

NUMBERS 3:5-13 APPOINT THOSE WHO ARE CHOSEN

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him. They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death.’

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD.’”¹

God chooses whom He wills to serve His people, and the churches appoint whom God chooses. However, the churches of this day appear determined to challenge the will of God by introducing new criteria for appointment to holy office. Today, sex at church is apparently vital! Let me explain. The push began some decades back as a few women began to demand the “right” to occupy the sacred desk; the basis for their demand was their sex. Women wanted to be elders and deacons. We were told that they felt excluded because of their sex. Therefore, it was necessary that progressive denominations and churches should rectify the divine deficit by adopting a new criterion of sex for appointment to holy office.

At first, liberal churches moved to become inclusive in filling the pulpits. These churches did not want to exclude anyone from the “privilege” of pastoral oversight; and so they demonstrated the magnanimity of their heart by recruiting women to serve as pastors. The pulpit was viewed as a place of power and influence. Women had long felt excluded from the positions of power; we were told these moves would rectify the situation. As time has moved inexorably toward a conclusion, an increasing number of churches that are reputed to be evangelical have joined in this grand experiment seeking to appease the demands of our world.

For the first two millennia of this church age, it would have been unthinkable to promote women into holy office. Misogyny did not inform this position—the Word instructed all who accepted the veracity of what God had delivered. However, the Gospel of Diversity demanded that every facet of church work must reflect the potential racial/social/economic makeup of the community. So accommodation and adjustment has become the standard as the Word of God is reinterpreted to say what modern church goes imagine it should say.

Today, an increasing number of broad-minded souls argue that the Word of God is irrelevant when it speaks on such matters as appointment to holy office. We are assured that this is the case because the Apostles were captive to their culture; or more likely, because they were misogynous or perhaps even fearful of women. Interestingly enough, few who promote this rebellion are so benighted as to argue that the Bible does not teach against appointing women to eldership; they simply dismiss what is taught as irrelevant to this day.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Were it not sufficiently insulting to the Faith of Christ the Lord to disregard His clearly revealed will by appointing women to church offices, now we are told that we must rewrite the standards to permit deliberate and defiant sinners to fill church offices. In fact, to demonstrate how broad-minded we are, we must specifically seek out such individuals, soliciting their appointment. If a contemporary church is so fortunate as to find a practising lesbian, the congregation will have “killed two birds with one stone,” so to speak.

Christians are divinely charged with the responsibility to turn from evil. We count it evil for a believer to disobey the laws of the nation. Likewise, we do not seek injury or to harm for any individual. We do not seek to instigate a fight against the prevalent wickedness of the day. However, if we will be true to the Word that has been given and if we will honour the Master, we cannot quietly submit to a reign of evil or ignore wickedness. Especially are we unable to permit the insinuation into these holy precincts of that which is condemned by our God as evil.

From the earliest days of the Faith delivered by the LORD our God, He has designated whom He wills to provide leadership for His people and to serve as His spokesmen. He has prescribed the standards for such service. No individual, no committee nor any group has a right to change what God has set in place for His people. The principle that guides anyone who would honour the True and Living God is that Christians are responsible to know what pleases Him and to respond to His will with alacrity.

THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE — “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him. They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death” [NUMBERS 3:6-10].

The Levites may be compared to deacons among the churches. They were not priests, so, they were not chosen to stand before the Lord as representatives of the people; rather, they were chosen to serve the priests, ensuring that the work required by the Tabernacle was performed and not neglected. What is vital for us to understand is that from the human perspective, God was arbitrary in choosing the Levites to function in this capacity. Theirs was not to be a position to which someone might aspire or to which an individual might promote himself; rather, the role of the Levites was to serve as the Lord directed.

It is equally important to understand that the position of the Levites was not to be seen as a position of authority; they were appointed to serve. This is evident from the language God used. The Levites “shall keep guard over [the priests] and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle” [NUMBERS 3:7, 8].

