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Apostasy on Trial, Part 7

Jeremiah 2:20-25, "For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds;
And you said, 'I will not transgress,'
When on every high hill and under every green tree
You lay down, playing the harlot.

- 21 Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality.
How then have you turned before Me
Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?
- 22 For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap,
Yet your iniquity is marked before Me," says the Lord GOD.

- 23 “How can you say, ‘I am not polluted,
I have not gone after the Baals’?
See your way in the valley;
Know what you have done:
You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways,
- 24 A wild donkey used to the wilderness,
That sniffs at the wind in her desire;
In her time of mating, who can turn her away?
All those who seek her will not weary themselves;
In her month they will find her.
- 25 Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst.
But you said, ‘There is no hope.
No! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go.’

Jeremiah 2:13 speaks of the “broken cisterns” which God’s people labored and worked to build! These “broken cisterns” clearly reference the adoption of Baalism on the part of Judah. As attractive as it may have seemed, Baalism could not give or sustain life! Yet God’s people clung to it.

Yet, the adoption of this religion on the part of Israel was subtle. If you accompanied Jeremiah as he ministered, you’d witness God’s people flocking to the many high places which dotted the land, all in the name of Yahweh! In fact, Jeremiah’s accusation of Baalism was viewed as rude, harsh, and untrue (cf. Jeremiah 2:23a)! Yet Christianity is not led by majority opinion, but by the Lord:

Jeremiah 2:11, “...My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit [the latter statement being an allusion to Baalism].”

The adoption of Baalism at this time was “subtle.” In fact Israel at this time did not adopt the creed of Baalism (its formal theology); rather the nation adopted its liturgy (or how it approached the Lord in their worship). Now the liturgy of Baal is simple: go to church in order to get a feeling! In fact in Christian-Baalism, worship is defined by this feeling.

- Go to church and NOT be moved?
- Attend church and NOT have an experience/encounter with God?
- If this should happen, the service will be deemed as dead!

Yet in true Christianity this is should never be the concern just as it is not a concern when it comes to giving due appreciation to a being whom you love (like a spouse or a parent). Therefore this should not be a concern when it comes to the worship of God. Recall the words of Peterson:

But neither Bible nor church uses the word ‘worship’ as a description of experience. Pastors hear this adjectival usage in sentences like, ‘I can have a worship experience with

God on the golf course'... The only thing wrong with the statement is its ignorance, thinking that such experiences make up what the church calls 'worship.' The biblical usage is very different. It talks of worship as a response to God's word in the context of the community of God's people. Worship is neither subjective only nor private only. It is not what I feel when I am by myself; it is how I act toward God in responsible relation with God's people. Worship, in biblical sources and in liturgical history, is not something a person experiences, it is something we do, regardless of how we feel about it, or whether we feel anything about it at all. (Peterson, 1992, p. 183)

Now aside from the fact that Christian-Baalism is a serious threat to a covenant community (so much so that God disciplined His people with exile on account of their Baalism); the adoption of Baalism will have a negative impact on our lives! It did when it came to God's people at the time of Jeremiah. The adoption of Baalism impacted Judah's worship; worship became an experience!

Let us continue to look further at the consequence of Baalism in the life of a church body and the implications of Judah's Rebellion in Jeremiah's day and in our Own.

Implications of Rebellion

1. A Church engaging in neo-Baalism will replace God's worship with one that is according to their own Imagination, Jeremiah 2:20, 21.
2. A Church engaging in neo-Baalism will feed on each other, Jeremiah 2:22, 34; 7:9-10; 9:8.

Jeremiah 2:22; "Although you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your iniquity is before Me," declares the Lord God."

This passage is somewhat vague. The people obviously are mindful of their sin. In fact, they are so mindful that they could take the strongest cleaning agents at the time, "lye" and "soap", and use it to wash "the stain of [their] iniquity," but it would be to no avail! (Jellie, 2009, p. 33) So what is the sin referenced here? Was it Baalism in general? Or was there a specific transgression in mind in this text?

Jeremiah 2:34a, "Also on your skirts is found the lifeblood of the innocent poor; you did not find them breaking in."

The idea behind this is the strong and powerful approaching the weak and poor with a sword tied to their upper class belts. They see something a poor family has and they want it! Accordingly, they pull out their sword, strike the family down in a bloody scene of chaos and death, and walk away with "blood on their skirts."

