ's words no longer true? Have the broad and the narrow ways become one? Is there now no Church, or is there now no world?"

68 scruple at question.

69 livery - the distinctive uniform style of dress worn by a person's servants.

70 double service - that is, serving God and mammon.

Not as if all this were strange and new, either in our days or in the Apostle's. The germs of this apostasy were seen before the flood. It was of such men that Enoch prophesied when he proclaimed a coming judgment and a coming Lord (verse 14). "Ungodly deeds," "hard speeches," "great swelling words"—these were in Enoch's day.

They were swept off by the avenging flood of water. They are now again coming up in the last days in wider and more awful development, waiting to be consumed by the flood of the devouring fire with which the Lord, when He comes, is to purge this polluted earth, that He may bring out of it the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Greater, indeed, and more hateful must be the wickedness of the last days. It is written of the last times, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure" (Psa 2:4-5). The way of Cain, the error of Balaam, the gainsaying of Korah will be all combined and repeated in the wickedness of the last days. Then the human heart shall, unchecked, be permitted to overflow. Do we not see the beginnings of this overflow in our own times?...

The whole of this epistle is full of solemn thought for us. It is very similar in tone to the apocalyptic epistles to the seven churches, and seems almost like a preface to them. Its warnings against declension from truth and holiness, against worldliness and luxury, against inflated self-sufficiency and boastfulness, against profligacy and carnality, against a fruitless religion and an empty name are very appalling and sound like a prelude to the last trumpet—a voice from heaven so loud and penetrating that it would seem as if even the dead would awake under its terrible thunder. What sins it exposes in the Church of God! What departures from first love! What debasement in evil! It takes up and echoes the apostolic warnings of earlier days. Here we find the summary of the sins and apostasies of Christendom. The "strong delusion," which believes the lie, is here (2Th 2:2). The fatal friendship between God and the world is here (Jam 4:4). The often denounced fellowship between the clean and the unclean is here (1Co 10:21). Here is represented to us the last great lapse to the Christian Churches and with it the ending of the times of the Gentiles: the commixture of religion and irreligion, of error and truth, of fleshly lusts and a confident profession, of antinomian laxity and a high profession, the alliance—political, or philosophical, or scientific, or ecclesiastical—between Egypt and Israel, between Babylon and Jerusalem (2Ti 3:1-7). Here we see the Church absorbed in the world and the world in the Church, each delighted with the other; the sons of Belial sitting at the "feast of charity" and at the Supper of the Lord; error the companion of truth, and truth the ally of error; the fine arts—music, painting, sculpture—all made to minister, not to religion, but to the production of religious sensations, which make men believe that they are religious when they are mere admirers of the beautiful and solemn in sight and sound.

Thus does Jude warn us, as Paul did, against the perilous times of the last days. The Church of our age may not be chargeable with such declension as in the days of Jude. The fine gold may have become dim, but is not altogether dross. Yet modern Christianity has in it but little of the miracle or magnificence of early times. It is not so holy, so prayerful, so joyful; nor yet so high, so noble, so splendid. The grandeur of apostolic saintship has disappeared. How poor is much of the religion we see around us! How hollow and superficial! Sullen in some, flippant in others, showy in others, bustling and talkative in others, worldly and political in others, sensational and sentimental in others—in all, second-rate, even when sincere and true.

One of the most sorrowful things amongst us is the going back of many who "did run well," who were once zealous and sound in the faith, but have been swept into the torrent of "progress." They boast of keeping abreast of the age and mistake the snares of Satan as "an angel of light" for the "leadings of providence" and teachings of the Holy Ghost; leaving their first faith and love; taking one of earth's meteors for the heavenly pole star. Politics, pleasure, gaiety, business, philosophy, science have come between them and the glory, if not between them and the cross. Leanness of soul, lowness of spirituality, lukewarmness in everything but outward religious bustle describe their present condition. They do not thrive nor bear fruit. They have come to be once more in love with this present evil world, from which they had been delivered.

They have become stagnant in the routine of external service and conventional talk. They have thrown themselves into the spirit of the age in its full breadth—a breadth too narrow to include the glory of earth's coming King and the power of the Holy Spirit, but broad enough to contain in it the dark subtleties of anti-Christian error, at least in their germ or idea, which in its full development will not only deify humanity and worship creature intellect and power, but will enthrone force, and numbers, and money, and commerce, and art with all that is called "nature" and "natural laws," as the true regalities of earth, the true elevators of the race, and accomplishers of the destinies of man!

That any of Christ's sheep shall perish, we do not believe. God's eternal purpose secures them forever. But we see strange things in our time. Men believe one thing today, another tomorrow, and a third the next, and they call it progress! The voice of the age is reckoned the voice of God! Truth has become flexible and principle as pliant as wax. Men

who looked as like Christians as any could look, turn back into error or worldliness. They did run well, but they have been hindered that they should not obey the truth (Gal 5: 7). They have been bewitched (Gal 3:1), so as no longer to obey the truth. They began in the Spirit, and they are trying to perfect themselves by the flesh. Some who once preached the gladness of the glad news have plunged into the gloom of popery or ritualism.

Others, who seemed to live in prayer and were absorbed in the study of the one blessed Book, now think prayer needless because of God's universal Fatherhood, and the Bible, though the best of books, only one of an ascending series, all of them inspired; who look on novels and newspapers, depicting what they call "life and character," as our true textbooks for daily study; who are persuaded that this world is not so evil as some narrow Christians think it, and that its feasts, luxuries, and gaieties are good things, which a Christian ought not to abjure but to enjoy.

