

Follow Not the Wicked to Do Evil

Micah 7:1-7; Exodus 23:2

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It is safe to say that most of us find it difficult at times to swim against the popular sentiment and opinion of the majority. It is a wearying battle at times to persevere in bearing witness for the truth of Christ against the world and against the corruption that has infiltrated the Church of Jesus Christ. Even when God grants us the courage to hold high His banner of truth and righteousness before the multitudes, the battle is relentless and those who oppose us are so numerous that we are tempted to throw up our arms in defeat from sheer mental and spiritual exhaustion.

We are tempted to say, “In order to have a little peace of mind in this life, I must let that truth go, or I must give in to the influence of the world in that area of my life, or I must give into the demands of my family to loosen up in this biblical conviction—just this one little compromise for the sake of peace. It is so small. After all, I’m not selling out my whole faith. I just want to fit in with those at work, with those in my family, or with those in the Church of Christ at large. After all, I may even have more opportunities to witness for Christ in the fundamentals of the faith, if I am willing to compromise a little in the non-fundamentals of the faith. A little compromise here or there would also relieve me of a great deal of stress in my life, and I would surely enjoy my life a lot more.”

Have we all not been tempted with similar thoughts? Dear ones, the constant bombardment of errors and ungodly living coming at us from all directions is a warning that unless our minds are girded with the righteousness of Christ and the truth of God’s Word, unless our hearts are enjoying communion with Jesus Christ through earnest prayer, unless we are watchful and not drowsy in identifying the subtle temptations of the enemy, we will surely begin with one compromise which will lead to another, and to another, until we have conspicuously left Christ, our first love, to go after other lovers in this world.

The attraction of the multitudes whether in the world or in the Church of Christ tugs at our heart, “How could so many be wrong?” But the Lord our God reminds us from His Word: “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil” (Exodus 23:2). Micah (here in Chapter 7) declares that the godly are surrounded by ungodly thoughts, ideas, and behavior wherever they turn. The Lord encourages Micah and those who are sincere followers of Jehovah to follow not the example of the wicked, but rather to look in faith and hope to the Lord their God. The main points from our text are: (1) The Godly Are Hard To Be Found (Micah 7:1-2a); (2) The Ungodly Have Formed a Conspiracy (Micah 7:2b-4); (3) Those Most Dear Betray the Godly (Micah 7:5-6); (4) The Lord Is the Only Hope of the Godly (Micah 7:7).

I. The Godly Are Hard To Be Found (Micah 7:1-2a).

A. In Micah 6:9-16, the Lord having searched the hearts of Israel (His people) gave to them a most startling evaluation of their faith and life—both were filled with hypocrisy. As a result, the Lord despised their acts of worship, and through His prophet, Micah, predicted that they would be given over to the lovers and pleasures to which they were devoted. In fact, these lovers and pleasures would prove to be their downfall and would bring God’s rod of discipline upon them (through the Assyrians and the Babylonians).

B. Having given the Lord’s reaction to Israel’s hypocrisy in Micah 6:9-16, the Lord now gives voice to the godly remnant within Israel who state their reaction to Israel’s hypocrisy (Micah 7:1-7). Here we see how the desires, thoughts, and words of God are reflected in the life of a faithful Christian. In fact, there are serious problems in the life of a professing Christian when his desires, words, and behavior reflect more of the

world around him than that of Christ. For in the life of every true Christian, the Holy Spirit is at work, gradually bringing his desires, words, and behavior into conformity with those of the Lord Jesus Christ (as we see in Romans 12:1-2). Are you earnestly praying that God would remove those sinful desires in your life and replace them with holy desires? Are you avoiding and removing as many of the occasions to be tempted as you can? Are you so serious about your sanctification that you even enter into personal covenants with the Lord (even fast) in order to overcome besetting sins in your life (Job 31:1)? Yes, there will continue (while we have breath) a battle raging within us between our sinful desires of the flesh and the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:17). Yes, we will struggle with sin. Yes, we will even fall into sin. Yet, there will be the operation of the Spirit of God in our lives, ever stirring up faith and godly sorrow within us, sending us to Christ who has already purchased for us sanctification just as He has already purchased for us justification.