Certainly the impoverished family did something to warrant such an attack- like breaking in at night?" (For if they did, the wealthy would be in the right, cf. Exodus 22:2-3) No! That is not what happened! They "weren't breaking in" at night to rob the wealthy; they simply were minding their own business when they were attacked! Yet this is the fruit of Baalism on a culture and a society.

Notice that the crimes listed here violate most of the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant, specifically the Ten Commandments.¹ In their Baalism, the nation unwittingly repudiated the Covenant of Grace which at its core produces a nation of givers/ministers not takers/consumers!

Jeremiah 7:9-10a, "Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal, and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house [the Hebrew denotes the idea of "standing before for the purpose of dedication and service" (Thompson, 1980, p. 280)], which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!' [that is, "we are safe" - God loves us]?"

This is an incredible passage. By their deeds, the nation had rejected God, His covenant, the Biblical calling of mercy/compassion/*hesed*. They lived for themselves because Baalism is all about self!

Yet that didn't stop them from gathering at the temple (daily, weekly), preaching the grace of God and the assurance that God was pleased with them, "*We are safe! We are delivered! God loves us!*" And then, based on this message, God's people committed themselves to the service and worship of God, "*Lord! Here we are! Use us!*"

This is perverted! Yet this is what Baalism will do to a local body. To engage in a religion that is centered around "self" will translate to selfish living all the week. At its core, Christian-Baalism is selfish and self-centered. It revolves around the individual worshipper. His needs are king! When this mentality is brought into daily living and so body life, the result is a growing group of "consumers" who view others as a means to their own end.

This is why we are not shocked when we read of that the "national revivals" of the 8th and 7th centuries B.C. amongst God's people were accompanied by egregious acts of hatred and violence toward the weak and lowly (the very ones God intends to be our covenant treasures)! See, because each of these "revivals" involved the adoption of Baalism in their worship, the nation became self-absorbed and so viewed one another as a means to an end. In this context, there is always the carnage of cannibalism. Describing the people of his day, Jeremiah wrote this:

Jeremiah 9:8, "Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit; with his mouth one speaks peace to his neighbor, but inwardly he sets an ambush for him."

When Baalism enters into a church, the body soon becomes as a pack of starving animals which

turn on each other in order to live because Christian-Baalism at its core is selfish and will produce a congregation of consumers!

Blind to Transgressions

A church engaging in neo-Baalism will be blind to their transgression.

Jeremiah 2:23, “How can you say, ‘I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baals’? Look at your way [“your practice”] in the valley!...”-

In Jeremiah’s day, God’s people hadn’t formally rejected God. They simply “updated” their services to accommodate the individual’s tastes and preferences. In the process, the worship of God was replaced with “a Freudian pleasure principle” which grew the attendance at the local high places like never before.

Now what is so bad about this? What is so bad about being moved in the context of a worship service? First off there is nothing wrong with being moved. However, there is everything wrong when “being moved” is the objective of a worship service (much less a friendship, a marriage, a date). When this takes place, when this subtle shift occurs amongst the corporate people of God, the worship of Christ has been replaced with the worship of Baal!

Hear this carefully. Most in Israel at the time of Jeremiah did not consider themselves Baalists. But they were. And sadly, that is the case of many in our own day who have abandoned the worship of God for Baal. Oh Christian, watch over your heart, lest you come here for any other purpose than to respond to the character of God with praise, giving, dedication, and fellowship.

Sin In Daily Living

A church engaging in neo-Baalism will reflect the sin in their daily living.

Jeremiah 2:23b, “How can you say, ‘I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baals’? Look at your way in the valley! Know what you have done! You are a swift young camel entangling her ways.”

Young she-camels are notorious for being unreliable, ungainly, and easily disturbed. They dash about in a disorganized fashion such that “entangling [or crisscrossing] her ways” is an apt description of the animal. This, family of God, is the net result of Baalism in the life of a Christian. Life becomes a mess of contradictions and competing passions!

And yet in keeping with the previous point, the nation denied their participation in Baalism here (again, they hadn’t adopted the formal system; just its liturgy)! Accordingly, Jeremiah made a simple reply, “*Look at your way in the valley! Look at your inconsistency, your contradictory life! From this you can discern what you have done!*”

From this we conclude that when a people of God adopt Baalism in their worship, it will have an impact on their lives.

