

Is The United States A Christian Nation? (Part 4)

Living as Christians in the World

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Given 24-Jan-09; Sermon #920

I am going to begin this sermon by reading a poem by Bob Dylan. Some of you may be familiar with him and his work. Bob Dylan was born just outside of International Falls, Minnesota as Robert Allen Zimmerman. He was born into a Jewish family in May 1941. During the 70s he went through a "Born Again" experience and became a Christian. He recanted of that a number of years later, but he had not gone back to Judaism. Today he claims he has his own religion, and that it is expressed in his music.

The poem that I am going to read he wrote first and then put it to music. It was published and sung first, I believe, in August of 1963 as one of the tracks on an album of his. He of course did the singing, but later on Joan Baez, another big name folksinger from the 60s, also recorded it as well and put it on an album of hers.

I am going to read the poem because it fits right into the sermon series that I have been giving. It is partly a political statement, but it primarily addresses the fact that most Americans have a concept that God is invariably siding with America, and that God opposes those with whom America disagrees. He says this because he objects to that attitude—the attitude being or giving birth to a fact that they do not question the morality of the wars fought and the atrocities committed because, after all, is not God on our side? So there is a very sharp cynical edge to what he says here. It is not only sharp, but it is also quite insightful. It goes like this:

Oh my name it is nothin' my age it means less
The country I come from is called the Mid-West.
I's taught and brought up there the laws to abide
And that land that I live in has God on its side.
Oh the history books tell it they tell it so well
The cavalries charged the Indians fell
The cavalries charged the Indians died
Oh the country was young with God on its side.
Oh the Spanish-American war had its day
And the Civil war too was soon laid away
And the names of the heroes I's made to memorize
With guns in their hands and God on their side.

Oh the First World War, boys it closed out its fate
The reason for fighting I never got straight
But I learned to accept it and accept it with pride
For you don't count the dead when God's on your side.
Then the Second World War came to an end
We forgave the Germans, and we were their friend
So they murdered six millions in the ovens they fried
The Germans now too have God on their side.
I've learned to hate Russians all through my life
If another war starts it's them we must fight
To hate them and fear them to run and to hide
And accept it all bravely with God on my side.
But now we got weapons of the chemical dust
If fire them we are forced to then fire them we must
One push of the button and a shock the worldwide
And you never ask questions when God is on your side.

In the first three sermons in this series we established the following reasons why America is not a Christian nation and has not been since it began. That America has always had elements of Christianity as a part of its foundation, of its lifestyle, is beyond question; however, believing some elements of Christianity does not make a person a Christian. For example, does believing in the law of gravity or of the first and second laws of thermodynamics make a person a physicist? Of course not. It takes more than that, does it not?

So first, though our Constitution's framers were undoubtedly sincere men, and they also undoubtedly had Christianity in mind when framing the Constitution, however, what they believed in was not the Christianity of the Bible. The group of them each taken from many versions of Christianity, each one of which was a counterfeit. They never had the correct doctrinal base from which they were to pattern their lives, and this major flaw leads right to the second reason.

Neither they nor their fellow countrymen ever conducted their lives as a true believer of Jesus Christ must, and thus in personal, as well as in national conduct, they did not follow in the steps of Jesus Christ. How can one be a Christian if one does not do this?

I do not in any way desire to denigrate or demean these men. They were truly great men of governmental vision, and generally also of very fine carnal character. They sacrificed a great deal, and they lived upright lives using the spiritual knowledge that they did have. But there was a problem that they were up against, that they, I would have to say, by and large were unaware of, and even if they had been aware of it, they would have had a hard time grasping its effect.

Revelation 12:9 is a frequently used scripture by the church of God, but it is truth, and it lays the foundation for understanding part of the problem that they had to face, and that we too have to face.

Revelation 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Revelation 20:3 And he [an angel] cast him [Satan the Devil] into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

This is speaking of Satan the Devil, and again a repetition that he deceives the nations.

