

# Externalism

## Introduction

There are many problems in the church today; indeed I have written many papers exposing them. However, we can summarise most of these problems with collective words, such as: idolatry, occultism, materialism or mysticism.

But there is one collective word above all others that sums up many diverse characteristics of apostasy today; that word is externalism. Errors at opposite ends of the scale are frequently both examples of externalism.

Externalism is the great enemy of genuine spirituality and godliness; therefore, it behoves us to look at this issue and explain some features of it.

## Variations of externalism

### Ebionism and Gnosticism

Sometime ago I wrote a paper explaining the basis of the two key heretical movements that bothered the early church and which are manifest today.<sup>1</sup> These were Judaizing movements coalescing in Ebionism and the various strands of Gnosticism. Today they would take the shape of Messianic Christianity and Charismaticism.

Now at first these two movements seem very different. Ebionism was based upon legalism, following rituals and ceremonies, and fleshly effort. Gnosticism was very mystical; usually emphasising passivity and introspection based upon hidden knowledge. Yet in essence both are external forms of religion opposing true spirituality.

Ebionism is obviously external, being based upon Jewish forms of the Mosaic Law. But Gnosticism (though mystical) was also a form of externalism in that it was still based upon things that the disciple did in order to find divine light (even if it was introspective). Thus to achieve divine knowledge a disciple performed various techniques to gain mystical union, such as asceticism, chanting, avoiding certain (or any) foods, meditation, obtaining the correct teaching from an adept etc. To get inner knowledge the disciple still had to concentrate upon many external things.

Thus both ends of the scale of the key heresies were centred in externalism.

### Jewish idolatry

Another example is the OT failings of Israel. The Jews are the great Biblical examples of utter spiritual failure, leading to rejection and condemnation. Israel's great sin was idolatry; going after foreign gods that were centred in demon worship. Why the Jews kept doing this after knowing the mighty power of the true God is unfathomable.

But the essence of idolatry is externalism. The Jews made idols of wood, stone and metal and worshipped them; often in shrines on hill tops or wooded groves. This is pure externalism; the object worshipped is outside of the worshipper and is something that is manufactured and seen by the worshipper. The setting of the worship ritual is an objective

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<sup>1</sup> The twin problems affecting the early church.

shrine and the worship style is external, featuring dancing, chanting, loud prayers and incantations etc.

### **Pharisaic legalism**

Jesus highlighted the externalism of the Pharisees and condemned them for it. Their religion was purely external and superficial consisting of various forms of legalistic obedience to the traditions of men.

Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? Matt 15:3

‘In vain they worship Me, Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men -- the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, ‘*All too* well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition’. Mk 7:7-9

Making the word of God of no effect through your tradition. Mk 7:13

Thus Pharisees ignored the truth of God’s commandments and substituted for them traditions established by their forefathers; these traditions included such things a ritual hand-washing and behavioural regulations. This was both externalism and idolatry.

As an aside, this is the essence of modern rabbinic Talmudic Judaism, which has nothing whatsoever to do with the teaching of the whole OT or even just the Torah.<sup>2</sup> Modern Judaism is a truly demonic religion that hates Christ and blasphemes him constantly. It also endorses multiple wicked sins (including paedophilia and murder) and is a foundational basis of modern satanic worship.

### **Summary of some old forms of externalism**

- *Judaising tendencies* – centring upon Jewish concepts, forms and rituals. Upholding the shadow at the expense of the reality in Christ.
- *Mysticism* – focusing upon the deep self, which masquerades as the divine. Many external forms are used in this mystical exercise (diet, dancing, asceticism, standing in freezing pools for hours,<sup>3</sup> drugs, chanting, repetitive singing, standing for long periods, praying certain formal ‘transformation’ prayers,<sup>4</sup> praying in tongues etc.).
- *Idolatry* – focusing upon external objects and worshipping them or relying upon them for spiritual help.
- *Legalism* – concentrating on external actions regulated by men’s rules.

Although these are ancient forms, one can see that many are repeated in modern apostate churches.

## **Modern externalism: Externalism rules in the world’s religions**

Externalism underlies almost all religious activity on earth. The great world religions are mostly external, with one exception being Zen Buddhism. Anything that works religion is externalism. Anything that involves idolatry is externalism. Anything involving ritual or special behaviour is externalism. For example:

- Going on a religious pilgrimage.