When we see these things, we stand in awe, perplexed as to what next may happen, asking, "Are there few that be saved?" and alarmed at finding how closely an unbeliever may resemble a believer, and how far down a Christian may be permitted to sink without totally falling away. Let us not be deceived by the vain show in which men are walking.

In spite of all fancied progress, that word is still true, "We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." No amount of "culture" can change the natural man. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Joh 3:6); and the "progress" of the flesh, however goodly it seems, must be ever downward. When that which is perfect is come, and that which is in part has been done away; when the Kingdom that cannot be moved has been set up, then the world's true progress begins, and the divine "culture" will take the place of the human. Then, as we look back, we shall be astonished at the shallow thing that men call progress now and see in it man's last proud effort to enter heaven without being born from above; to be a god to himself, and by his own intellect and energy to rectify the world that he has ruined—a world that can only be restored by the power of the Holy Ghost and the enthronization of its long absent King.

71 gainsaying — to speak against; contradiction.

72 profligacy — shameless immorality.

73 commixture — mixing together.

74 antinomian laxity — looseness in morality because of a denial of God's Law.

75 It is said, that in the last days of the old Roman Empire, when its "decline" was passing into its "fall," everything was paralyzed by luxury save music, which

was cultivated to utter intoxication. Old Rome died music mad.—Horatius Bonar

76 pole star — North Star.

Re: The Evils Within The Church - posted by Goldminer (), on: 2010/4/21 22:42

savannah I am going to bump this so I don't lose it and can read it later.

Re: The Evils Within The Church - posted by enid, on: 2010/4/22 2:45

There isn't anything in this article that I can argue with.

It speaks volumes, and it speaks the truth.

The blending of the church with the world seems to have gone on almost unchallenged from then until now. But then, we don't seem to mind mixing with the world.

We enjoy it's pleasures and all it has to offer.

And God looks on. He sees all this. He watches us.

Aren't we aware of that? That God is watching and recording all we are doing.

The judgment seat approaches.

Are we ready?

Re: The Evils Within The Church, on: 2010/4/22 9:57

"It is said, that in the last days of the old Roman Empire, when its "decline" was passing into its "fall," everything was paralyzed by luxury save music, which was cultivated to utter intoxication. Old Rome died music mad."—Horatius Bonar

Written 150 years ago. I am convicted and guilty of withholding my devotion away from Jesus, and toward these pleasures my brother speaks about.

Thanks for the post.

Re: The Evils Within The Church, on: 2010/4/22 11:15

Can we be precise about the definition of 'world', 'worldliness' and 'worldly pleasure'? I'm concerned that the way these words are often used can imply some kind of gnostic division.

Is eating (for example) a worldly (in the negative sense) pleasure? When done in excess or over-indulgence, yes, but in and of itself, it is a gift from God to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:3).

I would say the same of music.

Re: - posted by enid, on: 2010/4/22 11:27

Looks like toes are being stepped on.

Re: 'world', 'worldliness' and 'worldly' - posted by savannah, on: 2010/4/23 1:09

May He Who is Light...enlighten!

And others there are who are sown among thorns: these are they that hear the word, And the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts after other things entering in choke the word, and it is made fruitless. (Mark 4:18,19)

"Be not loving the world, neither that which is in the world. If ever anyone is loving the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15)

Because all that is in the world the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pretentious pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world.(1 John 2:16)

If ye then be raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1-3)

"Do not consider a worldly spirit as a little infirmity; as a natural, and therefore a pardonable weakness; as a trifling error, which will be overlooked for the sake of our many good qualities.

A worldly spirit is, in fact, the essence of our other faults, the temper that stands between us and our salvation, the spirit which is in direct opposition to the Spirit of God.

Individual sins may more easily be cured, but a worldly spirit is the principle of all spiritual disease.

A worldly spirit, where it is rooted and cherished, runs through the whole character, insinuates itself in all we say, and think, and do. It is this which makes us so dead in religion, so averse to spiritual things, so forgetful of God, so unmindful of eternity." (H. More)

"Our affections are not to be set upon things on the

earth. Business, worldly cares, the interests of our family, the things of time and sense--in whatever form they come, whatever shape they may assume, must not so entwine themselves around our affections as to bind them down to the earth.

We may use them for the support and sustentation of our life--but we must not abuse them. We are not to set our affections on them!

Houses,
gardens,
land,
property,
friends,
family;
all these earthly things we are not to set our affections on--so that they become idols. Thus any lovely object may be foul--because turned to an idol.

It may be but a flower--and yet be an idol.

It may be a darling child whom everybody admires for its beauty and attractiveness--yet it may be a defiling idol.

A cherished project may be an idol.

A crop of wheat,
a flock of sheep,
a good farm,
a thriving business,
the respect of the world,
may all be defiling idols--for all these things, when eagerly pursued and loved, draw the soul away from God, and by drawing it insensibly from Him, bring pollution and guilt into the conscience.

Now we are, or by grace in due time shall be, weaned and divorced from earth with all its charms and pleasures and all its polluting idols." (Philpot)

And finally brethren,

"GOD'S CURE FOR WORLDLINESS - is the bringing before us of another, eternal world, more glorious than that which He calls on us to forsake. There is no thorough cure for worldliness but this. It is lack of faith in eternal realities, that makes us worldlings! When the believing eye gets fixed on the world to come, then we learn to set our affections on things above." (HORATIUS BONAR)

"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols!" 1 John 5:21

"I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols!" Ezekiel 36:25

Re: The Evils Within The Church, on: 2010/4/23 9:23

Titus 1:... rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; 14 Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

15 Unto the pure all things pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Titus 2:1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:

Romans 2