

Not on My Watch

By Steve Highlander

"Not on my watch!" The words welled up in my spirit as I sat in church one Saturday night. The speaker was preaching from I Samuel. Conditions in Israel were dire. The eyes of Eli, the priest, had grown dim, the light in the holy place was about to go out, and the sons of the priest, the second generation of priests, were making a mockery of the tabernacle by committing all sorts of sins.

The thought occurred to me that it was a lot like church in America today. "Not on my watch!" It was something spiritual and significant to me. It came from within my being, but not from my own spirit. I sensed God was looking for someone to do something, not just sit around and complain because things were going downhill.

A few weeks later, the same words came back to me as I heard some statistics on youth in America today. I was reminded of a Biblical story about Manasseh, King of Israel. Manasseh led Israel away from the worship of Jehovah. The temple was used as a storage building and eventually the doors of the temple in Jerusalem were shut and locked.

His son reigned briefly in his place and was murdered by his court, leaving his eight-year-old son, Josiah, to reign in his place. Josiah turned the tide and worshipped Jehovah. A few years later, he had the temple opened and cleansed. An amazing thing happened. The priests doing the work came and said, "look, we found the book of the Lord in the temple."

Amazing! In just one generation (about 75 years), they had lost God's word. There is an(un)natural downward spiral concerning the attitude of a society that loses Biblical light. It starts with devotion to the Bible. Then comes distraction. Distraction leads to doubt and doubt leads to disbelief. Disbelief leads to disregard and disregard leads to disdain.

The words came back to me a third time today (the day this post was written) as I read the story of Hanukah - meaning "Dedication" in Hebrew. The story of Hanukah starts in 164 BC when Antiochus Epiphanies overthrew the Jews and set out to eradicate the Jewish faith from the face of the planet. He desecrated the temple, sacrificing a pig in the Holy Place and pouring swine

broth all over the grounds. He killed 80,000 people and sent as many into slavery. Finally, he set up a statue of Jupiter on the sacred altar and banned all forms of Jewish worship, including keeping the Sabbath, circumcision, and the worship of Jehovah. Satan planned to stop the Messiah from appearing soon. The story of the Maccabees is truly remarkable. A ragtag army of Jewish Guerrillas defeated the most well-trained and best-equipped army in the world at the time. As a result, the Jewish heritage, lineage, and nation were preserved, preparing the way for the Messiah a century and one-half later.

Once again, I heard, "not on my watch!"

Today, once again, we face an enemy that wants to eradicate the message of Christ (Messiah) from the face of the earth. The authenticity and authority of the Bible are not only questioned, but mocked - even in our Bible colleges. Perhaps, as he did some 2169 years ago, Satan senses the time of the appearance of Jesus Christ the Messiah is at hand. [Revelation 12:12](#) tells us that "Satan is come down to earth having great wrath because he knows that his time is short."

The fact is, the Church in America, for the most part, is not getting the job done. Like Eli, the eyes of many in the ministry are growing dim and can no longer see spiritual things, being blinded by the organizational aspect of the organizational church. The light in many churches is about to go out, the oil consumed by programs, flashy performance, and seeker-sensitive agendas that water down the Gospel and limit the Holy Spirit's movement in the Church. To the church at Ephesus, whom He otherwise praised in highest terms, Jesus said, "else you repent I will come quickly and remove your candlestick."

Another sad fact is second and third-generation Christians often do not carry the same sense of holiness and awe that the first generation did. The moving of the Spirit that swept our spiritual parents into the River of Life has often ebbed by the time the second generation of leadership arrives on the scene. Too often, they are left with stale testimonies, patterns, and practices that are a mere shell that held the original glory. However, these shells are cherished traditions that once defined the movement: because of this, they die hard. This is the very reason we see churches stuck in modes of worship and practice that are decades—and sometimes centuries-old—remnants of genuine moves of God that have little relevance to what God is doing today.

With the spiritual eyes of the priesthood dimmed and the original spiritual life ebbing, the second generation of churchgoers loses touch with the holiness of God. Human reasoning and organizational structure begin to take over, and the church or movement that was once "on fire" becomes another form of worship, but "denying the power thereof." Still carrying many of the outward characteristics of the original but lacking the Spirit, it is missing the reality of God's presence, life, and power.

The result of this lifelessness is sin. Paul assures us, "if you walk in the Spirit, you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." [Galatians 5:16](#) The opposite is also true.

The Word of God tells us that the sons of Eli—who were supposed to be priests of the Lord—did not even know the Lord. Still, they were "ministering" to God's people. Because of their wickedness and self-centered ministry, we are told, "Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: **for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.** I Samuel 2:17 (Emphasis mine.)

Besides the sexual sins these "ministers" were committing, we are told they violently took offerings for themselves. When a true worshipper came to sacrifice, the priests selfishly took the best portion of the meat first. When the worshipper requested to make sure that God got His portion first, the "assistant pastors" threatened them with force and violence.

Today one of the first objections you'll often hear from non-churchgoers (be they professing Christians or not) is the undue emphasis on money. I've personally heard some of the most ungodly appeals for money you can imagine. A few years ago, a well-known ministry came to a church I was attending. They took their own offerings each night. They would not even let the host church touch it or know how much they received. Then the last night, after the regular offering, they did what I call a "lottery offering." They told everyone to take an offering envelope, put their best offering in it and write their name on the outside. Then they would draw one envelope out of this special offering and pray a "special prayer of financial blessing" over that person. I think the angels must have puked.