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<sup>2</sup> The five books of Moses.

<sup>3</sup> Certain British Celtic mystics did this.

<sup>4</sup> Commonly found in Roman Catholic mystics.

- Eating special foods.
- Abstaining from certain foods.
- Submitting to controlling, human, religious authority.
- Celebrating annual religious feasts.
- Fasts.
- Asceticism.
- Priestly vestments.
- Aids for prayer and worship, such as: bells, cymbals, incense etc.
- Choirs.
- Instrumental music.
- Ritual dancing.
- Ritual forms of formal prayer.

The list goes on and on.

## **Modern externalism: Externalism rules in Christian churches**

Sadly, externalism reigns in the churches today, even evangelical churches. A full catalogue of this would occupy a book but we can mention some examples.

### **Messianic Christianity**

We have already mentioned Messianic Christianity. All forms of this are externalism. At worst the idolatry is a virtual worshipping of Jews and Israel, such as practised in John Hagee's church.

### **Roman Catholicism and institutional denominations**

The works based religion of Roman Catholicism is all externalism. Anything that is centred upon rituals, vestments, sacramentalism, priestly-type offices, or elaborate buildings is externalism.

### **Charismatic religion**

Charismatic religion is mostly based on externalism. It claims to be evangelical but all the forms of it that establish its singularity are external.

#### *Charismatic worship*

Charismatic worship is pure externalism, being a type of emotionalism backed by loud folk-rock music (or worse), dominated by a leader giving instructions. Charismatic worship cannot be conducted in private without assistance – which is why churches have flocked to join Charismatic denominations since 1970. Even Charismatics that claim to worship at home usually do so with the aid of an external object playing music.

#### *Charismatic leadership*

Charismatic leadership is based upon an external hierarchical structure and formal authority; it is little different to the authoritarianism of Roman Catholicism, since its authority structure is pyramidal.

#### *Charismatic buildings*

Charismatic existence requires a large building for the expression of its forms. If it doesn't, then why does every Charismatic denomination struggle and strive, and demand money from its members, to get one? Until, they get one they meet in a large rented building, such

as a warehouse, a large school hall or even a cinema. Can you imagine the apostles meeting in a cinema! This is pure externalism; it cannot survive without the right premises.

### *Charismatic dogma*

Even its most fundamental dogma is externalism, being similar to Gnosticism. The aspiring Gnostic disciple would have to go to an adept to be initiated in the Gnostic knowledge and experience. With modern Charismatic Gnostics it is the notion of a 'baptism in the Spirit' which is really a 'second blessing' mystical experience. This is an external ritual, even though it claims to be an internal experience. You usually have to go to someone in order to get this experience, which is pure externalism. For decades the proof of having this experience was speaking in tongues – externalism. However, modern Charismatics tend to downplay this in public writings but in practice it is expected. Being baptised in the Spirit is a badge of membership of a Charismatic church – externalism.

### *Charismatic pilgrimages*

Every time there is a major fake revival which displays mystical phenomena (such as mass falling down) Charismatics flock to the centre from all over the world. Such places have included Toronto, Pensacola, Azusa Street and Lakeland.

This is externalism. In fact, it is a rank denial of the essentials of Christianity, which is 'Christ in you, the hope of glory', (Col 1:27). The idea of having to travel great distances to find where God is working makes a nonsense of the basic principles of apostolic doctrine. God has given us everything we need. Every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling inside him. Christ lives in his heart; why then the need to travel to meet with God?

Everyone that performs this near blasphemous act has done great damage to their spiritual walk with God. It needs to be repented of. It is preferring the superstitious works of men and the deception of the enemy rather than serving the God who called them and gave them his Spirit in new life.

Make no mistake; no Christian needs to travel to meet with God; God dwells within him. Pilgrimages are mere externalism.

### *Charismatic entertainment*

Where do we start? Charismatic churches are filled with the underlying feature of entertainment but different streams have more or less of it.

The worship of most Charismatic churches is pure entertainment and differs little from going to a club. Here you will find loud bands (sometime ear splitting noise), dimmed lighting, dancing, loud singing of superficial, popular, repetitive songs, PA systems at full crank, and a sense of social community.

