

Judgment Begins at God's House



Teaching Letter
by Derek Prince

I have confined this analysis to the situation in the United States. Much of what I say, however, applies to other nations who are heirs to the Judeo-Christian **inheritance** and to the *church* worldwide. May God help each of us to accept our personal responsibility!

As American Christians, we are confronted by a grim, undeniable fact: our nation has come under the judgment of God. For this there are many reasons, but they can be summed up in one simple statement: We have committed the sin for which Esau was rejected - we have despised our birthright (Hebrews 12:15-17).

God judges us according to the measure of light we have received. Jesus told the Jews of His day that their judgment would be much more severe than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, because they had received a much greater revelation of the truth (Matthew 11:20-24).

The same applies to America in this century. No other nation has had the same access to the Word of God that has been granted to the American people. Through culture and tradition, through churches and evangelists, through radio and television, and through the printed word, America has been blessed above all other nations with the knowledge of God's truth. Our judgment for rejecting it will be correspondingly severe. Many Christians do not realize that God's judgment does not begin with the people of the world, but with the people of God. Peter told the Christians of his day:

> "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

These words apply equally to the church in America today. Of all the sins that could be charged against the contemporary church, it is sufficient to focus on two: materialism and compromise. In Luke 17:26-30 Jesus predicted that the period before His return would be like the days of Noah and Lot. He mentioned specifically eight activities characteristic of those days: eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage,

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buying, selling, building, planting. Yet there is nothing specifically sinful in any of these activities. What, then, was the problem?

The problem was materialism. The people of those days had become so engrossed in these materialistic activities that they were unaware of the impending judgment of God on their carnal lifestyle. When judgment came, they were totally unprepared. The same is true today of most professing Christians in America. If the final judgments of God should suddenly usher in the return of Christ, they would be totally unprepared.

Like materialism, the sin of compromise often goes unrecognized. About two years ago, while praying, I had a mental picture of the interior of a typical church building with rows of pews, a platform, a pulpit, a piano and so on. But the whole building was permeated with some kind of fog. The outlines of objects could be discerned, but nothing was sharply defined. While I was wondering what the fog represented, God gave me one clear word: compromise.

In the contemporary church, most of the main moral and doctrinal truths, so clearly enunciated in the New Testament, have become blurred and ineffective. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul wrote:

> "Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God."

Yet the church today is full of people who commit these sins, but remain totally unconcerned. In fact, they often boast of such sins.

A church member lay in a hospital, dying of AIDS, which he had contracted through homosexuality. Then he received Christ and was given a New Testament. After reading someway in the New Testament, he sent an urgent message to the person who had led him to Christ: "Come and pray for me. I need deliverance. I never knew there was anything wrong with my lifestyle."

About ten years ago, at the Christmas season, our staff had committed Ruth and me to appear on two television presentations of PTL. Since we do not watch television, we had no idea what to expect. I was supposed to be the "main speaker." Out of the first hour, I was given ten minutes, and out of the second hour, twenty minutes. Most of the time was given to appealing for money and selling Tammy dolls. As far as I can recall, Ruth and I were the only people who even mentioned Jesus.

Shortly afterwards there was a public exposure of the scandals that have now become notorious. But for me personally the most shocking thing was not any sexual or financial misdoing, grievous as that was. What shocked me then, and still shocks me today, is the realization that millions of Americans were being continually confronted with a totally false picture of Christianity—one that had no room for the cross, with its demands for humility, for holiness and for sacrificial living. How terrible to realize that people who have been seduced by such a presentation may never hear the real truth of the gospel!

The PTL scandal is now history, but it has left us with a question we need to answer: was it simply an isolated phenomenon, or was it a symptom of a disease that affects the Body of Christ throughout America?

Yet within the church there is still a remnant of sincere, devoted followers of Jesus. If we are among that number, how does God require us to respond to the present crises?

One clear answer is given in 2 Chronicles 7:14:

> "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

The phrase, "My people who are called by My name" applies to all Christians who take the name of Christ upon themselves.

For at least 30 years I have been teaching on this Scripture, but recently I was confronted by a shocking realization! God's people in our day have never fulfilled the first condition. We have never truly humbled ourselves. Our pride—both religious and racial—remains as a barrier that holds back the answer to our prayers for ourselves and for our nation.

Through the severe dealings of God in my own life, I have learned the most effective way for us to humble ourselves. Very simply, it is by confessing our sins. If we regularly and sincerely confess our sins to God, it is impossible to approach Him with an attitude of pride. Furthermore, I have seen that God has only committed Himself to forgive the sins we confess.

> "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"

(1 John 1:9)

Unconfessed sins are unforgiven sins. Thus the barrier of pride builds up a second barrier of unforgiven sin.

The Bible exhorts us to confess our sins not merely to God, but also to one another.

> "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16)

Confessing our sins to God deals with vertical pride; confessing to one another deals with horizontal pride. We can hardly maintain an attitude of pride towards someone to whom we have just confessed our personal sins.

This applies especially to the relationship between husbands and wives. Those who regularly confess their sins to one another are not kept apart by a barrier of pride.

Furthermore, confession of sin is an essential prerequisite to effective intercession. Daniel was one of the most righteous characters in the Bible, but when he set out to intercede for his people Israel, he began by acknowledging his own share in their sin (Dan. 9:3-13).

I believe that God is waiting for us as American Christians to humble ourselves before Him and one another by confessing our sins. Only after we have done that, can we move on to claim the healing of our land. But I must add a word of warning. Do not begin to indulge in morbid introspection! The Holy Spirit is "the finger of God" (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20). Ask God to place His finger on the sins you need to confess. He will do it with unerring accuracy, probably bringing to light sins which you never recognized!

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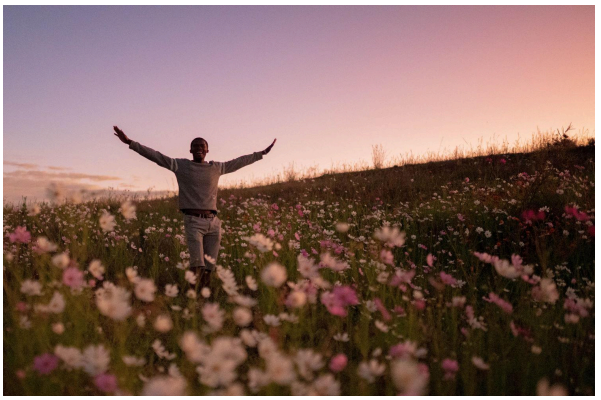

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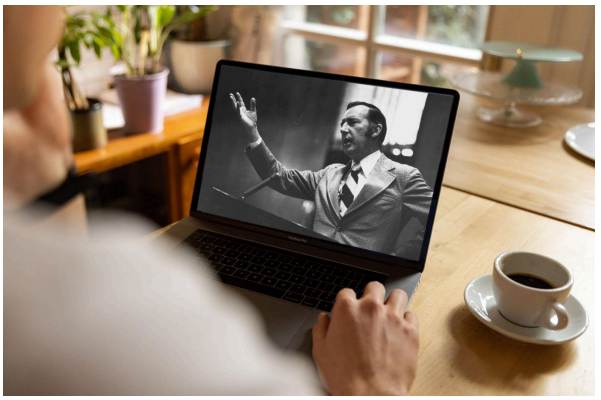

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