We are going to go to the book of Jeremiah to pick up three verses that apply to what we are thinking of here.

Jeremiah 3:6-8 The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' [Here was a Husband speaking to His wife who was playing the harlot—"Come back to Me."] But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.

Let us go back through this very briefly. Satan has deceived all nations, and that includes the nations of Israel and Judah—all of them. Now when we insert the fact that God divorced Himself from them, we cannot expect that the relationship established by the Old Covenant could remain the same. God pictures it as a husband and wife relationship.

Now when a man and a woman divorce themselves from their marriage, does their relationship go on as if nothing had happened? No. The close intimacy is gone. Each former partner pretty much goes his own way, so it is with God and Israel. It will remain this way until Christ returns, a second exodus occurs to the Promised Land, and God makes the New Covenant with Israel and Judah.

Do you understand what I have just given you scriptural proof of? The modern nations of Israel and Judah do not have the same relationship with God as Israel and Judah had with God under the Old Covenant. They are a separated family. God divorced Himself from them because they would not be a wife to Him. Now what God *has* done, because of His mercy and because He will not break His word—He keeps His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—He continued to supply what was needed for Israel and Judah, especially in terms of general prosperity and a sense of well being. However, the close spiritual relationship was no longer there. It was just like God was paying

alimony, as it were, to continue to supply Israel's and Judah's needs. We have to look at the Founders of this nation under that situation.

Those Founders, though very sincere and men of generally good moral character, and having an unusually wonderful insightful overview of government, were never called as we have been. They never had that advantage. What they got along with in their lives was *called* Christianity, but it was nothing more than a counterfeit of the reality.

It was miles ahead of anything else that was going in the way of religion on Earth. They had a fair amount of knowledge of Christian principles, and they put those things, as much as they were able, within our Constitution. It is good, but it is still not really God's nation as Israel and Judah were under the Old Covenant.

There are a couple of things we have to add here. The second sermon refined a vital principle that is shown in the book of Jude 3-4, that the belief foundation of Christianity consists of a very specific distinctive body of truth called in the Bible "*the* faith," "*the* way," or "*the* word."

In addition, these distinctive beliefs were given us for all time; that is, they are to be passed on from generation to generation without change. The Christian way is not a belief system that needs adjusted and updated as cultures evolve through the centuries toward Christ's return. A Christian, whenever he lives, is to walk, to conduct his life, following the same principles as Jesus lived during the first century, AD

In that sermon we also began adding to it that there is a basic difference between how God's overall government or governing principles of the Kingdom of God operate as for *us* compared to this world's governments. Understanding *this* principle is crucial to this entire series of sermons.

The term "government" includes not only the management of institutions and organizations, but also one's management of one's own conduct. All governments of this world operate to compel, to coerce, or impose its system of ways and agendas upon those who are its subjects. Now the degree of injustices human governments impose varies from nation to nation. Nevertheless, regardless of the degree, it is the way of the sword, as Paul terms it. Jesus added to this, "those who *live* by the sword *die* by the sword." I think from that statement He is saying that the coercive, impelling way of life ultimately produces death.

In contrast, the government of God, especially in regard to one's governing of one's self in Christian life, operates by faith, voluntarily submitting to God and to His revealed will, thus following the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I *always* do what pleases God." That separated Him from everybody else that has lived on earth for all time. He *always* did it. It was not a once-in-awhile thing. He always did what God said. He submitted to it His entire life, and so He then set the example for those who are to be His disciples are to imitate His behavior.

The government of God does not by force of physical power manipulate or compel. Now again, by way of contrast this way tends to produce life and leaves people free to choose to voluntarily submit to the force of the power of truth—God's truth. This is very important, because it is by means of submission to God's truth that we are sanctified and made holy. This is the key element as to whether or not we are going to be in the Kingdom of God. It is whether we, by power of faith in Jesus Christ and the spirit given to us as a gift, become sanctified and holy and in the image of Jesus Christ. It comes through imitation. This is very important to the creation of the image of Christ in us.

