

The Revelation of Righteous Judgment Series

PART 18

"JUDGMENT AT THE HOUSE"

(CONTINUED)

I Peter 4:17... *"For the judgment to begin with the house of God..."* (Rotherham translation).

II Thess. 2:7-8... *"Evil is already insidiously at work, but it's activities are restricted until what I have called the 'restraining power' is removed. When that happens the lawless man will be plainly seen-though the truth of the Lord Jesus spells his doom, and the radiance of the coming of the Lord Jesus will be his utter destruction"* (J.B. Phillips translation).

While waiting in Athens for his traveling companions to join him, Paul's spirit was deeply stirred within him. Passing through the thoroughfares of this celebrated city, he was shocked and sickened by the unbelievable display of temples, altars, and statues made in honor to their gods. Regardless of the direction in which he turned, he was faced with their innumerable idols! Petronius, a contemporary of Paul, and a citizen of Athens at that time, wrote that "our region is so full of deities that you may more frequently meet with a god than a man" (Satyr. cap. xvii). You can imagine, then, how congested things were! The streets were literally lined with these pagan devotions! They were everywhere!

Being exceedingly grieved by the sight, Paul began to openly dispute with the Jews in the local synagogue, and with devout persons in the public forum; and, as he did so, he was overheard by certain of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. These, being fascinated with Paul's strange and unusual speech, desired to hear more. So they brought him to the famous Mars Hill, that he might speak without distraction before the council.

From Paul's vantage point, he could view the entire city of Athens in one wide sweeping glance. It stretched out for miles around! At his feet was the epitome of man's cultural, intellectual, and philosophical achievements; the sprawling splendor of a then-modern civilization. How impressive it all was to the human eye; how wise and noble it all appeared! Here was a city of which men of refinement and sophistication took great pride; a community whose inhabitants were unarguably among the most intellectual in the world, and certainly among the most religious. It was "the center of the universe", culturally speaking, about which the entire Greco-Roman world revolved; the "Mecca" of higher education, you might say. It attracted students and worshipers alike, from all points. But what a strange mixture it was! They had employed the finest artists, architects, and sculptors the world had to offer to provide the visual effects for their many

objects of veneration; while the greatest poets, orators, and philosophers of their day had provided their complex descriptions. What an immense polytheistic structure they had constructed for their inhabitants! How very intricate was this "house" they had built on the philosophical plane! It was an incredible incongruity of ideas! On the one hand, they strove for exactness, preciseness, and perfection in the sciences, always demanding the higher standard in their academic achievements; while on the other, they gave themselves to the most fantastic superstitions! Absolutely amazing! In their efforts to explain the mysteries of life, they had placed a deity behind every form and expression in nature.. and thought themselves wise in doing so. But, O, how blind they were! Though in many ways they were far more advanced than the majority of the civilized world, they were to be pitied above all people! They were religiously imprisoned to their own devices, and ignorantly enslaved to the confusing system created from their vain imaginations. They had become the foolhardy captives of the very images which their hands had made! How sad they were! How alienated they had become from the realm of reality!

What a rare opportunity Paul was now given; to openly address the revered "wise ones" of the Areopagus (the supreme court of Athens). Now, some have suggested (Chrystosum, for one) that Paul was here on trial, against his will, being accused as a criminal; but judging from the way that he was brought to, and so freely dismissed from the stand, it does not appear that he had been charged with any particular crime. This opportunity became available, simply because of the ardent curiosity for which the Areopagites were noted. They loved nothing more than to tell, or to hear of some new thing. They were absolutely obsessed with philosophical novelties! Therefore, Paul seized the moment! He wasted no words! (Believe it or not, one of them had the audacity to accuse Paul of being "a babbler", literally, "a trash collector", or as Kenneth Wuest translates the term, an "ignorant plagiarist. picking up scraps of information here and there, unrelated in his own thinking and passing them off as the result of his own mature thought". This sounds more like a self-description of themselves)!

