



**BETHEL**  
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# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **Apostasy on Trial, Part 9**

Revelation 2-3 contains seven letters written to seven churches in Asia Minor. Each of these seven churches has its own struggle or challenge. For example, the church in Ephesus was the “cold church” which had lost its first love (Revelation 2:4). The church in Smyrna was the “persecuted church” having before it the prospect of death if they maintained their faith (Revelation 2:10). The church in Pergamum was the “worldly church” which held to the teaching of Balaam (Revelation 2:14). The church in Thyatira “tolerated sin” holding to the teaching of a woman whom God called, “Jezebel” (Revelation 2:20). The church in Sardis was the “dead church” which as a whole no longer cared about God and His word (Revelation 3:3). The church in Philadelphia was the “faithful church” which though opposed by the world, nevertheless maintained both its love for Christ and its hold on His word (Revelation 3:8). The

church in Laodicea was the “apostate church” which was neither hot nor cold (Revelation 3:15).

Now the one phrase that is common to each of these letters is, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This tells us that God not only intended these letters as a rebuke to the churches in the apostolic age, but by way of application these are types of churches and Christians that will continue to exist throughout the last days.

In light of this it is notable that of the seven churches, there was one which held to the teaching of Jezebel. Christ spoke to the believers in Thyatira and said this:

Revelation 2:20-22, “But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel [this wasn’t her name, but because of her sin, the Lord called her this; recall, it was Jezebel who introduced Baalism to God’s people during the reign of Ahab in the 9th century BC], who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. [Family of God, this is the religion of Baal which resurrected its ugly head during the Apostolic age. Notice what God says about it; it is very reminiscent of how God handled the Baalism of the Kingdom years...] Behold, I will cast her upon a bed *of sickness* [~Jeremiah 2:15b, 19; 12:4, 11; 23:10], and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation [~Jeremiah 22:10], unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence [~Jeremiah 2:30]; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds [~Jeremiah 2:19].”

We need to always be on guard against the religion of Baal. It is this religion which tempted God’s people in the Kingdom years and in the days of Paul. And it will be this religion which will tempt the people of God in the last days (cf. Revelation 17:4-5) to transform the worship of God into a religious experience or feeling!

Now Jeremiah 2:13 describes Baalism as an “empty cistern that can hold no water.” Though the people of God in these churches by all means know euphoria and excitement in their worship, nevertheless in the long run they reap for themselves death/leanness of soul!

## Rejection of God’s Way

A church engaging in neo-Baalism ultimately will reject God, His path, and His way.

Jeremiah 2:34-35a, “Also on your skirts is found the lifeblood of the innocent poor; you did not find them breaking in. But in spite of all these things, yet you said, ‘I am innocent; surely His anger is turned away from me.’”

Notice the people engaged in horrible sin, nevertheless they believed none of it would be held

against them because of their labor and effort to come before God and feel and commune with the Lord in a religious moment of euphoria.

Jeremiah 2:35, “Yet you said, ‘I am innocent; surely His anger is turned away from me’...”

Jeremiah 2:33 was written in the context of worship. Evidently the people of God at this time believed that their frequent visits to the high places for worship meant something before God! Though they sinned and yes, though they at times injured the weak and the poor amongst them, nevertheless the devotion and religious zeal that they all felt in worship had to have impressed God such that, “His anger [was] turned away from [them]!”

And this fits perfectly with Baalism. In Baalism it is believed that religious fervor has the ability to influence the gods. This thinking, translated to a local church body, will result in people believing that genuine emotion, strong emotion, will most certainly move the Lord to aid and help them in their endeavors! Notice, this is not without much effort:

Jeremiah 2:13, “...hewing for themselves cisterns...”

This speaks of much work and difficult labor. And that is Baalism. The service involves a certain amount of effort which typically leaves the participant drained (in contrast to Biblical worship which leaves the individual refreshed). Elijah’s competition with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 to demonstrate that Yahweh alone is God, brought a challenge before the people of God which illustrates Baal worship.

1 Kings 18:23-24, “Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire *under it*; and I will prepare the other ox, and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire *under it*. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire [In other words, the deity who lights the offering with fire from heaven], He is God.”

Now you have to understand that this competition was stacked against Elijah and God. In the Canaanite religion Baal was the God of thunder and lightning, thus this was a challenge on Baal’s home turf! And the people thought that it was a good idea. They summoned the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah and gave them the challenge!

Now, the prophets of Baal labored and worked to influence their false god all day long, but nothing happened. Then at the time of the evening offering of God’s people, Elijah doused his sacrifice with water three times (to make the competition even harder and so more unbelievable!) and then uttered a simple prayer.

1 Kings 18:38-39, “Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.’”

When the prophets of Baal sought to influence their deity to light the offering notice what they did so that we have a complete picture of Baal worship:

1 Kings 18:28-29, "So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. [Why? To demonstrate their devotion!] And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention."