This world's governments can force obedience by means of the power to coerce, but being compelled does not change a person's nature. It is impossible. Our choice has to be made on the basis of the knowledge of truth, and then voluntarily choosing to go that way regardless of the cost to the self. This changes a person's nature because he is submitting to it voluntarily as a result of those factors I gave to you.

In a way, the United States is going through somewhat of a revolution in the shift from the Republican controlled Bush government to the Democratic controlled Obama government. And boy oh boy! People are really having an exaggerated high because of this. Their feelings about this have created something that might turn into a monster for him if he and the Democratic Party cannot live up to the celebrity they are giving to him and the programs he is instituting.

Do you know what happens? History teaches us this, and it is infallible. It always happens because of human nature. Those who create revolutions take office, and it is not very long before the revolutionaries become the oppressive persecutors because human nature has remained unchanged. One of the most vivid examples of this is the French Revolution. It was not long before those who revolted were using the guillotine left and right, chopping off heads. I am sure some innocent heads got chopped off there. They instituted a regime that was every bit as bad as the royal regime that preceded it.

This nation stands as an anomaly to that. Do you understand that? We have just had the 44th change of government in American history, and not once has there ever been a riot of the revolutionaries. It has always been peacefully executed, even though I am sure there are very many disappointed Republicans out there, but still the baton was passed without a revolution taking place. In some ways it speaks to the overall character of the American people and the fact that they have had a measure of Christian principles, discipline and responsibility built into their lives that has not let them down yet. It came pretty close to it in the 60s after John Kennedy's death. We were getting that close to a revolution, but it was avoided by cooler heads.

A major constant through all times governing men's relations with God and with each other has been the enmity of the carnal nature against God. This enmity allows no possibility of real permanent change. Governing God's way is triggered by His calling of us. It is this miraculous event that permits submissiveness to Him; a true change of nature, and the creation of godly character as long as those called cooperate as coworkers with God in this creative process.

In the third sermon we began to touch on Jesus' statement regarding where He said His authority lay. He did this when He was on trial before Pilate, and it is recorded in John 18:36, where He, in effect, said, "I am not of this world." This made all the difference in the world as to how He acted and how He governed Himself. This is not a minor passing proclamation. It was also not the first time He directly said something of this nature.

What Jesus is stating is essentially in the category of every Christian's life regardless of when he lived, because here is what God's calling, its conversion of us, and the giving of His spirit does. It creates a "them" and "us" circumstance. This is why Jesus said, "I am not of this world." He was *other* worldly, and when we are called and converted, *we* become *other*worldly. We are no longer of this world even though we live in it. We are, in reality, something that God proves a nation forming apart from, but within the world—a *holy* nation. A holy nation meaning separate, different, clean in the midst of the filth of this world. So our calling triggers this.

Here is another time that Jesus made this statement. One reason I am going into this is because this is a reality we have to deal with almost constantly. There is no escaping the world. It is ever present. It is *always* just there.

John 8:23-24 And He said to them [the Jews], "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

Do you see what I mean when I said this is what makes all the difference between us and everybody else? This of course is what the difference was for the Founders of this nation. As great as those men were, as wonderful as their insight into proper government of men was, they were not converted. They were *of this world*.

In this statement, Jesus was not referring to His humanity when He said, "I am not of this world." He was flesh and blood like all of us, and was, in this case, in a sense, a son of Adam even as they were. What He was referring to was His spiritual nature, which He did not have in common with all of mankind.

John 8:21 Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come."

Verse 23 supplies the reason why they could not go where He was going. It was because of His spiritual nature. He would die, and He would go to the Father, but because they were solely of this world, they would simply die. So at that point in time He was speaking to them, they had no future beyond what all of mankind must experience. Hebrews 9:27 says: "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."