The ministry of Charismatic churches is usually simple entertainment and often pure showmanship. Extravagant leaders who claim to perform miracles ply their trade in an atmosphere more like a circus than a church. When they get waves of people to fall over, this is putting on a show. When people do crazy things (stamp, pogo, scream, shout, laugh etc.) this is another show. In fact, these meetings are so much like a show that people not present watch them constantly on their computers, just as any other entertainment.

The use of recorded church meetings and sermons are another form of cashing in on entertainment. Thus we have highly professional broadcasts with multiple technicians and engineers for sound, lighting, production, stage-management, camerawork etc. involved. These programmes are then marketed and sold to television networks or to DVDs. This is second-hand religion; you don't even have to get out of your chair to experience it.

All these features are mere externalism.

### **Conservative churches**

Sadly, many conservative churches are just as centred upon externalism.

They demand meeting in a dedicated church building; sometimes a large building. The leadership is usually formal and quite often several layers of unbiblical posts. Many have adopted a light form of Charismatic worship music and songs. Many demand adherence to a published form of theology; especially those belonging to historic denominations. Thus Particular Baptists require loyalty to the 1689 Baptist Confession but New Calvinistic Baptists follow the 1644 First Baptist Confession. Dutch Presbyterians follow the Three Forms of Unity. Other American Presbyterians follow the Westminster Confession; and so on. They all have a worship system that is rigid, formal and liturgical. All these are expressions of externalism.

### **Traditionalism**

Human tradition is one of the worst problems in the UK conservative churches. Rules and protocols established in long-forgotten history that have no foundation in Scripture dominate many churches. These rules are mere externalism.

For example,

- Large numbers of conservative churches are dominated by a deacon or a plurality of deacons; yet these officers have no Scriptural spiritual authority whatsoever.
- Until fairly recently pew rents still existed in some chapels where people paid to get the best seats.
- Many old conservative churches expect members to wear suits in all weathers.
- Meetings in most conservative churches follow a dreary formal liturgy that is never seen in the NT.
- Each denomination favours hymns written by their own members. Thus the presence of many types of hymn books.<sup>5</sup> Charismatic songs are slowly replacing these but many conservative churches still have them.
- Many independent and Baptist churches still maintain the practice of multiple tiny glasses seated in a tray to distribute the wine in the Lord's Supper, despite God's word emphasising a single cup. These glasses destroy the whole symbolism in the Supper.
- At the end of the meeting the pastor goes to the door to formally greet each member as they leave as a nod to fellowship. Yet the people have had no chance to share their gifts or learn of needs in true fellowship.
- In some churches prayer meetings (if they even have them) are led by a leader. Choices are made by the leader of the topics for prayer earlier and direction is given when to pray, how to pray and what to pray for.

All this is externalism.

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<sup>5</sup> Thus Redemption Hymns; Keswick Hymnbook, Hymns Ancient and Modern, Hymns of Faith etc. These are now being replaced by Charismatic songs; but even these have their own streams of songwriters.

## Specific examples of modern church externalism

### Fasting

Fasting is mere externalism. This is why fasting is an Old Covenant practice, which does not appear in the New Covenant.

Modern churches request (or even demand) fasting for certain results:

- To make personal or corporate prayer more effective.
- To aid healing.
- To bring about revival.
- To spur local conversions.
- To purify one's spiritual life.
- To concentrate intercession or worship.
- To eradicate sin.

Now some of these purposes are downright heretical and even blasphemous.<sup>6</sup>

Never do the apostles command us to fast for a spiritual reason. Nowhere in the NT are New Covenant disciples commanded to fast. In fact, even the later Old Testament changes the idea of fasting from self-denial to doing good works, 'Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?' (Isa 58:6-7).

In fact, fasting in the modern world, where people are rushing around to make ends meet, not sleeping long enough, beset by stress and eating improperly, could actually do a person physiological harm. Indeed, some people should never fast or they could endanger their lives. Religious leaders that demand a blanket, widespread fast could do a person serious damage.

What about cases of fasting in the NT?