Note the word that is translated “guard.” This is the Hebrew term *šāmar*. Certainly, the term carries the meaning of “to guard,” or “to watch.” However, the basic idea of the root is “to exercise great care over.” It conveys the thought of diligence, or careful observance.² Thus, the Levites were appointed to ensure that God’s commands concerning worship were implemented without fail, and that the people were instructed in what was expected of them.

² R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament: electronic ed.** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1999) 939-40

There was no boss appointed to run God's house; nor is there a church boss in this day. That is not to say that those appointed are without authority—the priests whom God appointed did have authority! However, the authority of the priests was the authority of the Word; it is through application of the Word that God directs His people. The Levites were charged to serve the priests and to serve the people; they were to ensure that the worship proceeded smoothly. Again, the Levites bore a measure of authority, but their authority was that derived from the Word and was solely for building the people of God and for ensuring that God was glorified through being approached in a respectful manner.

The principle just enunciated continues throughout the Word. Christ would emphasise this principle when He said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" [MARK 10:44]. This truth applies to all who serve among the churches in this day as the Master has stated, "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" [JOHN 13:16]. The concept is emphasised again when Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another" [JOHN 15:14-17]. The godly ideal is service offered in a spirit of love.

Similarly, Aaron and his descendants were to function as priests, representing God to the people and the people before the LORD. Again, this becomes apparent as we witness the words God spoke. "You shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood" [NUMBERS 3:10]. Aaron and his descendants were carefully to observe the commands of God, applying them without prejudice and ensuring that the people were represented before the Lord. The priests were responsible to understand what God had said and faithfully to apply all that He had commanded.

The elders have similar responsibilities in this day. When we consider the responsibility of pastors, we discover that they are to teach the Word of God, protect the flock of God and provide guidance to those who listen week-by-week. These duties are spelled out repeatedly throughout the Word. Paul provided instruction for Timothy in his final letter to the young theologian. "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" [2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5].

The overseer is to keep the return of the Master in view. He is to provide sound (healthy) teaching. Did you notice the manner in which he is to conduct his ministry? He is to reprove—to expose error and convict those holding to such error; he is to rebuke—to exercise authority to charge those who are erring to do what is right; and he is to exhort—to encourage those who are doing right, appealing to such people to continue doing what is right—he is to implore God's people to continue walking with the Master. Moreover, the overseer is to conduct this ministry "with complete patience and teaching." He is to be long-suffering, knowing that the flock will sometimes resist healthy teaching; he is to carefully instruct the people, bringing them back to the Word, pointing them to the truths that are revealed therein.

The pastor must constantly prepare himself by knowing the Word so that he is able to instruct the flock of God in the will of God. Listen as the Apostle instructs the young pastor of the Church in Ephesus. “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed... Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” [1 TIMOTHY 4:6-16].

The elders are responsible to be alert to the work of God as He seeks out others who bear the divine imprimatur and who will serve in this divine capacity as an overseer. The Apostle states this is the reason that Titus was placed in Crete. “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you” [TITUS 1:5]. Titus was to pay careful attention to what he taught. Thus, the elder whom God chooses “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” [TITUS 1:9]. Again, Paul instructed Titus, “Teach what accords with sound doctrine” [TITUS 2:1]. His adherence to the Word and his faithful teaching of the great truths of the Faith were to protect the flock. After all, “There [were (and are)] many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach” [TITUS 1:10, 11].

Now, what is important for us to understand from the message this day is the realisation that the priests and the Levites in our text were chosen by God. They, and no others, were to be appointed to the responsibilities God designed. Likewise, the elders and deacons of a congregation are to be appointed only when bearing heaven’s mark on their lives. The idea that a congregation can hire a preacher is the source of grave harm to modern churches. Likewise, the thought that wealth or ability to succeed in the world qualifies an individual to be a deacon has enervated the churches of this day.

The elders of the congregation are to be men of character, men who have demonstrated maturity and men whom God has prepared for leading His flock. The qualifications revolve around character—there is not a word of connections or credentials as is commonly thought important to the world. “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” [1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7].

Writing Titus, Paul clarifies the qualifications for eldership by adding that the elder must not be arrogant or greedy for gain. He must be a lover of good, upright, holy and disciplined; and “he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” [see TITUS 1:5-9].