Now, before we proceed, it would be useful to understand a little about how the average Greek mind viewed Mars Hill. This will enable us to better appreciate the wonderful backdrop provided for our text. This sacred mount served as the national "think tank".. the place where ideas affecting government, religion, and society in general were formed; where public opinions were either accepted or rejected; where civil disputes were indisputably settled; and where fable was officially transformed into fact (at least, in their mind's eye). It was the place where the beliefs of their nation were ever changing, ever expanding, ever taking on new twists and turns of understanding. In their view, this was a place which not only commanded the attention of men, but of the gods, as well. The judgments handed down from it's crown were thought to have interested both worlds. You see, the members of it's counsel (who, by the way, were known as "the most holy") were thought to have possessed the power, not only to order the punishment of men in this life, but also in the life to come. They were supposed to have authority on either side of the veil; controlling the eternal destinies of all those who were brought before them by a single verdict. In order to make this threat more vivid in the minds of the people, the caves which were located at the base of the mount were said to have been the abode of "the Furies" (three goddess-sisters, who were responsible for determining what

ridiculous, unending torment [depending on the crime] would be imposed upon those who passed into the dark regions of the underworld). Needless to say, this thundering mount where the gods met was considered "holy ground" by the general populace. With visions of harpies, and gorgons, and other fiendish images lurking below, most folks were frightened half out of their wits at the very thought of it (a footnote here: even a brief look into pagan mythology should reveal from whence many in Christendom have received their modern "Dante's inferno" type concept of hell. It was clearly borrowed from the heathen; not the other way around, as is so often assumed)!

Not only did Mars Hill represent a microcosm (small model) of the way the Athenians viewed the world, from top to bottom; it also illustrated a macrocosm (large model) of man's natural mind in general.. compelled by an overwhelming curiosity, controlled by a wild imagination, and laden with it's confusing mixture of fact and fiction; of truth and superstitions; giving special reverence and acknowledgment to it's own chosen representative "figures" of authority (that is to say, anything or anybody it chooses to honor, rather than that which has been anointed and appointed by God), and built upon the shaky foundation of uncertainty and fear of the unknown! Therefore, with this information in hand, we ask: what better place in the ancient world could possibly have been found for Paul to deliver the Gospel...than from the pinnacle of the carnal mind? Why, from where he stood, he had it all under his feet! He knew he had the advantage over them...and he knew that he had the word that could set them free! Therefore, with courage, yet with the courtesy of a true diplomat, Paul addressed his audience of critics; and we would do well to listen in! In the words of the Phillips Translation, he said, "Gentlemen of Athens, my own eyes tell me that you are in all respects an extremely religious people. For as I made my way here and looked at your shrines I particularly noticed one altar on which were inscribed the words, TO GOD THE UNKNOWN. It is this God whom you are worshiping in ignorance that I am here to proclaim to you! God who made the world and all that is in it, being Lord of both heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands, as though He had needed anything---seeing that He is the One who gives to all men life and breath and everything else. From one forefather He has created every race of men to live over the face of the whole earth. He has determined the times of their existence and the limits of their habitation, so that they might search for God, in the hope that they might feel for Him and find Him---yes, even though He is not far from any one of us. Indeed, it is in Him that we live and move and have our being. Some of our own poets have endorsed this in the words, 'For we are indeed His children'. If then we are the children of God, we ought not to imagine God in terms of gold or silver or stone, contrived by human art or imagination. Now, while it is true that God has overlooked the days of ignorance, He now commands all men everywhere to repent For He has fixed a Day on which He will judge the whole world in justice by the standard of a Man whom He has appointed. That this is so He has guaranteed to all men by raising this Man from the dead" (Acts 17:22-31). Wow! Just picture this scene with us! Here was Paul, speaking from high atop Mars Hill, that typical mount incorporating within itself the perfect representation of man's human wisdom and judgment, very authoritatively (but politely) informing them that all that they had imagined concerning deity, all their varied manners of devotion to them, and all of their highly developed and carefully calculated philosophies concerning life in general and the