I quote from my paper '*Are New Covenant Believers Required To Fast To Secure God's Blessing?*', which see:

The early Christians observed the ordinary Jewish fasts according to the law and later Jewish customs (Acts 13:3, 14:23; 2 Cor 6:5). This was due to the temporary changeover period from Judaism to Christianity. In this time Paul also undertook Jewish vows which involved shaving his head; he circumcised Timothy (but not Silas, a Gentile) to appease the Jewish believers in Jerusalem; the apostles initially cast lots to discern God's mind, kosher diet was insisted upon to ease fellowship with Jews, and so on. These practises were to pass away (Heb 8:13) and finally did so when Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed by Rome in 70 AD. The temporary practices of Jewish believers in this time is not our guide; the specific teaching of the apostles representing the final words of Jesus to his church is what determines our own practice. In this there is also no command to fast.

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. to claim that fasting remits sin is to blaspheme the complete redemption procured by the work of Jesus alone. The claim that fasting aids a conversion denies the sovereignty of God in alone calling a sinner to grace.

So, fasting is merely externalism. It is part of the Old Covenant that has passed away for believers. Why would fasting be necessary when we have the indwelling Holy Spirit as our guide and sanctifier?

The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.  
(Rm 14:17)

### **Charismatic spiritual warfare**

The type of popular spiritual warfare techniques adopted by many Charismatics is mere externalism and utterly pointless. Indeed, it could actually do spiritual damage to the faith of a young believer. Worse, many aspects of the spiritual warfare movement are actually pagan in origin.

What is involved?

Well practices change from year to year as a certain discipline gains favour and then passes out of favour. In years gone by Pentecostals would bind the spirits (i.e. demons) before starting to pray in a formal prayer meeting. This was deemed necessary to protect folk and ensure no hindrance to prayers. Utter superstition.

A list of items in this field would be endless but some include:

- Exorcism of demons by the prayers and actions of an exorcist (including physical blows or even wrestling the person to the ground).
- Marching around the room to terrify demons!
- Corporate loud shouting to terrify demons! (I am not making this nonsense up.)
- Getting rid of pointy street signs.
- Spiritual mapping, whereby the demons of certain areas are identified and their rank established to aid prayer.
- Blowing a ram's horn to defeat demons.
- Gathering certain groups to confront certain types of demon: such as, apostles are needed to confront national demons but local ones can be removed by a church.
- Observing certain acts of sacramentalism to eradicate demons (wearing a 'blessed' object,<sup>7</sup> using holy water, knighting a group of people to convey authority etc.).
- Laying on of hands causing afflicted people to fall over backwards.

All these things (and many more bonkers things) have been actually done. They are not academic; they have been practised.

Frankly, if you cannot see that all this is utter tosh, then I have doubts about your salvation. I do not care that famous church leaders have endorsed this rubbish; I question their salvation too.

Do we see this in apostolic doctrine? No we do not.

*What is Biblical spiritual warfare about?*

Biblical spiritual warfare is chiefly about the battle for the mind. The devil wants to pervert your thinking. If you can be deceived into thinking wrong things, then you will be useless forever, until that thinking is changed. The devil is not concerned about you committing some sin, big or small, he wants to control your mind.

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<sup>7</sup> Such as a crucifix that has been prayed over.

Even in the Old Testament God highlighted this problem:

O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, That you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? Jer 4:14

Thus believers are told to renew their thinking and get in line with God's doctrine:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Rm 12:2

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Col 3:2

Believers are told to take every thought captive:

Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. 2 Cor 10:5

We do this when we put off the old man and put on the new man:

Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Eph 4:22-24

You have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. Col 3:9-10

Thinking right leads to acting right and God wants us to be righteous, therefore we must conquer our thoughts before we can do God's will.

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Lk 6:45

The devil, on the other hand, wants you to do his will, which is the opposite of God's will. To do this he must first conquer your thoughts. The battle is for the mind.

Before we were converted the devil controlled our mind, and that was why we were sinners:

God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting. Rm 1:28

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works. Col 1:21

Sinners walk in futility of mind:

The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. Rm 8:7

The spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. Eph 2:2-3

You should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind. Eph 4:17

The battle is not for your town, your area, your city, or your country; by centring on such things men have lost their way. God is responsible for your town or your country and he will deal with them in his sovereignty. You cannot change the course of divinely controlled history. Your job is to conquer your thoughts, do God's will and preach the Gospel to your neighbour. The battle is for the individual mind.