Similarly, those who are appointed to serve as deacons are to be spiritually mature men. It is to be evident that they have spent time in the presence of the Master and bear His mark of holiness. In fact, the first men appointed to this office were specifically qualified by being recognised for good reputations, fullness of the Spirit and for wisdom [see ACTS 6:3]. So there would be no questions concerning what it means for one to be full of the Spirit and wisdom, Paul defines the issue when writing to Timothy. “Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well” [1 TIMOTHY 3:8-12].

The congregation is a holy entity—it is not an organisation such as the Lions, or the Kiwanis, or the Elks, or the Buffalos. The congregation is the Bride of Christ, a holy entity that is to reflect the glory of the Divine Head. He chooses whom He wills to serve His church. Underscore in your mind this vital principle: the leaders of the congregation are divinely chosen, not elected. The elders are appointed by God Himself to be received by His people. Likewise, the deacons are divinely chosen to serve the Lord through serving His people.

I have stressed this point because pressure mounts in this present age to appoint people to holy office according to the criteria of this dying world. Thus, in modern church life the eldership is to reflect the racial, social, cultural, sexual composition of the community. Of course, this is carried to silly extremes, and we witness the strange phenomenon of appointing people who are in open rebellion against God. They have rejected who they are and determined to remake themselves in an image that satisfies their own lusts. Tragically, many of the churches of this day are insistent that through rewriting the standards that God has given they will somehow make the holy Bride of Christ more comely, more attractive.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S CHOOSING — “I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD” [NUMBERS 3:11-13]

When God chose Aaron and his descendants to serve as priests, they were specifically appointed to serve God. Here is what Moses wrote concerning this appointment. “Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar” [EXODUS 28:1]. God’s purpose in choosing particular individuals to serve as priests was sufficiently important that He would stress this particular point repeatedly in the Book of Exodus.³ As Moses completed anointing all the accoutrements for the Tabernacle, God gave one last command. “You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall wash them with water and put on Aaron the holy garments. And you shall anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve me as priest. You shall bring his sons also and put coats on them, and anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may serve me as priests. And their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations” [EXODUS 40:12-15]. God’s purpose was that those whom He chose should serve Him in the capacity to which He appointed them—no others were to promote themselves, however qualified they may have appeared!

³ See EXODUS 28:4, 41; 29:1, 44; 30:30; 40:13, 15

You see the same emphasis in our text when God speaks of choosing the Levites. “The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine.” The LORD hearkened back to the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. He had claimed every firstborn as His own.⁴ The firstborn was seen as an evidence of God’s grace; for He delivered Israel even while killing the firstborn of all Egypt. The firstborn of man and of beast were killed in the Egyptian households, but the firstborn belonging to Israel were spared [see **EXODUS 12:21-32**].

Thus, the firstborn child was viewed as a special gift from God. That child was a symbol of God’s blessing on the people. The firstborn was the promise of continued life for the family, for the tribe and for the nation. Thus, the firstborn was seen as holy. In grace, God permitted each family to raise the firstborn as their own child, reserving to Himself the Tribe of Levi in their place. Thus, the Levites were chosen by God and were to be appointed to serve Him.

Let’s translate this knowledge into the contemporary scene. Among the churches, God appoints whom He wills to office. He acts neither capriciously nor arbitrarily in doing this, but He calls whom He wills. Moreover, He notifies us of the character of those whom He will appoint, whether as elders or whether to serve within the churches as deacons. He chooses males, for reasons He provides in the Word [cf. **1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16; 1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15**]. However, not just any male can promote himself to holy office. God will have worked to ensure spiritual maturity, and He has spelled out precisely what that maturity looks like.

There is something more than is often overlooked when considering those appointed to holy office. I am referring to the fact that those appointed are given to the churches as a gift from the gracious hand of the Master. Listen to what is written in the encyclical we have received as the Letter to the Ephesians. “Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says,

‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.’

“(In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [**EPHESIANS 4:7-16**].