origin of the cosmos, was naught but rubbish! When viewed from his position, their entire structure amounted to nothing more than temporary construction... wood, hay, and stubble! It could not support their society for long; and would certainly not survive the inevitable fires of testing! It was destined to become but one more ash heap littering the skyline of human history! Their pluralistic divinities with humanly-likened characteristics, the limited appointments given them over certain aspects of creation, the warring factions and conflicts which supposedly existed between the gods, and their comical interaction with the world of men, were nothing more than "tall tales"; religious "cartoons"; the accumulated figments of man's vain and foolish imagination. They had merely raised them to the realm of the revered in their thinking, and treated them as sacred in their understanding. But that was just it: no matter how hallowed they were to them, and regardless of how much power had been attributed to them, they only existed in their minds! There was nothing there to fear but these flitting phantoms of the psyche (who disappeared into the shadows at the first break of light)! Nevertheless, despite the fact that they had carefully thought out their program, and despite the neat and orderly arrangement at which they had finally arrived, it seems obvious that they still sensed something seriously lacking in their knowledge of divinity. Paul immediately picked up on this, and used it in his presentation. The fact that they had erected an altar to "the unknown god" demonstrated conclusively that they must have felt incomplete, like something was missing, like there must have been a god out there who either refused to make himself known to them, or who exceeded their ability to imagine him. Why else would they have set up this stone "question mark" in the middle of town? No doubt, it punctuated the query in their hearts! Though it was in Him they lived, and moved, and had their very existence, they knew it not. They were totally oblivious to His presence. And yet, what they could not seem to understand was why the only true God would not fit into their "box". He would not be found among the confusing clutter in their minds; nor would He be found inhabiting any one of the beautifully crafted shrines, icons, or hallowed altars scattered across the land. In fact, the harder they worked to build up their religious order, and to proliferate their sacred structures throughout the region, the greater the chasm became. They were actually distancing themselves from Him through their works! You see, they had looked for Him in the vast "stretches" of their imaginations; and they had tried to envision Him in a way that would make Him compatible with their current mythology. But when they could not discover Him there, they just contented themselves to remain in their little world of make-believe, and to relegate Him to the realm of the unknown! Therefore, they built for Him an abode, and put a generalized, innocuous title over it, just in case He might show up someday (they didn't want to seem disrespectful, or in any way inhospitable to Him, if He did)! This was their way of acknowledging the weaknesses and limitations of their fictitious little system. They knew they had a problem; but were unable to come up with a better explanation!

Paul's speech was quite enlightening, to say the least...especially to those to whom he spake that day. And, yet, it is relative to all men in every generation. Without going into all the implications of it, it should be seen that the Omnipresent, Transcendent, Preeminent, Self-existent One, through Whom the world, and all that is therein, came, needs nothing of man's inventive or creative genius to bring Him to life. He does not need to be recreated by human imagination, in order for men to be able to worship Him; nor

does He need to be "resuscitated" by the breath of human inspiration, in the form of cunningly devised fables, in order for men to find Him interesting (furthermore, He takes no delight in doctrines which are designed to scare men into submission to Him). The fact of the matter is, who He is, and what He is able to do, far exceeds what man could ever imagine about Him (Eph. 3:20)! He is not held within the framework of human creativity; and He will never cease to amaze us! However, if men will but seek after Him, He will surely be found of them; for He is not far from any one of us. He Who encompasses all, and gives breath to all, actually desires to reveal Himself to all in Spirit and in Truth. But we may know of a certainty that if any will not feel after Him once He has made His desires known, He has appointed a specific time for every human being when He shall unavoidably break forth upon their consciousness as the noonday sun! In such an hour, there will be no excuse. The times of ignorance will have passed, the "winking" period will have waned, and He whose eyes are as flames of fire will reveal all things in the light of truth! Hallelujah!

Beloved, as if you hadn't noticed by now, the issue has already been settled. HE ALONE IS, AND ALWAYS WILL BE THE FINAL AND ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY ON TRUTH. This is because He is the very embodiment of Truth! When He shows up on the scene, it no longer matters what the convening counsel in our minds may think about Him; our ideas are no longer a concern. At such time, He overrules man's judgment, by making His mind and will undeniably known to us. And it is in this contrast between light and darkness that He reveals the absolute foolishness and absurdity of our carnal reasoning! (Our high and lofty "Aereopagite" like opinions don't seem so wise, then)! Just as Paul was inadvertently confronted by the blinding Light on the road to Damascus, and thus brought to see his folly by virtue of that Light, even so the Lord has determined to utterly destroy the wisdom of the wise in each one of our lives by the Spirit of His mouth, at the brightness of His coming. He has but to appear, and the "mountains" of man's wisdom and judgment just melt away into nothingness! Praise God for it! The most wonderful aspect of all of this is that He has fixed a Day on His glorious "calendar of events", when He shall judge the whole world by the same standard, the standard and measure of that Man whom He has appointed! Praise His holy name! The revelation of Himself will perform the work!

THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE

Paul wisely summed up his experience on Mars Hill, when He later wrote to the Corinthians, "Has not God shown up the nonsense and the folly of this world's wisdom? For when the world with all its earthly wisdom failed to perceive and recognize and know God by means of its own philosophy, God in His wisdom was pleased through the foolishness of preaching [salvation, procured by Christ and to be had through Him], to save those who believed (who clung to and trusted in and relied on Him)" (I Cor. 1:20-21, Amplified). Despite the breath-taking and intricate "temple" of human wisdom and knowledge the Hellenists had constructed, the Lord still remained unknown to them; and they would continue to be unable to discover the Wisdom of God personified, as long as they sought after Him through philosophical, intellectual, or imaginative means. (This was due to the fact that not only were they building with the wrong materials, they were

also building on the wrong foundation). This condition, in and of itself, was distressing enough. It had caused them to miss out on that glory, virtue, and freedom which comes from knowing and walking with God in "the Spirit of the Day". But their beliefs, if allowed to continue on their own destructive course, would ultimately lead to the ruin and collapse of their society, as they knew it! In other words, they would bring judgment upon themselves!

