

# Carnal Followers and Lawless “Theologians”

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A.W. Tozer once observed:

“Churches and societies founded by saintly men with courage, faith and sanctified imagination appear unable to propagate themselves on the same spiritual level beyond one or two generations. The spiritual fathers were not able to sire others with courage and faith equal to their own. The fathers had God and little else, but their descendents lose [the fathers’] vision and look to methods and constitutions for the power their hearts tell them they lack. Then rules and precedents harden into a protective shell where they can take refuge from trouble. It is always easier and safer to pull in our necks than to fight things out on the field of battle.” (“Organization: Necessary and Dangerous,” *God Tells the Man Who Cares*, p. 32)

If ever a quote revealed the usual pattern and nature of churchianity, this one must surely rank among the best yet most concise treatments of the disease that plagues a great deal of that which calls itself the body of Christ!

We must first recognize the hidden sin of these leaders and spiritual fathers. Paul prophesied that their particular sin would come. To the elders (Greek, *presbuteros* [4245]) and overseers (traditionally, “bishops,” Greek, *episkopos* [1985]) of Ephesus (see Acts 20:17, 28), he said, “From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” (Acts 20:30) From among the ranks of the elders and overseers, church history records the rise of the bishop who stood in the place of Christ and God over the local assemblies. Councils of these bishops formulated doctrines and creeds by which they could judge who was “faithful” and who was “apostate.” These lords over the people came to be called clergy and took to themselves great privileges and powers. But the original sin of this group was to simply draw followers after themselves and away from Christ.

As soon as we have attached ourselves to any man, that man competes with Christ as our head and leader. When one is truly an infant still needing the milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2) it is appropriate to have a “nursemaid” who “breastfeeds” the newborn baby. But if this stage of life is not quickly outgrown, the attachment quickly becomes a carnal one. (see Heb. 5:12-14) Paul wrote, “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?” (1 Cor. 3:4) As soon as we attach ourselves to some man – and this may be as simple as calling a man “father” (see Mt. 23:9) – we have reverted at least some part of ourselves back to carnality – a thing Paul said was *enmity* against God. (Rom. 8:7, Gal. 5:17) When one has embraced carnality that fights against God’s purposes at this early stage of development, it will always be difficult to discern God’s will and way. Rather, it will be easy to convince oneself that one’s “church” is right and good because it is by that tool that we have caused ourselves to be “better people” or by which we have come to rub elbows with a “higher class” of people or even have had spiritual experiences that surely must be with God. In reality, however, because the whole system hinges on carnal followers of lawless “theologians,” it remains an abomination, a stench in the nostrils of God, even as He graciously continues to raise up all those who will later somehow come out of that abomination. God still knows how to simultaneously reserve some

for judgment in the very same place where He protects and upholds His righteous remnant. (2 Pet. 2:9)

It is perhaps easier for us to recognize the carnality of the followers (though most people mistakenly assume that the obvious, extreme sycophant – yes-man – is the *only* possible version of the carnal follower) and it is indeed more difficult to recognize the lawlessness of the “theologian” they follow. First, the very concept of lawlessness, a characteristic Jesus said would be extremely prevalent in the days just prior to His return (Mt. 24:12), was shrouded for centuries under the word “iniquity,” a word which is more closely related to “inequity” (“imbalance”) and which means (in most people’s minds) simply rampant evil or crime. The Greek word however has a much more precise meaning.

Lawlessness (Greek, *anomia* [458]) simply means “without law.” As New Testament believers freed from the law of Moses, the term could be used against us if simply not following law was its real meaning. But *anomia* (best rendered as lawlessness in more modern translations) refers to the absence of any outside source by which one regulates his or her activities, attitudes and behaviors. “Relativism” is the name of the philosophy that mirrors what the New Testament calls *lawlessness*. It is perhaps best summed up in a description of the Israelites before there were kings. “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Jdgs. 21:25) Because Christ is not really King and Head over most of that which calls itself “Christianity,” the result is that most people are simply and only practicing whatever version of churchianity appeals most to their own personalities and appetites. This is where the lawlessness of the “theologian” (“pastor,” “apostle,” “prophet,” whatever) becomes visible – he chooses which “brand” of “theology” he prefers and preaches that, attracting as many followers to himself and his “theology” as his personal eloquence and charisma will seduce.

There is another way too in which lawlessness is practiced – particularly now that the internet allows virtually anyone to be a teacher or blog-host. One can peruse all the various websites that appeal to one’s personality and appetites and choose a little from here, a little from there, and never realize that all one has done is make oneself his own follower. While it is true that the genuine seeker of truth must decide how much truth is before him in any given writing, setting or message, this is a different process from selecting out which portions appeal to one’s carnally acquired religious and “spiritual” tastes.

Tozer’s observation that the founders (of those movements which have produced much good fruit) “had God and little else” (*ibid.*) still stands as an excellent guidepost: God and little else – and the less of the latter the better! God alone is to be the very center of our lives – individually *and* corporately. Our mistake is made when we allow our own notions about God to replace Him as our very center of being. It is as easy as mistaking the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to be the tree of life.

One will never be the pure and ready bride of Christ (Rev. 19:7) who does not break free from the trap of following after men. The wife of Christ will not consist of people whose will is set on things contrary to the will and purposes of God.

It is time once again to sound forth the pure and unaltered gospel of the kingdom: “Set your mind on things above, not on [the fleshly and carnal] things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:2-3) The “pastor” as lord over his own “church” and the “apostle” or “prophet” as one set over the life and actions of another are only the carnal, earthly fruit of someone’s lawless “theology.” Whether we will allow ourselves to become a carnal follower of a lawless “theologian” is our choice to make. Genuine teachers and preachers

of the gospel of the kingdom can only encourage you to choose wisely and be entirely certain you are truly one of the Lord's sheep who hear *His* voice and know *Him* and follow *Him*. (Jn. 10:27) Anyone seeking followers after himself or his own "theology" is only participating in the great falling away, the apostasy, that comes before Christ's return. (2 Ths. 2:3)

Let he who has ears hear.

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