Just as the priests were to “guard their priesthood” [**NUMBERS 3:10**] and the Levites were to “guard over [the priests]” and to “guard all the furnishing of the tent of meeting” [**NUMBERS 3:7, 8**], so, those chosen to serve the churches are to guard the flock of God. This is especially true for the elders. Paul charged the Ephesians elders, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood... Be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears” [**ACTS 20:28, 31**].

⁴ See **EXODUS 13:12, 13, 15; 22:29, 30; 35:19; LEVITICUS 27:26; NUMBERS 8:16, 17; 18:15; DEUTERONOMY 15:19**

THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE — The push among many contemporary churches is nothing short of lese majesté; it is rebellion of the vilest sort. Earlier, I noted that the downward march toward the rebellion now witnessed among the churches began when some church leaders determined that they did not like what God had written. They determined that the eldership was nothing less than a patriarchal caricature of righteousness because women were excluded from holding office as elders. These rebellious souls disregarded what was written in the Word, characterising the instruction of the Word as apostolic misogyny unworthy of the Faith. Nevertheless, the Apostle makes it abundantly clear that eldership was restricted to males by God’s own sovereign design. His instruction to Timothy was, “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” [1 TIMOTHY 2:11-14].

Not a few modern theologians audaciously hold to the idea that Paul didn’t like women; and others today endeavour to marginalise what has been written through suggesting that his instructions were meant only for the situation in Ephesus. Of course, they do not extend that line of thought to his instructions to oppose ungodliness [e.g. 1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20; 4:1-5], his soteriology [see 1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17] or his insistence upon the deity of the Master [see 1 TIMOTHY 3:16]. I suppose that is one way to rid ourselves of unpopular teaching—relegate it to an ancient day without application today. However, it is an axiom of the Faith that if a people disregard one portion of the Word, they will shortly disregard all portions of the Word. Either we take seriously what God has delivered, or we dismiss all as useless information unworthy of our time. Establish this as a truth firmly fixed in your mind: either we take seriously what God has delivered, or we dismiss all that He has commanded as suggestions unworthy of consideration.

Recently, I read a position paper penned by a man ordained as an Anglican priest who now pastors an evangelical congregation in Washington, D.C. He was reviewing the situation facing evangelical churches, using the downward spiral of the Episcopalian Church in the United States. What he wrote could easily have been written of any of a number of churches in Canada, including a surprising number of Baptist denominations.

This is what he wrote. “The evangelical church is under constant threat to compromise its reliance on biblical truth. The human desire to be accepted, to not be seen as ‘outside the mainstream,’ can be overwhelming. But that desire is our weakness, our downfall. It does not always immediately destroy the dam we build to protect the waters of truth, but instead it leads to tiny fissures that grow until destruction is inevitable.

“Twenty years ago, I experienced the painful demise of the Episcopal Church, who once was a bastion of biblical truth. It was not a pretty picture. It was a picture painted in the primary colors of relentlessness and deception.

“The combination of those elements inevitably led some sincere folks to weariness, and willingness to compromise, and yes, ultimately to surrender. For those who sought peace at any price, conformity over conviction, and popularity over principle, capitulation seemed the easier way out.

“The initial compromise, which caused the first cracks in the dike, seemed innocent enough at the time: the ordination of women.

“But to truly understand how that initial compromise caused a wave of liberalism to overcome biblical boundaries within the Episcopal Church (and soon by the rest of the mainline denominations), we have to understand the different groups involved.

“Sincere followers of Christ made up the first group. They believed in Jesus and the scriptures. To them, the effort to ordain women seemed genuine. But they ultimately bought into the secular argument that the ordination of women was merely an issue of equality, sharing power, responding to new realities, and gaining relevancy with modern culture. Those believers were most troublesome of all. Although they adhered to the secular perspective, no one could accuse them of having ‘departed the faith once delivered.’

“The second group, which pushed the breached even further, was comprised of people who were religious but biblically illiterate. They followed a simple faith not rooted in history. They were more willing to follow than to think.

“The third group was made up of committed liberals, or as I prefer to call them, apostates. That group often worked behind the scenes. They hid in the shadows, preferring to steer the second group forward while putting pressure on the first group. They fueled the secular media with proclamations that the church was ‘hopelessly out of touch with the real world’ or that the ‘male-dominated church is unwilling to share power with women.’