You do not strive and fight to bring revival to your town or your country, you fight to renew your mind. God will deal with your country as he sees fit. If revival came to Britain tomorrow, the church would be unable to cope because almost no one is properly fighting to conquer their thoughts and renew their mind by putting on the new man. Very few people would be effective if there were a true revival to occur tomorrow.

Thus the apostolic counsel is to resist the devil; to stand against the devil:

**Nor give place to the devil.** Eph 4:27

**Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith.** 1 Pt 5:8-9

**Resist the devil and he will flee from you.** Jm 4:7

This is done by conquering your thoughts. The results of this are many:

- Knowing God's will.
- Fearing God.
- Understanding true doctrine.
- Gaining wisdom.
- Walking in the Spirit.
- Bearing the fruit of the Spirit.
- Being able to help others.

Spiritual warfare has nothing to do with externalism; the clue is in the title – it is spiritual not fleshly, not external.

We do not have the space to deal with more examples of externalism in the churches today.

## **The reason for this**

I have explained, in several papers, that the purpose of the devil is to bring about the complete reversal of the law and character of God upon earth. The final expression of man upon earth, when he will then be harvested to condemnation, is when the corporate appearance of mankind follows Satan and is the reversal of godliness.

Thus instead of love there is hate; instead of kindness there is aggression; instead of the poor being assisted they are trampled upon; instead of people caring for each other selfishness reigns; instead of mercy and compassion there is cruelty and hate.

In the church (there will be a false church) we see the opposite of all that God teaches in his word. It is called anti-Christian for a reason; it is something wicked that claims to be of Christ. Theology is reversed; ethics are reversed; church practice is ruined and becomes an abomination.

I have explained that all the changes in society (such as Gay marriage; increasing poverty; afflicting the sick) are part of this gradual strategy to reverse godliness. In the church also there is a gradual change to reverse God's order. In the non-evangelical churches this is obvious, such as Gay priests and women priests; but evangelical churches are also following the course of this world and reversing God's judgments.

Thus we see the incursions of idolatry, mysticism, paganism, materialism and so forth. But a key weapon used by Satan is to first bring a church to focus upon externals. It is externalism that is often the first stage in the downfall of a church.

For example: an obvious case is where a church that is open to Messianic Christianity suddenly begins adopting Jewish feasts and ceremonies in its meetings. I have seen a Pentecostal church have a Passover celebrated by a Jew as its worship. I also know of Anglican and other churches that had women performing Jewish dances as part of the worship. These are very obvious cases of externalism; but there are many more subtle forms.

As more and more externalism is birthed in the church, the more the church is twisted to become the reverse of all it should be. In time it will all become anti-Christian. The true church of God on earth will be hidden in homes, caves and woods; the outward church in society will be anti-Christian. God has warned us about this in his word, in the teaching of good men and in the lessons of history (e.g. China); but few are listening.

## **The basis of true religion is internal**

The essence of the Christian religion, true Biblical religion, is a relationship with God. Everything else is then continued on the basis of this inner relationship with God. Christianity does not rely upon externals, though there are obviously external facets (such as meeting together).

This is why Christ sent the Holy Spirit to indwell us and be our guide, comforter and advocate. The key power that keeps a Christian going is not what he does, not where he goes, but who lives inside him. If a true Christian was locked up in prison (as many have been) and deprived of all the forms of grace (Bible reading, meeting with the brethren, partaking of the Lord's Supper etc.) he would still grow and be strengthened in God if he had faith.

Indeed, there are many today who, on the basis of obedience to God's word, are unable to find a church that they can meet in and keep a clear conscience. They often live a lonely life, or perhaps with a spouse or a few occasional friends, and cannot gather as a body in their town. Yet I have found that it is often such folk that are more alive to God's word, more determined to live right, more worshipful in their heart, than those folk who attend church but live careless lives.

What is the basis of our religion? It is:

If Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.

Rm 8:10

You are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? 1 Cor 3:16

You are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among *them*. I will be their God, and they shall be My people'. 2 Cor 6:16

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Gal 2:20

You also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Eph 2:22

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Eph 3:17

Christ in you, the hope of glory. Col 1:27

I cannot emphasise enough that the Christian life is a focus upon Christ.

