

WHAT'S THE DIRT?

Slammed up against the locker, held firmly some distance above the floor by his incensed classmate, my then 15 year old son Michael had simply told his very large and infamously brutal assailant, "Jesus loves you and gave His life for you." The reply was an angry, "Don't ever mention that name to me again!" or something to that effect.

We are different, or we're supposed to be, and the world hates it. Jesus guaranteed that if we would live a godly life, we'd be loved and hated, appreciated and persecuted. (John 15:18-20) Increasingly though, something is happening to the church – it's happened before of course, and in fact there's some Old Testament stories which illustrate it.

In Exodus, we read that Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt; many Bible teachers liken their freedom from Pharaoh and passing through the Red Sea unto an OT picture of NT salvation and consequent baptism. Anyway, as they traveled, Exodus 12:28 says, "And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle." of whom Matthew Henry notes, "Probably the greatest part of this mixed multitude were but a rude unthinking mob, that followed the crowd they knew not why; we afterwards find that they proved a snare to them, and it is probable that when, soon afterwards, they understood that the children of Israel were to continue

forty years in the wilderness, they quitted them, and returned to Egypt."

These stragglers, caught in the tow if you would of the newly liberated Hebrew people were both a snare and a vulnerability. It was in these outskirts of the camp, the outer fringes so to speak, that this mixed multitude had a terrible effect. As Numbers 11:1-4 shows, a murmuring arose there against the Lord and as a consequence, He sent a consuming fire among them. Yet remaining unrepentant, this same group of people then began to lust uncontrollably, and their attitude led the people of Israel nearby to do the same. They wept and moaned again that they wanted MEAT – flesh, flesh, flesh! They even began to despise the heavenly manna.

It drove Moses to the brink – he wanted out; he wanted God just to kill him. Instead, the Lord brought an incredibly huge swarm of quail into the camp right in the 'strike-zone'. So, as my pastor used to say, "They were battin' down the quail. Homers everywhere!" (See Num 11:32 Yeah, I know, it was a poor pun then and still is.)

But then the Lord brought judgment upon those who lusted -- "And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibrothhattaavah (graves of lust): because there they buried the people that lusted." Num 11:33,34

Not only was the mixed multitude a snare to Israel, but they were a

weakness and a vulnerability as well. You see, as the host of Israel moved, it was these fringe-folk who were attacked first. Moses, in Deuteronomy reminded them, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God." Deut 25:17,18 The feeble and weak naturally fell behind and thus were amidst the mixed multitude. There, they were prey to the Amalekites (see Ex 17:8-15) – those descendants of Esau who quite adequately portray the sinful flesh.

Yes, mixture has been the perpetual plague-conundrum of Israel. The more they stood out from the world around them, the more they wanted to fit in. The more they fit in, the more they wanted to rise above and be separate. This is historically true and prophetically accurate as well. In Hosea, the Lord said, "Ephraim, (the ten northern tribes of Israel) *he hath mixed himself among the people;*" (Hos 7:8) Historically, although they have in some case adopted the ways of the gentiles around them, the Jews have remained a 'lumpy' mix at best. In fact, no other people group has lasted more than two generations outside their homeland as clearly indigenous. The Israelites however, were displaced from their homeland for as much as 2500 years and yet maintained their national identity.

And prophetically -- in Daniel's famous interpretation of King

Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he revealed that, "...whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay." (Dan 2:43) As I've written before, I'm convinced that the clay in this vision is properly interpreted to be the Jewish people – the scripture makes that clear in Isa 45:9, Jer 18:6 and Isa 64:8. Therefore, I'm persuaded that this mingling with the 'seed of men' (i.e. gentiles) will be done by the Jews, trying as ever to fit in to the world - perhaps, it speaks specifically of Israel trying to mingle with the EU.

In any event, the consequences of mixture are the same for the church as for the Jewish people. As the last days church has in many places and in many aspects cooled to a tepid temp spiritually, it has become itself a mix indistinguishable from the world. Christian media mimics the world, denominational leadership is more and more infused with worldliness, compromise and even devilish notions. Recent surveys reveal that more than a third of pastors and church leaders are playing with porn. The majority in several main line denominations doubt the divinity of Christ. Divorce and marital fidelity is statistically now no different in the Christian community than it is in the society at large. Meanwhile, the Bible is being labeled as hate-language or irrelevant, and conference after conference at the highest international political and religious levels are convening to figure out how to make us all believe one homogenous soup of toxic spiritual

waste. Yes, I know I'm using strong language.