It is right here that in the stark reality of this governmental issue we find strong evidence that there is no nation of this world that is Christian, nor has there ever been. Even ancient Israel and Judah were not Christian because the Old Covenant did not take them in that direction. They had a relationship with God that no other nation on the face of the earth had, but it still was not a Christian relationship.

We are going to look at some other verses on this subject that are aimed right at you and me. I am doing this because I want us to clearly see that this "them" and "us" factor is a reality that we must deal with. Nobody wrote as much about the world as did the Apostle John, both in the Gospel and in his small epistles.

I John 4:1-6 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

I John 2:18-19 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

We shall see that this actually clarifies chapter four a considerable amount by providing a background. Here is the general background. Some people had left the fellowship, and it concerned people in the congregation. It concerned John, but in a different way from the way it concerned the people in the congregation. I get the impression that they were concerned in a *wrong* way, and he wrote to give them the truth on the matter.

The first thing I want you to do is to think about what precedes verses 18 and 19—probably three of the most famous verses John wrote.

I John 2:15-17 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. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

To me the influence is clear that John is saying that these people, despite fellowshiping with the church, loved the world and were *of* the world, and their conduct of leaving the fellowship proved the source of their spirit. They could not bear it. One way of putting it would be that they felt out of place.

John's warning and explanation in this paragraph is given to help us understand that there is an invisible, but nonetheless, real spiritual war going on. If he were writing today in today's terminology, he might have said to them that the congregation was invaded and influenced by those who left, that they did not belong to God, and this fellowship should have been a comfort to them.

John is saying that under the circumstance by their leaving, this was the very best thing that could have happened. Another take on this I think is a possibility that God, on His own, got rid of them, that He put it in their minds to leave and not hang around, because to have them there was not in the best interest of the congregation.

Very much that is in this epistle is about this spiritual war. It is very easy for us to pass this instruction off as virtually meaningless to us here in the 21st century, but it most assuredly is not. John very much knew that he was in a battle for truth, and so are we.

There are very many people in this tolerant age we live in who feel that all Christianity consists of is being a nice person, and so they are really sociable people. They can go from place to place, and we will say, fit in. But Christianity, brethren, is *not* about being a nice person. I am not saying that being a nice person is not something we should strive for. We should strive to be a nice person, but what supersedes it and is far greater is, are we following, are we conforming to truth?

If a person is conforming to truth, it is going to upset people. Which is better for the Christian? To be a nice person, or to conform to and submit to God's truth? It is God's truth that sanctifies. It will make

us different, and sometimes it is going to make us very unpopular even though we have no intention of being unpopular. We will see more of that as we go along.

The world's influence is almost constantly impacting on our lives, and brethren, that is a major problem. If a church member's understanding, attitude, perspective, and conduct become indistinguishable from the world's, we will pass away with the world because we are conforming to the wrong image. The image of Jesus Christ took Him *away* from the world, and eventually the world killed Him. The world found reason to kill Him, even though, brethren, He was the nicest person who ever walked on the face of the earth. The world though, because it is driven by Satan and demons, cannot stand that, and they will work things to bring about pain on those who would submit to truth.

In our time there is a very persuasive relativism coming from the world around, and it is a major influence working against us. This influence says it really does not matter what one believes just so one believes it sincerely. That is not reality. God's *truth* is reality, and it is by submitting to God's truth that we are sanctified, and nothing less than God's truth will do, because nothing less is in the image of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

Did He not say to us and to the disciples, "*I am* truth"? Therefore, it is, when we imitate Him, we are imitating and conforming to Him. The image of Him is being created within us because we choose to submit to it, and we choose to submit to it because God enables us to do so, but we have to make the choice.

The world is out there always as one of the enemies influencing us to not conform to truth. I think it is entirely possible that Bob Dylan saw a truth, and it formed into his mind into this poem, but he did not know what to do with it except sing about it. He had no answer.