He is before all things. ... And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence. Col 1:17-18

While fellowship is important, the chief part of the Christian life is internal, introspective; it is communing with Christ through the Spirit.

The amazing thing about the life of grace is that while it is introspective, it is not mystical and neither is it dwelling on the self. Mystics focus upon themselves (even while trying to die to the self). Even when supposed Christian mystics say that they are meditating upon Christ, they are really centring on their deep emotions and trying to get an inner experience that is felt. They then feel more divine, more powerful. Self-absorbed people are introspective in a bad way; they are constantly looking inwards and picking over emotions.

True Christians, on the other hand, are centred upon Christ. It is a genuine communing with God in a powerful, and yet matter of fact manner. Whatever experience they may have they never make a claim to divinity but grow in humility before God.

Communing with Christ in the Spirit does not need long striving, fasting, struggling, becoming passive, praying in tongues, or any other mystical trait, it simply requires faith. Christ lives in you; you do not have to strive to enter the presence of God you come boldly by faith (Heb 4:16).

True spirituality is a matter of the heart.

Love the LORD, all you His saints! ... He shall strengthen your heart, All you who hope in the LORD. Ps 31:23-24

Unite my heart to fear Your name. I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart. Ps 86:11-12

## What God commands of us

Trust in the LORD, and do good ... feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD ... Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him ... Rest [be silent in] in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him. Ps 37:3-7

You shall delight yourself in the LORD. Isa 58:14

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'. Jn 8:31-32

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. Jn 15:4-5

When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. Acts 11:23

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Gal 2:20

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Col 2:6

Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 1 Jn 2:24

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Jude 1:20-21

### **Internal communion**

Living in the grace of Christ, growing in faith, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, has nothing to do with external things. It is internal communion; abiding in Christ. Even when important external features are involved (such as Bible reading) it is the inner relationship that makes it powerful. For example, studying the word to understand doctrine is external but the benefit of it is the Holy Spirit leading the soul into truth and strengthening the spirit, which is internal. Merely reading and studying academically is of no value – even demons can do that (Matt 4:6; Jm 2:19).

### **Abiding in Christ**

The image of abiding in Christ is based upon the symbolism of the vine. This is where the branch (the disciple) draws up sap that is present in the vine stem. It is completely dependent upon the sap produced by the vine and has no resources of its own. Nothing the branch does externally has any impact upon the inner resources it has; it cannot make the sap flow faster or slower. Without Christ we are nothing.

### **Faith and the fruit of inner communion**

Nothing we do can make us more powerful, more graceful, or more holy. The Christian life is lived by faith not actions. Anything we do that is not based on faith is sin (Rm 14:23). Sure we do good works but these are the result of faith and the fruit of our inner communion. They are important as a testimony but they are not what make us what we are. They are the result of what we are.

### **Keeping the heart**

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life. Prov 4:23

This is the crux of the matter. Even the OT saints understood this despite not knowing the indwelling of the Spirit.

What is required is a pure heart; a heart that is guarded and kept centred upon God.

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. Ps 24:3-4

Blessed *are* the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matt 5:8

The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith. 1 Tim 1:5

Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Tim 2:22

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Heb 10:22

The key to this is dependence upon God; utter dependence. This is why Jesus emphasised the need for self-denial; we must not trust in any aspect of our strength or character, still less any church office we may hold.

Self-denial is dying to self in Paul's terminology; and this involves putting off the old man (self-denial) and putting on the new man (Christ). Those who do this will keep their heart pure.

This is tied up with the doctrine of progressive sanctification, which we cannot enter into here. The point is that we cannot rest on definitive legal sanctification, upon our justification and washing (definitive sanctification) in heaven,<sup>8</sup> we must progress to the salvation of the soul (progressive sanctification).<sup>9</sup>

Yes we were given a new heart but we must keep that heart clean. Yes our conscience was washed (Heb 10:22), but it can also be seared (1 Tim 4:2). Yes we have a new nature, but we can put on the old man. Yes we have the Spirit, but we can live in the flesh.

Those who are in the flesh cannot commune with Christ. No one in the old man can commune with Christ. No one with a guilty conscience can commune with Christ. Only those branches abiding in the vine will bear fruit.