And we have our own mixed multitude don't we. Those who 'follow along' but haven't really bought into a sincere faith in Christ. Now, I'm not at all advocating anything like sending them 'back to Egypt'. But, we must realize that if we allow mixture in our own walk, it will bring with it, as it did with the Jews, lusting, murmuring against God and a vulnerability to the attacks of 'the flesh'. The real issue is that we need to take the 'beam out of our own eyes'!

And if we do, we'll be different. We'll stand out from the world around us. It's truly a day of decision for the church. The enemy of Christ has sensed our corporate lukewarmness and is pouring on the ice water if you know what I mean. Have you noticed how aggressive the homosexual community has become in the media, the schools, the government and the workplace? Have you noticed how timid our political and religious leaders have become in defining the true difference between satanically inspired religions and faith in Christ? Have you noticed how utterly and grotesquely violent and lewd the preponderance of our 'entertainment' has become? Accidental? No way.

A very large portion of the church has put aside the Word of God and has instead allowed the news and entertainment industry ('Christian' or otherwise) to formulate their 'truth for today'. At the same time, those who take a valid stand for any real Christian values are portrayed as just "fringe elements" – so say the

reports. In truth, it is the spiritual 'fringe' elements themselves that are the ones fingering the faithful as "extremists" and "hate mongers". And oh how they love to latch on to some truly tragic situation involving a so-called believer and shout it to the world as evidence of the 'weirdness' of the Christian faith.

Meanwhile, on the whole, we've become overly consumed with being 'relevant', seeker-sensitive, 'successful', entertaining and attractive. We've invested countless millions in buildings, parking lots, potted plants and pew pads (all of which are appreciated!), but invested comparatively little in the true house of God. It's time for divine differentiation. "*Finding his newly-appointed pastor standing at his study window in the church weeping as he looked over the inner city's tragic conditions, a layman sought to console him: 'Don't worry. After you've been here a while, you'll get used to it.'* Responded the minister, 'Yes, I know. That's why I am crying.'"

-- Dennis Marquardt
Yes, it's time for true believers to be different again -- to love our enemies, to share the gospel, to genuinely care for the family of God, to devour the Word of God and to obey it, to forgive from the heart, to eschew evil and cling to what is good, to intercede sacrificially for one another, to seek to approve the excellent, to speak the truth in love and having done all, to stand... It's time to rejoice in that difference and know that although we are the minority here, we belong to the enormous family of believers – the 'majority' in heaven!

Lord, break the mold of worldly acceptance, comfort and ease even as it's congealing around us. Open our eyes to behold the true state of our souls. Grant us peace in the knowledge of your grace and fire in the knowledge of your coming. Give us a fearlessness of man no matter the cost.

"Nikolai Berdyaev, who abandoned Marx for Christianity, insists that neither history nor theology nor the church brought him to the Christian faith, but a simple woman called only Mother Maria. He was present at a concentration camp when the Nazis were murdering Jews in gas chambers. One distraught mother refused to part with her baby. When Maria saw that the officer was only interested in numbers, without a word she pushed the mother aside and quickly took her place. This action revealed to Berdyaev the heart of Christianity--and what atonement means."

-- James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988)

"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake." Luke 6:22

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you," 2 Cor 6:17

In closing, we will be thankful one day soon for the separation that godliness brings. We don't have to force the issue. Just living a truly godly life will make us stand out from the world. Personal

discomfort, even disgrace, may be the price, but it's worth it. You know, that fellow who bullied my son for his witness? Well, a year or so later, he ran up to Mike in school and thanked him earnestly adding that during the summer, he'd given his heart to Christ – and now he is different too.

May each of us find the blessedness of difference from this world by conforming to the awesome character of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we never be the so-called 'difference without a distinction'. God grant us courage, conviction, comfort and Christ-likenedness in these treacherous times. God bless you.