I John 2:18 mentions both: "*the* Antichrist is coming," and "many antichrists have already come." The Antichrist is one who claims to be God in the flesh and is a direct one-on-one rival of the true Christ. This is the same "Man of Sin" that Paul mentions in II Thessalonians 2. He has not yet appeared.

The *many* Antichrists, also mentioned in Verse 18, are lesser religious teachers who merely have a general opposition to Christ. Most of these people are simply deceived individuals, called elsewhere "false prophets," who may sincerely believe they are true ministers, but do not be deceived, because these people are truly dangerous too. With their sincere and earnest presentation, when it is combined with a message that is smooth, traditional, and popular, they can be very persuasive.

The term "antichrist" indicates a usurper, and he usurps by means of pretenses, assuming a position as a teacher to which he has no right. Nevertheless, to those who know God's truth, their message gives them away. Now be aware, because merely identifying their message as false is not enough. The reason is this: We have to *live* truth. That is what is going to separate us.

Salvation is only partly because we *know* truth. That is a beginning point. It is when we *live* it that it becomes important. I can say this with full assurance that Jesus will back me up, because that is what *He* said. It is those who *do* what He says who are going to be in the Kingdom of God. He said, "Many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and I will say right back to them, 'I never knew you,'" because they did not live it. The knowledge was a façade, which these people were deceived into believing,

was enough. Be aware then, that when these scriptures we just read in I John are combined with Jesus' statements, and also with Paul's, we see that this anti-Christ assault is going to peak just before Christ's return.

I John 4:1-6 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The first thing of importance to note in this section is that John begins by warning us not to be deceived by spirits by making sure that we test them to see what their source is. Now how many spirits have *you* seen lately? It is very likely that you have never seen one in your entire life, unless you were hallucinating. It is because they are not visible in our world. They can make themselves visible, but God, I am sure, has put a lid on their capabilities and not allowed them to do it. It might be too scary.

What is important is this. Immediately after saying, "Do not believe every spirit," he immediately connects the spirit to false prophets, and what he is saying is that these false ministers have a demon behind them. I am not saying that John is saying that they are possessed; rather he is saying, at the very least, they are influenced by a spirit that is inspiring them, putting things into their mind, and then allowing them to give their message.

You know very well that their message is going to be, in some cases, very close to the truth, but there is always going to be some area in which they depart from the truth. They go off on an angle that the person with knowledge is going to see is wrong because it does not conform to God's truth, and they will turn away from it regardless of the speaker's personality, which might be quite dynamic and seemingly very sincere. John is saying, "Understand there is a demon involved here, and God will make them reveal themselves to a person of knowledge." So it gives that person of knowledge a chance to reject it, to submit to God's instruction, which is, "Get out of there! Do not accept what they are saying." "Get out of there. This person has not been sent by Me."

I am pretty certain that those who are not truly of God's church would pretty much reject what I have said out of hand because they sincerely believe that the false minister who is teaching them is a true minister because they do not know the truth either, and so they cannot always identify them. Sometimes they can. They are sharp enough to see that this is wrong, and they will turn away from it.

Most of these people who go on unconverted and are able to see something like this are usually found in the most vigorous conservative groups of Evangelicalism. Do you know why? It is because they know more truth than those people who are unconverted. They often will very vigorously reject those others because they can see from the truth from God's word that those people are wrong.

There are people in the Evangelical world who will make holy war against Rick Warren because they know he is really out there on the fringe, and he is preaching something that is popular, but wrong.

They see it. They reject him out of hand, and they are right for doing so, even though they themselves are wrong in other areas.

John wrote this, and he was urging people to use their God-given knowledge and the spirit of God to not allow themselves to be tempted by this. But you see, he left it up to them.