### **Abiding in Christ results in good works**

As a practical example to help understand how this works out, one key is to put Christ first in everything. As you centred in Christ in inner communion, so you submit to Christ's ethics in your walk. Here I give a warning – this will cost you.

Abiding in Christ and keeping the heart are worked out by determining that in every area of your life you will put Christ first. This means that Christ comes before all your relationships. Christ comes first in your work and career. Christ comes first in how you spend your free time. Christ comes first in how you spend your money. Your inner communion gives you moral strength to make difficult decisions.

Now this must not lead to stupidity and cultic behaviour. Putting Christ first does not mean that you give all your money away and fail to feed your family. Putting Christ first does not mean shirking on your job and being a faithless employee. Putting Christ first does not mean that you love your wife less than you should. All your responsibilities have to be maintained because that is God's commandment. However, within those responsibilities Christ must always come first.

Part of growing in grace is learning how to do this. It will mean that you sometimes have to make sacrifices as God leads you. Some examples:

- A new movie comes out which is all the rage; everyone is talking about it and it is the type of movie you love. However, you learn that there are themes that are unsuitable, irreverent and unrighteous. You put Christ first and choose not to see it.
- You get a week off work and look forward to relaxing, as you have no family commitments that week. You learn that a member of the church is in trouble and needs urgent help fixing their house. You put Christ first and you give part of your week to assist.
- You have some spare cash and decide to treat yourself to some new clothes but you learn that a neighbour is in deep trouble and has no means to fix an urgent plumbing problem. You put Christ first and help that neighbour out.

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<sup>8</sup> The beginning of our salvation is justification by God-given faith, which is associated with adoption (legal inheritance, not sonship) and definitive sanctification, which occur in the human spirit (past tense of salvation). The development of the disciple in grace is by progressive sanctification by which the human soul is trained by faith, experience and knowledge (present tense of salvation). At the coming of the Lord we are instantly perfected and given a new Christ-like body (the future tense of salvation). Very few today understand this; yet it is elementary Biblical doctrine.

<sup>9</sup> See my paper on the 'Salvation of the soul'.

- You are sick and feel fragile, however you are mobile. You get a call from someone asking you to come and counsel someone in deep spiritual trouble. You put Christ first and help them despite feeling unwell.
- A job opportunity arises but it means relocating far away. You have considerable responsibilities in your church and to your local extended family. You put Christ first and refuse the promotion. (This does not mean that all relocations are wrong; wisdom is required.)

The person that communes with Christ inwardly will act like Christ outwardly. The person who centres on Christ inwardly will centre on Christ in his walk. Communing is the key to righteousness.

## Conclusion

Externalism is of the world; it is the way that the world does things. Since it is of the world, it is also rooted in satanic principles. Externalism ruins spirituality. Those who rely upon externalism will not be saved.

When the church starts to fall away, it relies upon externalism of various sorts. All institutional churches rely upon externalism – even if it is just the need for a large church building. Over time, more and more externalism becomes apparent. What starts as a man with a message becomes a movement; the movement becomes a monolith; then the monolith becomes a mausoleum. Radical Charismatic churches that began in the 1980s as a reaction to the formal, man-dominated, institutional denominations of their day, are just as formal, man-dominated, denominations themselves today – or even worse.

True churches need no externalism; even their meetings are a corporate communing with Christ and obeying his Spirit. They need no dedicated building, no musicians, no structure, no liturgy – they just need to obey the Holy Spirit in glorifying Christ and edifying each other as Christ directs. Anything external (singing, breaking bread, Bible reading, teaching) are done as God directs and according to his word as the fruit of communion.

Disciples must shun all forms of externalism that claims to be spiritual, which just leads to idolatry. The highest priority of the believer is to commune with Christ, to abide in Christ.

Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD! Ps 27:14

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him. Ps 37:7

Truly my soul silently *waits* for God. Ps 62:1

I will wait on the LORD. Isa 8:17

In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. Isa 30:15

The LORD *is* good to those who wait for Him, to the soul *who* seeks Him. *It is* good that *one* should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. Lam 3:25-26

But Christians are not mystics. Having communed with God and learned his counsel, believers are to bear fruit. The branch does not drink the vine's sap for nothing, it must bear fruit. Thus we do good works wherever we are, and whatever we do, in simplicity.

Everything we do can be done to the glory of God – but only if we first commune with Christ.

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