C. Note the desperate cry of the faithful remnant through the voice of Micah (Micah 7:1): “Woe is me.” Here Micah and the godly with him bewail the time of apostasy in which they live. They are not comfortable in it. They are not trying to fit in with a backslidden nation and church; but rather they grieve and sorrow over the unfaithfulness they see all around them. Their hearts are broken over the sin and error that is within Israel. Dear ones, if our hearts are not broken over the backsliding we see in the lives of others, if our hearts are not humbled over our own sin and areas of backsliding, if our hearts are not more grieved over the shame brought to Christ through the unfaithfulness of professing Christians then the vengeance we feel for our own names, then we cannot expect our testimony to affect the hearts and mind of others.

D. Micah compares himself and the godly remnant of Israel to one seeking fruits and grapes after the time of harvest. Those who were faithful among God’s people were as rare as a cluster of grapes upon a vine after the time of reaping (Micah 7:1). What Micah is saying about the time of apostasy in which he lived is that a faithful man (not a sinless man), a man that is sincere in his faith and life and seeks to shun all hypocrisy in his life, a man that loves God, loves God’s truth, and loves his brethren with an unfeigned love, such a man is a rare person. In fact, he is so rare that he appears to have perished entirely from the face of the earth (Micah 7:2).

E. There is a similar ring to the sentiments of Micah as is revealed in the cry of Elijah (1Kings 19:10). Was this not the case with many of those who were faithful in times of backsliding (Noah stood against the entire world at that time; Elijah on Mt. Carmel would not back down from 450 prophets of Baal; Micaiah testified against 400 false prophets before King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat; Jeremiah seemed to stand alone in bearing witness against the apostasy in Judah; the little flock of Christ was to find fierce opposition not only from Israel, but from Rome as well; the 2 witnesses are no doubt a faithful remnant that for 1,260 years bear faithful testimony for the Cause of Christ against the many corruptions in church and state. It was that great defender of the orthodox faith, Athanasius, who was told, “The world is against you, Athanasius.” He had been excommunicated by the church and exiled by the civil magistrate for defending the biblical faith. To which he replied, “Then Athanasius is against the world.” Calvin wrote from a perspective of being in a small faithful minority when he said,

It is an offense to a great many people that they see almost the whole world opposed to us
(*Concerning Scandals*, p. 109).

It has indeed been the case that a faithful remnant stood for the purity of doctrine, worship, and government (whether in Micah’s time or in our time) when the Visible Church has fallen away from her biblical testimony. Yes, I too grieve that the Visible Church has fallen so far that we are called a cult because we will not worship under unfaithful ministers in accordance with Romans 16:17; or because we will not celebrate a holy day not instituted by Christ (such as Christmas or Easter); or because we believe that biblical covenants sworn by our

faithful forefathers yet bind us—their posterity; or because we walk in the footsteps of all those who have faithfully contended for the testimony of Christ in accordance with Hebrews 6:12; or because we lead our children in courtship rather than in dating; or because we will not follow Margaret Sanger and Planned Parenthood in using various means of limiting the number of children God desires to give us.

F. Shall we give up our biblical testimony because the majority of professing Christians disagree with us? Shall we conclude that we must be wrong because the biblical truths once defended by faithful Reformed Churches are no longer popular? God forbid. The saints of old were given God's grace to stand faithful and so must we. In times of apostasy, if we would be faithful, we must expect to be in the minority (even as Joshua and Caleb gave a faithful report in spite of the unfaithful report of the other 10 witnesses). O how the words of Matthew Henry on this text ring true:

When we read and hear of the wisdom and zeal, the strictness and conscientiousness, the devotion and charity, of the professors of religion in former ages, and see the reverse of this in those of the present age, we cannot but sit down, and wish, with a sigh, O for primitive Christianity again!

The desire of the godly is ever expressed in the word of the Lord to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 6:16):

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

The question then for the faithful is not whether the majority walk with us, but rather do we walk with the Lord and with His faithful witnesses of the past in promoting and defending the Cause of Christ.

II. The Ungodly Have Formed a Conspiracy (Micah 7:2b-4).

A. Israel had joined hands together to oppress and defraud the weaker brethren among them. They committed their heinous deeds of theft, cheating, lying, covenant breaking, and brought suit against the poor and the helpless not with one hand, but vigorously with both hands (Micah 7:3). Sadly to say, the ungodly are often more "earnest" in loving that which is contrary to the revealed will of Christ, than the Christian is in loving that which is agreeable to the revealed will of Christ.