The only hope Paul left them was to repent. But how did the Greeks understand this word, "repent"? If anyone would have known what it meant, surely it seems they would have; for it was from their own language that the apostle spoke to them (and notice that he did not, at this time, bother to redefine the term for them, either). In their speech, it was "metanoeo", which simply meant, "to think differently or afterwards: to reconsider" (# 3340 in Strong's). It meant "to have another mind" (Young's). Therefore, when he said to them that though God had "winked" at the former times of their ignorance (that is, He "overlooked" it, and thus would not hold them accountable for what they had not known), but now commanded all men everywhere to repent, they took this to mean that they must change their entire structure of thought; reconsider their system of beliefs, and receive another mind, the mind that God Himself would give them, by way of revelation! Once they had learned of God's desire, they could no longer think as they once did with impunity!

Before we pass up the opportunity, there is one thing here that we would like you to pay special attention to; and that is the fact that Paul was not rebuking them. He was not shaking his finger in their faces, condemning them for their past lack of spiritual knowledge; and he was not trying to generate a particular display of emotions from them. He knew that (unlike the hypocritical Pharisees to whom John preached) what the Greeks had believed, they had believed with all sincerity; and there was nothing that could lightly be spoken against that. Besides, they had never heard the gospel, prior to this. This was their first encounter with the truth that is in Christ. Therefore, the times of their ignorance were not even a consideration. He was simply admonishing them that they should now turn from the way of imagination, to that of revelation. He was warning them to lay aside the broken and distorted "spectacles" of their Hellenistic world view (which would only cause them to further stumble along in the dark); and he was offering them an invitation to see and know the "unknown God" as He truly is. Christ alone could save them from themselves! However, if they chose to continue in their ignorance, if they refused to acknowledge Him during the time of their visitation, they would most certainly bear the consequences. It was inevitable that they would suffer greatly from such a decision. Their punishment would be self-inflicted!

Beloved, the importance of repentance could not possibly have been overstated to them; and neither can it to us! For not only is it foundational in the life of every believer; it is also critical for our continued growth in the Spirit. It is something none of us can afford to ignore!

Now, generally speaking, when we think of the subject of repentance, we are inclined to connect it with weeping, remorse, and confession of sin. This is because the majority of

the times we have heard it mentioned, it has usually been in an evangelistic setting, and primarily directed toward those in a lost or backslidden condition. Therefore, it is only natural that we have come to commonly associate it with known, deliberate transgressions against God's law. And there is certainly a clear validation for this type of preaching from Scripture (but not so much for the "circus-like" atmosphere which often accompanies it). We would be amiss to believe otherwise! We find this validation in several places, but primarily from a couple of Hebrew words used in the Old Testament. Those words are "shuw" and "nacham". The first means, "to turn back; to return to the starting point; to retreat". The second means, "to sigh, i.e. to breathe strongly; to be sorry, to rue" (it is this second word that provides inclusion). Therefore, it is not difficult to see from whence we get our idea. It is clearly based on solid, practical teachings from the Word of God.

However, it seems that because we have so radically and exclusively embraced this view, it has inadvertently served to suppress our general understanding of the subject. With justifiable reason, we will quickly relate repentance with sin...even with thoughts that are sinful. But what about thoughts that are basically amoral in nature? And what about doctrine in general? Has it ever dawned on us that repentance might well be warranted for some of the things which we have come to believe? For many, this brings out the role and importance of repentance in a whole new light! We believe that in order for us to have a well-rounded understanding of the purpose of repentance, and in order for it to serve us properly, this broader definition must ever be kept in mind. Again, so no one will take our words out of context, let us reiterate. For sure, there is that sense of the word which pertains to willful, intentional acts of rebellion, which demands a turning from sinful thoughts or practices, and a returning to the paths of righteousness. Certainly, grief and sorrow should accompany this; a ruing of our deliberate, disobedient ways. There should be no contention with this in anyone's mind. But then, there is also that sense in which no such emotion is necessarily involved. Depending on the condition of one's heart, of course, all that is required is a simple turning from thoughts which spring from the natural mind. This can refer to thoughts arising from daily circumstances which confront us in life, or it can refer to thoughts which pertain to doctrinal issues. They may be well-intentioned, and innocent enough. And they may seem to be right, from a human perspective, well-fitting in the place where we have incorporated them. But they are thoughts which have not been issued by the Lord; those which have no quickening from the Spirit. Therefore, regardless if we are dealing with thoughts or actions which specifically fall under the category of "sin", or whether we are discussing thoughts or doctrine in general (which have not come from the Lord), repentance plays a vital part in each one of our lives. It always starts with the simple act of turning, of changing our minds, of converting from one point of view to another. Anything less than this is not true repentance, and will not redound to the glory of God.