The religion of Baal revolves around the worshipper endeavoring to influence the deity to do what he wants Baal to do. As such, the focus was on being sincerely moved, sincerely devoted. When this occurred it was hoped and believed that Baal likewise would be moved to act!

However when it comes to the true worship of God, God is not after religious shows, songs sung with emotion, or warm fuzzies. None of this is what pleases God. David expressed this following his sin with Bathsheba:

Psalm 51:16-17, "For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Now, do not misunderstand David was not a person brought to tears or warm fuzzies on account of a song or tune. Rather, he came to worship with blood on his hands and being those distinct words: "Thou art the man!" David was a condemned man who saw his spiritually bankrupt condition before Christ. He saw that he must trust Christ alone for forgiveness! That is the sacrifice God "wilt not refuse."

This is true biblical worship! It is covenant renewal where

1. Christ is proclaimed,
2. His servants are "condemned" and then forgiven,
3. And then the forgiven saints say, "All that the Lord has said, we will do! We will be obedient!" (Ex. 24:7)

Again biblical worship does not focus on inward emotion, but rather the outward devotion of God which is the basis of man's ascription of adoration and praise! Michael Horton describes true worship this way:

The problem, of course, is that we have an outside God and an outside redemption. Everything inside of us is the *problem* [even our emotion]. The good news, however, is that the God who is completely other than we are became one of us, yet without succumbing to our selfish pride. He fulfilled the law, bore its judgment, and rose again as our solution to the curse of sin, death, and condemnation. (Horton M. , 2007)

A.W. Tozer, contrasting the message of the new cross (Baalism) with the message of the old, put it this way:

The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it... The flesh, smiling and confident, preaches and sings about the cross; before that cross it bows and toward that cross it points with carefully staged histrionics- but upon that cross it will not die, and the reproach of that cross it stubbornly refuses to bear. (Tozer, 1995)

This is neo-Baalism! It brings a worshipper before God bloodied and defiled on account of his sin, and rather than calling for repentance, it seeks to impress God by a show of religious devotion. And yet, this is NOT the end of the story.

## God's Discipline

A church engaging in neo-Baalism will not be rejected by God, but will be disciplined.

Jeremiah 2:35b-37, "Behold, I will enter into judgment with you because you say, 'I have not sinned.' Why do you go around so much changing your way? Also, you shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria. From this *place* also you shall go out with your hands on your head; for the Lord has rejected those in whom you trust, and you shall not prosper with them."

Throughout this era, a constant temptation for the nation of Judah was to appeal to Egypt as their "ace in the hole" when threatened by the Babylonians. Yet God says that not only is the desire futile, but in the end His people would suffer the same fate as Israel, EXILE!

Jeremiah 2:37, "From this *place* also you shall go out with your hands on your head; for the Lord has rejected those in whom you trust, and you shall not prosper with them."

Because when pressed God's people at the time appealed either to their false god's or their secular neighbors (which always brought with it a requisite submission to that nation's gods), the Lord would indeed humble His people with their own sin (Jeremiah 2:19; Proverbs 5:22)! Their false gods would by all means let them down.

Now from a distance, it would appear that God's chosen vehicle for dealing with his wayward people was to disown them! Yet that is NOT what the exile was about. It wasn't God disowning His people; it was God disciplining them because of His love and advancing His redemptive plan for them!

Hebrews 12:5b-7a, "...My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint

when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline that you endure..."

That is exactly what the exile was about. In fact, throughout this prophecy, Jeremiah returns again and again to the theme of forgiveness, restoration, and the welfare of God's people.

Jeremiah 3:12-13a, "Go, and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the Lord; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the Lord; 'I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity...'"

This was directed at the northern kingdom of Israel. If God would be gracious to them, He certainly would be gracious toward those in Judah who soon would be scattered abroad!

Jeremiah 3:18, "In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance."

Truly, God's plan was to reunite His people into a holy nation which then would dwell securely having as their only Lord and King, God!

Jeremiah 16:14-15, "Therefore behold, days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when it will no longer be said, "As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt," but, "As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them." For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.'"

This was based on this that we read those glorious words in Jeremiah 29.

Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

This is the big picture that we must keep in mind when reading of the devastation that God brought upon His people in this book. Recall, through the Mosaic and Davidic covenants God organized His people into a theocratic nation, a Christian nation. Yet the Lord never intended for this nation to endure. Clearly, according to God's redemptive plan, the "Kingdom Years" were intended to be a foretaste of what God's people someday would have and enjoy in Christ! Speaking of Christ Jeremiah wrote this:

Jeremiah 23:5-6, "Behold, *the* days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, "The Lord our righteousness.'"

And thus we understand that our passage is not God blowing a gasket on account of His

peoples' sin rather, the exile was a vehicle by which God's redemptive plan was advanced not only for the generation living in Jeremiah's day, but for many more to come! From all of this we conclude that the Christian or church engaging in neo-Baalism will not be disowned by the Lord. Rather, they will be disciplined unto their restoration and growth in grace!