Do you understand that this war and all the individual challenges that might be thrown at you almost always invariably begins with an intellectual challenge to see whether you know the truth of God, and God is testing you on this. I am going to read a verse to you, which shows God is deliberately testing you to find out where you stand. Did He not do this to Jesus? Satan himself boldly and presumptuously came up to Jesus and started quoting scripture, and what did Jesus do? He quoted scripture right back, but it was translated into the truth. He defeated Satan by the truth of God. There is the pattern, brethren. We will be challenged to understand to know whether we get it, so God gives us the opportunity to pass the test and to receive the blessings thereby.

In I John 4:1, John first urges us to think our thoughts and our actions through regarding the instructions we are being given. The question for us is: Is that instruction we are hearing from God's word, or is the false minister's word coming from our spiritual enemy? What can we learn from this first verse? We can learn from this first verse that behind these false ministers there is a demon. Again, I am not saying that the person is possessed, but he is, at the very least, being influenced in that direction.

In verse 2 is the word "confesses." John is aiming toward one of the two ways in which we can know. We are to watch the person's confession. "Confession" to us means something one does with his mouth, and that is indeed one of the ways. However, one also confesses with his conduct and what he produces. Here is another principle: belief and conduct always are linked. In other words, we act on the basis of what we believe.

Virtually everybody is doing that except sometimes the hypocrites who are not acting on what they believe. They are putting on a show, and that occurs. So most of the time, except for the hypocrites, a person is acting on the basis of what he believes, and that is wonderful, that is good, as long as what he believes is God's truth. This is one of the reasons why people in the world can be so sincere. They sincerely believe that they are right, so they come across that way, and it can be deceptive to the person who is not really being thoughtful about what he is hearing and making judgments on the basis of God's word.

Here is one of the things that makes it difficult in this kind of a situation, and this is that both the true and the false ministers make essentially the same claim. They claim that God is their authority and that they are speaking, guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The false ministers have no hesitation about claiming that they speak directly for God. They might say things like, "Thus saith the Lord," as if He were right there, or "I have a word from the Lord for you today."

They might even claim to speak to the nation and claim authority to direct others' lives. Do you remember some of the pronouncements Pat Robertson made to the United States of America that he had a vision from God about this and that and the other thing? He did. Of course he was wrong, but that is a man of very persuasive influence over many peoples' lives. He felt this so much so that he ran for president. He of course lost because not very many people trusted him outside of his own

group. But he did not think anything of giving the president of the United States direction on what was coming from the Lord, and none of it was true. So his influence actually went down because other people could see that it was not true.

We have had some of this in our experience in the Worldwide Church of God. David Maas mentioned something like this in his sermonette, but I heard of a man within the Worldwide Church of God who told people in his congregation that he was the voice of God in their congregation. He told people that they should always do what he said, and that whether the advice was right or wrong, God would make it work out.

Sometimes he would tell people what kind of car they should buy, or where they should live, or how much they should pay for their house. You name it. It is not the minister's normal responsibility to do that kind of thing. It may happen once in a blue moon, but how many blue moons have you seen lately? It may actually happen on occasion that what the minister says is true, and it should be done. But again, the recipient has to think it through as to whether this is in alignment with God's word. That is our responsibility He places on every one of us.

Always remember, brethren, God promises never to give us a test that is beyond our capability. In many cases we have greater capabilities than we think we do, and we tend to distrust them in our trial because we do not trust ourselves to be handling God's word correctly.

I wonder how many tests we have failed to pass because we were afraid to make the decision because we could not make up our mind whether it was true or not, hesitating at least, and maybe give up the opportunity to seek some counsel which would be helpful.

In identifying false ministers, the first thing we have to do is to examine what they say. We have to examine their confession—the *verbal* confession they make.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

There it is. You can be sure of anything—we are going to be tested. So do not be misled by the fulfillment of a prophecy or a miracle. The prophecy or the miracle might indeed be real, true. Remember Jannes and Jambres who challenged Moses? The miracles they pulled off were real. It did not fool Moses a bit. His snake ate up the other ones. But you get the idea here.