A PAINFUL PROCESS

It is quite fascinating to see how the English word, repentance, came to us. It was originally passed down to us from the French language, then through the Latin. Etymologically speaking, it stems from the word, "pain", and is connected with the word,

"penalty". With the "re" prefix attached to it, we come up with "pain.. again". Therefore, we might say that repentance is twice-born pain; a second penalty. But how do we understand this concept? Quite simply. The first pain comes, whenever we think contrarily to God's Word or will (we often times experience misery, irritability, condemnation, etc., all the consequences commonly associated with wrong thinking; or, at the very least, we will feel an unsettledness and deep-down dissatisfaction in our spirits...which comes from being deprived of the peace and joy which should naturally come from knowing the truth). The second pain comes, when we must humble ourselves, and admit to God, ourselves, and perhaps others, that we have been wrong. As you are probably aware, that can be extremely painful! (It could well be said that while we are walking "as men", in the vanity of our mind, upon "the stones of the pit", our spirit man suffers, while the flesh is eased. But in repentance, the flesh man suffers, while our spirits rejoice in the truth! This is because our inner man naturally delights to do God's will)! Ah, if only we could remember that the pain associated with it is kept to a minimum, the quicker we repent! We could save ourselves much unnecessary suffering!

Of a truth, real repentance involves every faculty of man's soul. It is the changing of our minds, the compliance of our wills, and the submission of our emotions. It is the acknowledgment of the truth of God, and the willingness to make the necessary adjustments to align with that truth, once it has been made known. But as you know, one of the hardest things for folks to do is to admit when they are wrong! They will wiggle and squirm, and make a multitude of excuses, sometimes justifying things which they know deep down in their hearts to be erroneous, rather than accepting correction, and going on with God. Now, we know that the Lord "winks" at ignorance, whenever it is an innocent state of mind; but when people come to the knowledge of the truth, and then deliberately rebel against it, you can believe He raises His eyebrows! The Lord is not slack concerning His promise (I Peter 3:9), dear friend! He corrects those whom He loves!

AN ABIDING ATTITUDE OF REPENTANCE

It is our intention in this message to show that repentance is not just a past-tense experience for the maturing believer; neither is it reserved solely for what we have come to identify as transgression. These two general misconceptions have probably done more to derail the spiritual progress of believers than any other (and the idea that repentance must always be marked by some special inward sensation, or outward display of emotions would perhaps be a close third). Nay, brothers and sisters, repentance is our way of keeping the man of sin from "sitting" in our temple. It is our way of cooperating with God in his unseating. And it is the way in which we remove unwanted, "flammable" materials from the temple, once they have been added. You might say that it is our spiritual "claw-hammer"...the means by which we pry off that which does not belong on the building)! Moreover, it is an attitude that God desires each of us to develop, and to walk in. By this, we are speaking of a constant and continual state of compliance.. a perpetual readiness to stop what we are doing, cease from the way we are thinking, and humbly turn to the Lord, the instant He makes known to us that we have been walking contrary to His will and Word (this keeps matters from getting out of hand). It is an

immediate and ever-present willingness to admit when we are wrong, and to agree with God, no matter how painful or difficult that decision might be. We can either do this with consent, or the Lord will use a little "warm and gentle" (ha!) persuasion to help us do so! But, one way or another, He will invariably bring us to His point of view! We can rest assured of that!