- Baalism manifested in the daily life of an individual will have them living for themselves; yet struggling with guilt on account of their selfishness.
- Baalism manifested in daily life will make a person/family event oriented- living for the next high, whether that be Friday night with the friends, the next movie, or the next concert. In between, life simply is endured!
- Baalism in the life of a Christian will transform the believer into a consumer by which the things of the Lord are evaluated and utilized based on the pleasure that is derived from it be it any of the following:
 - The word of God.
 - Family devotions.
 - A fellowship gathering.
 - Talking with another believer.
 - Attending a Bible study.
 - Ministering to the needy.
- All these things will be utilized or engaged in ONLY if the Baalists perceive that there is something in it for them.

This is Baalism translated in the life of a believer.

And yet, this ought not to surprise us. Dom Gregory, in his monumental work on the history of the liturgy of the church, made the observation that the shape of the church's liturgy will always shape the lives of its people. (Dix, 2000, p. xviii) And this has biblical precedent. The Psalmist contrasts the worship of the idolater and the worship of God:

Psalm 115:4, 8, "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands... Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them."

From Psalm 115 Tozer made the observation:

The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God...

We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God. (Tozer, 2009, p. 9)

Oh Christian, don't miss a very important truth: the way you worship will be the way you live! If

your worship is self-centered, so will be your life. If your worship is God centered and so God-driven, this too will affect your life!

Led By Feeling

A church engaging in neo-Baalism will elevate experience over the mind and thus be led by feelings.

Jeremiah 2:24, “You are... a wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness [notice the change of metaphor; we are now talking about a donkey], that sniffs the wind in her passion. In *the time of her heat* who can turn her away? All who seek her will not become weary; in her month they will find her.”

It is proverbial how a female donkey in heat is driven and led by her passion. An Arab proverb put it this way: “[The she-donkey] is intoxicated with the urine of the male.”

Now, from the perspective of the owner of a female donkey, you may have trained the animal quite well such that you think you have a reliable beast on which to depend. But let the female donkey enter “her passion” and you no longer have an animal on which to depend. The donkey will be led, yea, driven by her passions. All her training will have gone out of the window. She will be led by her desire. W. H. Jellie described this donkey in heat as “...wild, reckless, ungoverned, obedient to nothing but desire...” (Jellie, 2009, p. 33)

This is an apt description of the Christian-Baalist. They are not governed by their mind, and so the revelation of God. Rather they are driven by their feelings/desires. Now you must see the danger that is involved here. The Fall occurred when the mind was placed in abeyance to the desire. Though the woman knew God’s word, it was when she saw that the fruit was “desirable” that she partook (Genesis 3:6)! And such will be the Christian forged by the worship of Baal!

- Much of what they do will be determined by how it makes them feel.
- “Feelings” will be that which sets the pace in their lives and so the gauge by which they measure...
 - The health of their walk.
 - The quality of a service of worship.
 - The will of God.
 - And much, much more.

In the words of John, may God give us the grace to “guard ourselves from [this] idol” (1 John 5:21)!

The Taste for Baal-Worship

A church engaging in neo-Baalism will create a taste/inclination for Baal-worship in its people which will be difficult to overcome.

Jeremiah 2:25, “Keep your feet from being unshod and your throat from thirst [In other words, don’t wear your shoes out or weary yourself in pursuing your passionate desire for another high]; but you said, ‘It is hopeless! No! For I have loved strangers, and after them I will walk.’”

Jeremiah exhorted the nation to stop wearying themselves in their passionate pursuit of Baal (translated to the present: stop gauging worship by how it makes you feel!). Ironically, the text indicates that some in the nation were open to Jeremiah’s exhortation; they realized that they had gone too far, that their worship was compromised. And what did these few receptive Israelite’s say? Were they rebellious? Dismissive of Jeremiah?

No!

Jeremiah 2:25, “but you said, “It is hopeless! No! For I have loved strangers, and after them I will walk.”

In other words, *“Jeremiah, you don’t understand. It no longer is up to us... any other way just wouldn’t be worship! Having tasted Baal, we no longer can go back to the way it was formerly!”*

From this we derive another important application: Once you’ve had meth, it is hard to go back to normal life. And likewise, once you’ve given yourself to Christian-Baalism, returning to biblical worship is very difficult. In fact the Christian may find themself saying, “It is hopeless!” Now of course it is not. It is possible to return after neo-Baalism; but it will most certainly be hard!