Far more important is what they say, and if they are speaking truth, then you can accept them. But if they are speaking a lie, or lies, identify it, and regardless of the miracle, walk away from it. Thanks, but no thanks. The miracle is as important as the teacher. That is very clearly spelled out.

Emotionally, miracles really impress. The teaching may seem dumb, but the teaching may be true, and all the miracle is, is spectacular. But the guy is telling you that it is okay to break the Sabbath and that it is okay if you steal from God. Do you get it? Those things are wrong. They are out of step with God's word, and so therefore you reject the minister and his ministry when that occurs.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

If the person preaches false doctrine, the preacher is not of God, despite the miracle. And despite the miracle, the preacher is anti-Christ. Then you have proof-positive that they are of the world, of Satan and his demons, and they are doing nothing more than preaching a popular relativistic message imitating Christianity.

What I have just said I think is actually one of the easier discerned tests we might run into. However, sometimes the problem is not so easily seen, but still the Christian has the responsibility to evaluate the source of what he is hearing. In such a case one has to evaluate a much larger body of work looking for the overall content. If the message does not strongly direct people to seek, know, worship and obey God by following the teaching provided in *the faith*, it is going to lead people into idolatry. That is the lesson of Deuteronomy 13:1-5.

God says to listen carefully to what they say. If you cannot discern that, then the next thing to do is to discern the conduct of their life and the fruit that their preaching is producing. "You shall know them by their fruit." So if the message does not strongly direct people to seek, know, worship and obey God by following the teaching provided in "*the faith*," people are going to be led into idolatry.

I want to give you just a real quick insight into what I mean by a "relativistic" message. Human nature is still in us, always wanting to be assured that we are basically all right, acceptable to God pretty much the way we are. Human nature always says we need to make a few changes here and there, put a little patch-up paint in that area and dress things up a little bit, but brethren, that is a wrong path.

What does the Bible show? First of all the Bible shows us we are *not* all right. We have major problems that separate us from the revealed image of Jesus Christ, and a person who is really striving to be like Christ will recognize that he is not all right. Probably the outstanding example of this is the apostle Paul in Romans 7.

Here was Paul, an apostle for about twenty years before he wrote Romans 7, and he said he found himself wanting to do this when he should have been doing that, found himself to be doing that when he should have been doing this. He said, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" His experience, his relationship with God *drove* him to see how much different, even after twenty years of conversion, he was from the real thing—Jesus Christ. Paul was humble enough to admit it.

I think you can begin to understand that in someone like him, because he could so clearly see where he fell short, that his human nature was taking a bashing. In other words, he was really winning the race. He was winning the battle, and the kind of fruit that was being produced within him was

perhaps the virtue, the characteristic that we need most: humility. We all have a fantastic ego that is hard to put down, and that is why human nature always likes to think that it is really kind of okay, pretty nice. But when we really begin to see ourselves, we begin to recognize that we are not all right, that there is the Grand Canyon separating us from God in terms of character.

We can see some elements are beautiful—the character of Jesus Christ, the mind of Jesus Christ—and there is enough in us to appreciate it, but also an intense sadness that we do not measure up yet. We have a long way to go, and we can be thankful for that, because it is a God-given gift that keeps us moving in the right direction of really wanting to be like Him.

I will continue with this because I think it is very important we understand that these things are being built on the fact that the United States—this country that we love so much—is not Christian. It has elements of Christianity within it, and look at what it has produced. How much better is it going to be in the World Tomorrow when Christ is actually ruling over these nations, and His character begins to infuse the whole country? What a glorious time that is going to be, but we are not there yet. We are trying to get to the place, that when He comes, we will be able to occupy a position under Him. There is much to be done with our character, and it is our responsibility now to do all that we can to conform to the truth of God and not allow the persuasions of this world that are so pressuring us all the time to cause us in any way to cave in.