Now, having said that, we will reenter the atmosphere of our observations from the third chapter of I Corinthians. As has been established in our studies, our Father has ordained that we wait patiently for the revelation of His Spirit. That is His highest intention for each of us, that we hear the "cross" principle "in the place of the skull". But while this is the preferred experience, it is an undeniable fact that it is not always the one we enjoy. There are times in our spiritual "apprenticeship program" (I Cor. 3:9) when we honestly mistake that which has been dispatched from the mind of the flesh for "gold, silver, and precious stones"; and this comes as no surprise to God. He knew that we would make mistakes from time to time; and He has more than enough grace and patience to work with us when we do. He is the perfect Instructor! Throughout our experience, He has known just the right times to "wink" at us, and right when to overlook an occasional unintentional slip. However, the extension of His grace does not mean that He will still let us retain that which does not comply with the divine Pattern, or overlook that which does not conform to the "fire code". To do so would be counter-productive to His purpose! He has always insisted on building "by the Book"; and He will make no exceptions now. He will not allow substitutes or compromises in the choice or quality of the building materials! Why should He, when He has already provided everything that we would ever need to build His house? As it says in 11 Peter 1:3, "His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us unto glory and virtue"! This is to say, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God have already been invested in His "store house" (namely, our earthen vessels; 11 Cor. 4:7); and these valuable, inexhaustible treasures of "gold, silver, and precious stones" are available to us for the asking. Just as Solomon built his temple for God, using only those materials provided by his father, David; and just as Jesus followed suit, employing only those things which He saw with His Father; no less is expected of us! He has supplied us with the best, most enduring materials possible! Therefore, there is no reason why He should make concessions for our "consumables". Whenever we accept an alternative, and attempt to incorporate it into the framework of His house, we can expect Him to voice His objections. He knows just how to convince us that it isn't needed, and that it doesn't belong!

We dealt briefly in our last segment with the passage from I Cor. 3:14-16, which says, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire... if any man defile the temple, him shall God destroy (or, bring to destruction)". And, just to stir up your pure minds, we will remind you that the temple being discussed here is, first and foremost, that mystical mental temple, which is comprised of the multitudinous impressions and thoughts we entertain in our heads (it is not until later, in chapter 6, that the physical temple of our bodies is specifically brought into the arena of discussion). The mystery of Paul's terminology is clearly understood, when taken in

consideration with an earlier declaration of his. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent " (I Cor. 1:19). We found that by following the chain of scriptures, beginning with chapter 1, this was his consistent theme; and it continues uninterrupted, all the way through the passage we are presently considering. Thus, we concluded that God's chief interest is in bringing the defiled temple to destruction; and He does so by destroying and bringing to naught the understanding and wisdom of this world in us. That should be simple enough for anyone to see. Now, if God permit, we will expound a little more upon this precept. As you know, there are certain discrepancies which we allow in the construction that require but minor attention. A single word from the Lord helps us to make the necessary corrections, and to resume production on the temple on schedule. Whenever this is the case, and we cooperate fully with God, we are able to redeem the time, with little or no significant loss, by quickly acknowledging the error, and agreeing with Him. Our Father is well pleased when He sees this response from us; and we in no wise lose our reward! Praise God!

However, there are other disparities in thought or doctrine, which, because we do not take sufficient heed how we build in the early stages, can lead to an utter corruption and defilement of the temple. Unchecked, these ideas and impressions can eventually influence our entire perspective on life. They can desecrate the sanctity of our renewed minds...severely effecting our conduct, and perverting our judgment on virtually every issue with which we are confronted. When this happens, the Lord often makes the wise and merciful decision to burn the structure to the ground, in order that we (and others) might learn from our mistakes, and start afresh from the foundation. But just how does this come about?

There are several ways that might be mentioned here, which, we believe, depend largely on the individual, and the particular set of circumstances. Seeing that the Lord treats each one on an individual basis, according to His wise discretion, we will not attempt to generalize them all into a single definition. And we will not attempt to list them all. The fire can fall in many ways, either by word or by experience, but always "tailor-made" to suit each individual's needs! However, we have found that many times, when we insist upon thinking in certain ways, the Lord will say nothing more. After we have repeatedly spurned His warnings, and shunned His instructions, He will simply withdraw His presence, and leave us to our own devices. And when He who "lets", or hinders, is taken out of the way, the "restraining order" He has had on the man of sin is removed (II Thess. 2:7). Thus, he is given freedom to "come out of hiding", and express himself more fully. It's as if the Lord says, "O.K., if you're determined to think in these terms, I will allow you to...but let's just see where they lead"! This is but one of the ways He deals with the defiled "temple" of our thoughts! He turns "the heathen" loose in our minds, and permits him to go to extremes! What a powerful way to teach us a lesson!

We find this disciplinary principle to be common in Scripture. Among other places, it is seen in Prov. 1:31, "...therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices" (note: the word, "device", means, "a perception. i.e. purpose, by implying the intellect, disposition:--device. mind, thought, advice, or imagination"). And

again, in Jer. 6:19, "Lo, I am bringing in calamity against this people, the fruit of their own devices, for unto My word have they not given heed, and as for My law, they have rejected it" (Rotherham translation). It may also be seen in scriptures, such as Prov. 14:14, "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways", as well as Isa. 3:10-II, and Jer. 2:19. These, and other passages like them, speak for themselves. They set forth a rule of discipline; a means by which God judges His people.