“The media—which loves to denigrate the church and its leadership for refusing to adhere to a godless culture—used its powerful megaphone to condemn the church. Of course, the media never understood that ministry in the Church of Jesus Christ is not about power. A pastor models himself after Jesus, who ‘did not come to be served, but to serve.’

“When apostate Christians and agnostics were allowed to set the agenda and define the arguments, the faint of heart self-consciously sought to surrender. Quickly abandoned were Martin Luther’s words: ‘Here I stand. I can do no other.’

“The ordination of women was not the end of the road—not by any means. Those who had stood up for adherence to biblical standards knew all too well that the push for compromise was merely a prelude to a long hidden agenda: extreme feminism, abortion rights, homosexual advocacy and the tolerance of all sorts of unsavory practices within the church.

“Back then, I watched and wept over the first group; they were my comrades in arms, and they surrendered their birthright for a morsel of peace and acceptability. They surrendered their birthright, and before long, the cracks in the dam led to its massive collapse.

“When communities in the Bible rejected the disciples, Jesus instructed his followers to shake the dust off their feet and move on. He did not instruct them to compromise in order to avoid rejection. He told them that rejection would be part of the deal.

“Countless followers of Jesus, from those first disciples to today’s martyrs, have ultimately given their lives rather than compromise. That same courage is expected of us as well.”⁵

Why should I preach on such a controversial subject? Why shouldn’t I seek some accommodation with those who are truly committed to changing what now exists? Why would I risk distressing some who listen by speaking as I do? First, I speak as I do because of Him who appointed me to this office. I must shortly appear before Him. Seated on the Bema, He shall demand of me an accounting of my ministry to His holy people. Paul cautions each believer when he writes, “Each of us will give an account of himself to God” [ROMANS 14:12]. More particularly, I believe what is written in HEBREWS 13:17 applies to me. The writer urges believers, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” We who are leaders will give an account.

⁵ Michael Youssef, “How the Apostates Take Over, Part 1,” Townhall, March 18, 2012, http://townhall.com/columnists/michaelyoussef/2012/03/18/how_the_apostates_take_over_part_1/page/full/, accessed 18 March 2012

A second reason I speak on such a sensitive subject is that the churches are susceptible to infiltration by evil. Paul warned the Corinthians, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:12]. And long years before this time, Jude, the brother of our Lord, spoke of “Certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” [JUDE 4]. His words mirror those which Peter wrote. “False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” [2 PETER 2:1-3].

We are not immune to the danger that we could surrender to the siren song of the age. We are not automatically excluded from the danger of spiritual narcolepsy. Moreover, our enemy is powerful and deceptive in the extreme. Peter specifically warned me as an elder when he wrote, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” [1 PETER 5:6-9].

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I have delivered this day the Word of the Lord. You have received the teaching of the Word for which you are responsible. When the day comes that I shall stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ, I seek to so preach that I will be able to testify, “I am innocent of the blood of you all” [see ACTS 20:26 NET BIBLE]. I have been faithful to this Word, for which I was appointed as a herald and a teacher.

You will be challenged; you will be tested. Because you hold to the Bible as the Word of God, you can anticipate opposition and pressure from the world to capitulate to its will. However, you must remember the Word that has been preached and stand firm. Know that,

“If you are not firm in faith,
you will not be firm at all.”

[ISAIAH 7:9]

I have perhaps spoken to someone who does not share this Faith. You have heard of Jesus, but you do not know Jesus. He is very God, who became a man and gave His life as a sacrifice because of sin—your sin! However, the Good News that we declare is that He did not remain in the grave. He conquered death and rose from the tomb. Now, risen and ascended to the right hand of God the Father, He offers life—true life—to all who will receive His reign over life. For this reason, the Word of God invites all who are willing, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is my Master,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father, and with the mouth that one confesses and is set at liberty.” The Word of God concludes by declaring, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be set free” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].⁶

Our prayer is that you will receive this life and discover the freedom that is now offered in Christ Jesus the Master. Amen.

⁶ Free translation of the Greek