Once again, in our day, the offering of the Lord is despised by men when they see ministries living rich while manipulating people for money. Combined with the self-promotion and sin that often goes on, is it

any wonder why the world (and many Christians) doesn't want to go to church?

You might be protesting that this does not reflect your ministry or your church leadership. Praise God. Even when Elijah requested God kill him, saying, "I am the only one serving you, and they are trying to kill me," God responded with, "I have reserved 7000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Today there remains a remnant. I trust you are a part of that remnant because you are reading this.

The thought occurred to me, "will we be the generation to lose the light?" Another generation lost the light in the Middle Ages. They never stopped going to church or being religious. They did all the more so. They thought they were the light, when in fact, they were losing it.

As it always does, the true gospel light rose triumphantly out of the dark ages in what we call the Reformation. You cannot keep the light suppressed forever. Today another Reformation is at hand. However, like the Reformation of the earlier age, some made it happen, some watched it happen, and some wondered what happened. Still, others fought it with all their might and ecclesiastical power.

"Not on my watch" has great significance. Will we of the remnant refuse to settle for the status quo in the Church today? Will we lovingly and humbly confront the things that are blinding people to the reality of God's Spiritual renewal? Will we refuse to accept as usual a pattern of practice that chokes the life out of God's people as they sit in a church week after week? Will we purpose to make changes within ourselves, seeking the will of the Lord for our generation?

I'll be the first to admit that changing the course of the Church in 21st century America is a monumental task. It is like a runaway freight train. I have often likened the change to swimming upstream. If you ever stop paddling, you'll float back down to "church as usual." The effort is worth it. I am sure if you asked Martin Luther, Count Zinzendorf, Tyndale, Calvin, and a host of other reformers, they would tell you it wasn't easy and that, at times, they thought it would just be easier to stop bucking the system. But they didn't, and you and I enjoy the fruits of their labor and sacrifice today.

Will we be the generation to lose that for which they fought? I hope not. Not on my watch anyway.

Identifying the problem without identifying a solution is not only worthless; it is spiritually wrong. Anyone can complain. Anyone can point out problems. That doesn't take a genius—or spirituality; it just takes a critical spirit. The gift of criticism is not among the spiritual gifts listed in the Bible.

Many things need to be done. I offer one pivotal point that I believe that the Body of Christ needs to deal with. The rest of the things will fall into place if we deal with this. The self-centered approach to Christianity must go. The "what's in it for me" message has killed the concept of serving God simply because He is God. The false emphasis that Christ died to make me happy, healthy, wealthy, and personally fulfilled has blinded the Church in America. (Now we have exported it around the world. Five of the wealthiest "pastors" in the world live in Africa, in some of the poorest nations on earth.)

God does want to bless us, He does heal, and He does cause us to prosper, but this is not the fundamental purpose of God on the earth. Because we have emphasized the blessings of God without pursuing the purpose of God, we are beginning to lose the blessings too.

God is looking for self-sacrificing servants, not self-aggrandizing saints who are afraid of the slightest bit of discomfort and inconvenience. Will we be the generation that loses the light? Jesus said self-will (iniquity) would mark the last days and would cause the love of God (agape) to grow cold. It is not the world He was speaking to - they have never known the agape love of God; it is only the Church whose love can grow cold. Not on my watch!

One day God will have a Church that walks in the fullness of Jesus Christ. That according to [Ephesians 4:12-13](#).

"His intention was the perfecting and full equipping of the saints (His consecrated people), [that they should do] the work of ministering toward building up Christ's Body (the church). [That it might develop] until we all attain oneness in the faith and in the comprehension of the [full and accurate] knowledge of the Son of God, that [we might arrive at really mature manhood (the completeness of personality which is nothing less than the standard height of Christ's own perfection), the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ and the completeness found in Him." Amplified Bible

As far as I can tell, that has not happened yet. If you asked the average churchgoer, they would say it is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. God will have a church that fulfills Ephesians 4 on earth. The only question is, will you and I be a part of it?

Are you willing to sacrifice some comfort for the sake of Christ? After all, He died on a cross for you. Would you be willing to do that which is inconvenient - or even sacrificial - to be a part of the Reformation sweeping across America? He left the glories of Heaven to come here for 33 years. Are you willing to obey God rather than men? Jesus was reviled for it—and ultimately crucified.

We cannot afford to lose the Word of God.

Will the Church continue to languish and die 'til her light goes out? Will the word of God be lost to our young generation? Will the lost go blindly into hell, ignoring the Church with nothing to say to this generation? Will we slip quietly into the night because it was too much trouble to do something different? NOT ON MY WATCH!

I invite you to stand with me to reach our generation with both the life-changing Gospel of Jesus and the Spirit-led Reformation of His Church.

Copyright 2009 Steve Highlander and Emmaus Road Encounter. All rights reserved.
Permission granted to download and distribute this article free of charge for personal use,
provided contents remain unchanged, my name and copyright information remain on it.

For reprint rights, please email the author at steve@stevehighlander.com for more
free resources visit www.SteveHighlander.com