B. After all, it is no surprise to find the people in general hating their brethren in such demonstrable ways when the leaders themselves set the example by perverting justice due to the poor by taking the bribes of the wealthy (Micah 7:3). Micah demonstrates that the wicked conspire together to satisfy their goals: "so they wrap it up" (Micah 7:3). The ungodly weave a plan together to further their own selfish designs (Psalm 2:1-3; Ezekiel 22:25). All goals to further a man-centered agenda are a conspiracy to do evil (and it all began when Satan conspired to be like God). It is not only civil leaders that may be guilty of taking bribes, but also pastors and elders when they show respect to those who have money, or those who have conspicuous gifts, but disregard those who don't. When we are more concerned for the applause of men than we are in serving Christ or the least of these my brethren, we have taken a bribe.

C. Dear ones, the enemy of your soul has conspired with the world to over throw your faith in Jesus Christ by means of comfort and security, by means of success and prestige, by means of wealth and riches, by means of love of pleasure, love of music, love of TV, or love of self (2 Timothy 3:1-5). We have an enemy within our soul (that sin that yet remains within us) that drives us to follow the multitude to do evil, to conform to the world's standards, to fit in, and to walk the broad way rather than the narrow way. If we are

not sober-minded and wise to the devil's schemes, we will walk right into his trap as did Peter (who did not believe that he could deny the Lord, but he did).

D. Micah declares that a time of reckoning is coming to Israel when both the watchmen (the civil and ecclesiastical leaders) as well as the common people will endure the day of God's righteous visitation of judgment for this backsliding (1 Peter 4:17).

III. Those Most Dear Betray the Godly (Micah 7:5-6).

A. Micah now declares what must be among the most painful experiences of a child of God—to be betrayed by a relative or friend so near and dear to him/her—one whom you thought embraced the same truths, professed the same faith, expressed the same desires, but who in times of persecution, or times of apostasy, turns his/her back on the truth once professed and becomes an opponent rather than a proponent of the truth once embraced. Can there be a deeper wound incurred than to have a trusted friend or counselor, a wife or husband, a child or parent fall away in faith or life from that which he/she once knew to be true?

B. Here is where the Lord tests our love and faith to the maximum degree. For most of us would rather know the pain of losing a loved one in death, than to lose a loved one through betrayal. The unfaithfulness of a spouse is far more difficult to bear than the death of a spouse. But dear ones, even such betrayal does not happen without a divine purpose. In whom is our faith? Who is our first love? Is our life, joy, peace, and contentment all wrapped up in that person? If that is the case, I can assure you that you will never recover from that wound and pain. You will never know the peace of God that passes all understanding. The Lord brings such painful experiences into our lives to drive us to Him, to find in Him our life, to learn afresh that without Him we can do nothing, but with Him we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Is there anything in your life that you are not willing to give up for the sake of Christ? God certainly does not take everything from us when we come to Christ in faith, but we must be WILLING to give up everything in order to follow Him. Was it not the rich young ruler's unwillingness to give up all for Christ that revealed his lack of faith, and the widow's willingness to give even her last two mites that revealed the presence of her faith (Luke 14:23)? Beloved, the Lord our God was willing to give up His Son for you, how can we withhold our willingness to give up our loved ones to Him? Are you yet in pain from a betrayal? The Lord is your sympathetic High Priest who was betrayed by one of His own disciples. Come to Christ and cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you. He will be a friend that sticks closer to you than a brother.

IV. The Lord Is the Only Hope of the Godly (Micah 7:7).

A. Micah does not leave the faithful remnant with a sense of loss, but confidently turns their attention to the Lord their God who will more than supply them with that which is truly gain (Luke 18:28-30). When the faithful see the example of the unfaithful all around them tempting them to compromise just a little in their faith or life, the faithful are exhorted to look to the Lord who is ever faithful (Psalm 27:10). He who trusts in the Lord will not be disappointed. Only He cannot be taken from you.

B. I close with this thought. In order to present our lives as living sacrifices to Christ, even to the point of forsaking all to follow Christ, we must see ourselves more and more as strangers, aliens, and pilgrims in this world (1 Peter 2:11). We must grow not only to profess with our mouths that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), but to pray for a firm conviction and realization that such is the case. If this is our conviction, the enemy can never truly hurt us; for our home is in heaven (Hebrews 11:13). Dear ones, where is your home? For there will be your heart, your life, your joy, and your contentment also.

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