Accordingly, it behooves us that we remain vigilant and sober when it comes to Baalism. Again, it will be one of the characteristic sins of God’s church in the Last Days (cf. Revelation 17:4-5)! How it therefore behooves us that we not play with worship. Don’t compromise it for expediency.

Toward this end, let me sound an important warning-cry for this generation: There is no question that the world in which we live is moving toward Baalism/mysticism in its endeavors and entertainments. Just take a look around you.

- Shopping Malls are designed to give the consumer an experience.
- The whole entertainment industry is about moving the consumer with its product.
- News no longer is news, but entertainment.
- Jobs no longer are viewed as a vehicle of co-reigning with God (or at minimum, a means of support); now they are about fulfillment.
- In fact, this is THE characteristic of the Millennial Generation- everything is viewed in terms of what is “in it” for the individual!

All of this has produced a culture looking for the next high, the next experience, the next thrill (what do you think is behind the legalization of marijuana?)! And herein lies the perfect storm. Today many church leaders, sessions, and denominations define a successful church by the bodies, bucks, and buildings which come as a result.² Accordingly, many, many churches are about growing their numbers. And yet:

- If you want to fill the empty pews of your church in a growing culture of Baalism, what must we do to the services of worship?
 - We must make them Baalistic; we must adopt the liturgy of Baal- and so make them an experience, an event, a high for the individual attendee.
 - Now when we do this, what will be the spiritual impact of this service on the people of God? They too will become Baalistic in their approach both to God and life.

What must God's valuation be of this generation of shepherds to whom God has entrusted His sheep and yet, because of their ignorance or, worse, their ego, have led God's people to Baal?

Christian, guard yourself, your family, your brothers and sisters in Christ from Baalism. An active brainwashing is going on in our world when it comes to Baalism. We must do nothing less than actively resist it. We must guard our hearts lest we too be tempted. Parents, are you raising children who live in the moment, who know nothing of delayed gratification?

Ecclesiastics 11:6, "Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good."

This constitutes a biblical worldview. It won't be until the end that we enter into the fullness of our salvation. This is the course of all of God's providences! Accordingly, the Christian mind lives for that which is unseen and will not be enjoyed until glory! And so we sow in the morning with "a conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews. 11:1)! In contrast, Baalism is all about the present!

Husbands and wives, must you have a great marriage today, and if you don't you pout, disengage, or give up? Again, the course of redemptive history is to labor for that which lies ahead. Your goal must therefore be to have a great marriage in your 80's and 90's, and so diligently labor at it until then.

Is today about you? Will you define the quality of your worship by how you have felt? Will you see that the worship you offer on Sunday is the life you have lived this past week in response to the character of God? It is this that you brought and laid at Christ's feet, not a check! You say, "I'm doomed! My living this past week was pathetic!" Then the worship you must offer to God in response to His character this morning is a heart of brokenness and repentance by which you have expressed your gratitude for His forgiveness and grace! That is what worship is all about; it

is not about how you feel!

Parents, are you raising your children with such an understanding? The well-intentioned parent is shocked when they hear their child say, "I don't like church! I don't want to go to worship!" Let me ask you something: what would you do if your child said this about school?... or about doing a chore around the house? You'd probably say something like, "Life isn't about fun! It is about doing your work heartily for the Lord in a world cursed on account of sin! At times it is going to be hard! Trust me!"

But when it comes to worship, our response is completely different. If a child doesn't think it is fun, then let's make it fun- with music they like, activities to capture their imagination, drama, and rousing messages which do not disappoint! And then we wonder why, when our children grow up in such an environment and then encounter difficulty and trial, they

- Ditch their marriage.
- Quite their job.
- Drop out of school.
- Or walk away from Christ.

None of these things come with clowns, entertainment, or pep-rallies! Christian, will you engage in the disciplines of grace and so Kingdom service only if it too is fun, engaging, or entertaining? Or will you...

1 Corinthians 9:27, "...buffet [your] body and make it [your] slave..."?

Philippians 3:13, "...forget... what *lies* behind and reach... forward to what *lies* ahead"?

Will you live your life for a higher purpose than momentary, passing pleasure? Family of God, there is a war going on today! We can't afford to ignore it or take it lightly! There is too much at stake! Rather, we must actively engage in it!

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 23, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.

End Note(s)

¹ In all, commandments one, two, six, seven, eight, and nine are represented here.

² Rather than the spiritual maturation of the people over time and their ability to worship God acceptably!