That is as far as we are going to go with this chapter and its lawsuit against God's people. However, all of this raises a very important question: Wherein lies pleasure in the Kingdom of God, and specifically worship? We've seen that Baalism translated to a Christian-setting will equate worship with feelings so that it will be believed that the more the individual worshipper has a sense of being moved emotionally, the better was his worship. And this we've seen is completely wrong! Worship has nothing to do with how we feel. Rather, it is the ascription of praise to God, rendering to Him that which is His due. Recall the Anglo-Saxon root is "worth-ship." How a person feels when they worship is quite irrelevant. What is relevant is whether or not they are worshipping

- With integrity (what Christ identified in John 4:24 as, "worship in spirit"),
- According to the word/will of God (what Christ identified in John. 4:24 as, "worship in truth").

Does this therefore mean that we should shy away from emotion in worship? Or that somehow "feelings" are a negative thing? Absolutely not! Feelings and emotions are the by-product of true worship, they are never the objective of true worship!

In light of this, let me make a case for emotion in the context of worship. A prominent slogan of the late 1960's was "make love, not war." Most evangelical churches criticized the behavior of the generation calling this behavior sin. However many youth concluded that that religion taught that all sex was evil and therefore bad. This of course was faulty conclusion because it failed to recognize that God is the author of sex. And sex, in the confines of marriage is not only acceptable, it is wonderful because it is a sign and seal of a greater reality, specifically:

- Devotion and commitment.
- Submission and covenantal care.
- Self-sacrifice and unconditional acceptance.
- Trust, loyalty.

However sext outside of this context is shallow, weak, and insignificant! C. S. Lewis put it this way:

The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. The Christian attitude does not mean that there is anything wrong about sexual pleasure, any more than the pleasure of eating. It means that you must not isolate that pleasure and try to get it by itself, any more

than you ought to try to get the pleasures of taste without swallowing and digesting, by chewing things and spitting them out again. (Lewis, 2009, p. 29)

Feelings and emotions in worship or any Kingdom activity cannot be isolated from a Christian's union with Christ. When we seek to isolate a "warm, fuzzy feeling" and make it the standard and judge of worship we eviscerate what God intended worship to be. For example a heart wrenching story or an emotional tune (what Ezekiel called a "sensual song," Ezekiel 33:32) may move the individual to tears on Sunday but it will not help the Christian face the realities of life on Monday. Emotional experience are soon seen as shallow and impotent.

Contrast the emotional feelings of a story to the worship based upon the person and work of Christ: True worship is:

- Demonstration of our love in response to Christ's person and work.
- Confession of our sin and knowledge that God has forgiven us.
- Wilful submission to God's word saying, "Here am I! Send me!"
- Renewal of our love in a ceremony of Covenant Renewal for a Being who is the Great I Am — infinite, eternal, unchangeable!
- Worshipping the Lord in the context of "devotion and commitment, submission and covenantal care, self-sacrifice and unconditional acceptance, trust and loyalty"

These things can and do produce emotions that will never compare to the effects of a "sensual song."

The worship of Baal will most certainly be more intense than the worship of God. There is no question in my mind that strong emotions can become addictive, in fact they are much like meth! But the joy of the Lord that accompanies the child of God as he leaves a service of worship continues with him (Nehemiah 8:10), strengthening him on Monday morning when the realities of life come crashing down upon him! It is similar to the difference between the impact of an ice-cold water balloon thrown at an individual in summer (it takes the breath away, but in the heat of the day evaporates in less than an hour) and the slow rising tide on a Miami beach (in summer the water is warm to the touch and so hardly noticeable). No doubt the experience of the water balloon will be more intense but the volume and power of the water from the ocean shapes an entire continent! Real emotions that come from the acceptable worship of our one and only true God will never feel like the emotions of Baalism, but in terms of depth and impact, it will be far more moving!

So, is there anything wrong with emotion in the Christian life? Absolutely not! It is just that this is not our pursuit as Christians. In fact, in keeping with the nature of God's Kingdom on this earth, it is my observation that to pursue it is to lose it. But to pursue God and His covenant will for your life is to walk in it throughout the week!

Asaph, when he was confronted with his Eternal God who claimed the psalmist as His very own, "Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth" (Psalm 73:25)!



Baalism at the time may have been more intense, but the emotion of Asaph accompanied a transformed life!

Job, as he reflected upon His Redeeming Lord, “And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me.” (Job 19:25-27)! This is real emotion; not that produced by a tune!

One of the godly children of Korah wrote, “I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in Thee!” (Psalm 84:10b-12)

Today you are faced with a choice. You may choose the shallow, emotionalism that results from a “sensual song” (Baalism) or that which Asaph, Job, or the sons of Korah knew. Me and my house stand with Asaph, Job, and the sons of Korah with the eternal, not the intense.

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## About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 8, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.