We have known some fine folks over the years, who appeared to be strong, stable, competent believers. They possessed a good working knowledge of the foundational principles of the doctrine of Christ, and stood firmly upon the Rock. Through the course of time, however, they began to entertain some strange little notions. When they first began to consider them, they had no idea how influential they could be. Nor did they have any intention of ever believing in them so strongly. They were just interesting little ideas, possessing within them an element of truth, which served as "food for thought" (howbeit, forbidden fruit). As time went on, they began to share those thoughts with others, as novel conversation pieces. Their ponderings gave them a sense of "uniqueness"; the feeling of profound spiritual depth. Ignoring the "warning lights" that were going off within their spirits, however, they steadily pressed forward with their curiosity, until finally, they began to work them into their general theology. Their questions eventually turned into statements of faith!

We have seen these same folks some time later, who, in our brief space of absence, had become so thoroughly obsessed with these ideas, so completely engrossed with these opinions, that they were like strangers to us! Only in appearance did they even slightly resemble the people we remembered! Every scripture they viewed, and every experience they had, was either directly, or indirectly built around their current mindset. They were absolutely "brainwashed" by their newfound beliefs! If they had a dream, it was interpreted according to these perspectives. If they had an encounter of any sort, it was somehow connected with their pet doctrine. It was as if they were incapable of thinking, apart from these strange fanaticisms! And conversation was next to impossible with them! All they wanted to talk about, yea, all they could talk about, was what was going on in their little world (this was because they had no room, nor interest, in any meaningful exchange of ideas)! There was no reasoning with them at all! They had totally alienated themselves from fellowship with their brethren, from sound doctrine, and from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them! They were like aliens from another planet!

What had happened to these people? And what happens every day to others just like them? In a word, God permits them to be filled with their own devices! The reasons could be varied. Perhaps it is because they have tried to figure a matter out in the flesh; maybe it is just the result of not consulting with God for discernment. The Lord knoweth all things. With some, their temple may have become defiled when they attempted to interpret scripture through the eyes of a particular emotion (such as fear, anger, bitterness, hatred, etc.), which they refused to abandon. With others, they might have just plain listened to the devil! What else can you say for them? Regardless, when people become obsessed by views like this, when they become lop-sided and extreme in their beliefs, it is

a good indication that they have repeatedly cast off God's advice. They have purposefully rejected His counsel. Therefore, He has allowed the man of sin to make fools of them!

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Now, we don't want it to seem like we are trivializing this "defilement" of the temple. Certainly, we are mindful of some of the ugly, immoral, and ungodly forms it can take. And we have seen some very tragic illustrations of where they can lead in recent history. For starters, we could think of Jonestown in Guyana; we could think of Waco, Texas. These, and many other extreme examples have occurred as the result of God withdrawing His presence, and giving men over to reprobate minds; of surrendering them over to the spirit of strong delusion. What horrible losses have been suffered in this life (not only by the individuals themselves, but by their families and friends, as well), simply because the leaders of these groups chose to incorporate false doctrines into their theological "temples", and their followers were foolish enough to build according to their "house plans"! Ah, the "firetraps" men have built! The sad thing about this is, while not all end up the same way, these are anything but isolated cases. There are untold scores of bogus "building contractors" out there, who build without "building permits" (Heb. 6:1-3), scattered all around the world! They will build their idol temples anywhere they can, on any foundation! And they are totally irresponsible for their teachings! As has been well documented, many of their listeners have been so effected by the hazardous materials they use that they have literally lost their minds. They have ended up in mental institutions, as result of them! Needless to say, this is no light matter!

Without doubt, God would have all men to repent for these forms of defiled thinking. Common sense should tell us that much. But it is our conviction that God is not just concerned with dealing with what might be deemed as "severe", or obvious cases of deception. He is just as mindful of those seemingly "insignificant" ideas we entertain; the attitudes and opinions which rarely come into question (because we have held them so long); and the doctrines which are more widely accepted among the Christian community. He knows the source from whence they came; and He knows where they can ultimately lead!

Beloved, as we have said before, we will say again: from the Lord's perspective, "wood, hay, or stubble" is all the same.. no matter how well it's been fashioned; no matter how secure it may seem. This is not to say that in every instance, these materials are wrong (for, as you know, wood was, in places, used in the construction of the temple.. but only when it was completely covered with gold). The bottom line is that they are just not the materials of choice. Because of such examples as those cited above, some have thought themselves wise just to remain (or become) members of any one of the many respected and established denominations in Christendom, and settle for at least one of their dusty old teachings. This, in their view, serves as a safeguard, and keeps them from falling into error. Their natural reasoning is that if these theological "houses" have survived this far, they must be "fire-proof". Each and every one of these belief systems must be trustworthy, to have stood the test of time, as they have! Therefore, week after week, they respond to the incessant urging to drive to the nearest "supply warehouse" of their choice, and receive their regular load of building materials. As you know, these institutions are usually well stocked, with ample amounts on hand. No matter how high one might desire to build in their organization, they have their seminary manuals, their sermon books, their Sunday school lessons, their correspondence courses, their hymn books, and some even their prayer books, already prepared, and laid out in a very systematic order for the

inquiring mind; describing in great detail the blueprints for their particular way of thinking. They are always ready to build on any location! And they will gladly order your every thought, according to their specifications! They are like pre-fabricated house factories.. anxiously waiting, with their pre-packaged materials, to build their "dream home" between your ears! How exciting! But what many fail to understand is that most, if not all of these time-honored institutions have long since incorporated extra-biblical customs and beliefs into their programs and teachings. Their services are literally filled with practices which have absolutely no founding in the New Testament; in fact, many of their teachings are only slight modifications from those of ancient Greece and Rome (anyone with even an elementary knowledge of the simple message and methodology of the first century church should be able to recognize this)! But because these things are now commonly accepted by the majority of those in the religious "contractor's union" (you know, the authorities on religious matters), they have come to be known as "mainstream" church doctrine and procedure! Ah, beloved, in many ways, they are just as hoodwinked as the others! We wonder to ourselves: what's the big difference?

As you can probably imagine, there are many ideological questions that could be asked here; many theological queries that we could pose. And we trust that the Spirit will raise each of these, as is relative to the reader. The questions could literally number into the hundreds (we have to restrain ourselves, for lack of space)! But having set the stage at the opening of this article, it behooves us to ask these simple few. Have we erected an altar to the "unknown god" in our hearts? Have we resigned ourselves to the idea that certain things concerning the Kingdom will never be clear to us; that there is really no definitive position we can take on certain issues; or that God has no interest in personally showing Himself to us as individuals in Spirit and in truth? Have we, as a result, settled for the traditional superstitions and religious imaginings of men, the home-spun yarns and doctrinal fairy-tales of dreamy-eyed theologians, in matters such as eschatology, judgment, or God's eternal purpose? Have we simply "joined the crowd", so to speak, in the way that we annually pay tribute to God (by our routine participation in pagan holidays)? Or, like the Greeks, are we practicing a form of polytheism? Have we divided the character of the Godhead into a thousand conflicting pieces? (As you recall, the actions of their gods were oftentimes inconsistent with one another. The god of love might stand in opposition to the god of wrath, etc.). If so, He has commanded all men everywhere to repent! We must turn from such thinking, and be open to receive the mind of Christ on every issue. If we are willing and obedient, He will show us exactly how to build to His specifications. **THIS IS HIS DESIRE!** Remember, "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it". Unless He is overseeing the entire construction, and approving of the substances with which we are building, even our most sincere efforts are in vain! They will all go up in smoke (and the smoke of our torment will be seen afar off)!

It remains to be seen where some of the thoughts the church world has traditionally entertained about God and His Kingdom will lead (if nothing else, we know that they have led men away from truth and reality). Some things are obviously reserved for the Day of fire. And suffice us to say that the Day will declare them in due season. The Lord will settle every issue, and cause all doctrinal disputes to cease. So why argue about

them? What we will say is that as long as we hold on to ideas and doctrines that are obviously not biblical or true, we are only hindering ourselves. We are only keeping ourselves from advancing in our full apprehension of the mind of Christ. Regardless of how popular they have been in the past, and regardless if we can see the damage and defilement they are capable of producing, they will eventually have to be discarded, anyway.. so why not make things easy on ourselves? Place them at the foot of the cross! The longer we hold them, the more difficult it will be to give them up!

We believe that there is coming a time when God shall have a people who are in perfect accord with Him; whose every thought will be His thought; whose every impression comes from Him. At such time, the message of repentance will no longer be relevant to them. The temple will be established in the top of the mount, and every truth and revelatory principle shall be in it's proper place. But as long as we are going through this transitional stage, this "metamorphosis of the mind", and until we can honestly say that we do only that which we have seen with the Father, a constant and abiding attitude of repentance will be necessary. We cannot get around it!

"...the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent...". Selah (pause, and think deeply about this)!

to be continued...

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