

## **Conforming To God's Truth and Will!**

*By Brother Gene Aptaker*

There is a word that keeps coming to my mind. It comes at various times and in different places. It even comes to me as I am going to sleep at night, keeping me awake at times. Sometimes, I think the word will drive me crazy. I'm being serious. I'm not trying to be dramatic.

What is this dreaded word? Apostate.

Apostate, according to the dictionary, means one who commits apostasy. Apostasy is defined as:

- 1** : renunciation of a religious faith
- 2** : abandonment of a previous loyalty

I have my own definition, which I believe lines up better with the true, biblical thought. My definition of apostate is: Having departed from living according to God's truth and will.

Remember, Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?" This is apostasy.

I believe, with all my heart, that the Lord is showing me, almost continually, that the modern-day Church is apostate; believers are apostate; I am apostate. It is actually making me ill.

What is the Church supposed to be? Firstly, it is called to be a body of believers who are, together, pursuing (finding or employing measures to obtain or accomplish) conformity to God's will and purposes. They should be totally abandoned to, and committed to, even unto death, if necessary, being and doing what the Lord has called them to be and do.

We can clearly see this truth in the life (and death) of our Lord, Jesus. Everything he was and did was utterly given over to His Father for the accomplishing of His will and purposes. I don't think it is necessary for me to quote scripture passages to support this statement.

Nothing was held back. Even when He had to face unbelievable suffering, pain, humiliation and death, he said, "Not my will, but yours, Father, be done." He didn't want to go through those things. Nevertheless, He chose to obey His Father.

Believers are called to live and walk in exactly the same way. Are we unaware of this? I will offer here just a few of the many scriptures to support that statement.

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**Luke 14:25-34**- Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—**he cannot be my disciple.** 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 **In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.** 34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."**

**Matthew 8:21-22**- 21 Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

**Phil 3:7-15**- I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.** 15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

So, what's the problem? The problem is, we talk about these issues, and have interesting bible studies, and listen to excellent sermons by talented preachers, but... we don't **DO** them!

Nobody really **expects** us to do them. Let's be reasonable. Don't we all have busy lives? And many responsibilities? And jobs? And families? And bills to pay? Aren't there other things in life, too?

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And, of course, there is a difference between "believers" (those who are "saved" and going to heaven) and "disciples" (those who really serve the Lord and will receive "rewards"). Right? Wrong. Jesus and the clear testimony of scripture know of no such distinction. You are a disciple, or you are a worker of iniquity.

Secondly, believers and the Church are called to express, in real and observable ways, the very life, nature and ways of God. They should, in actual reality, look like, sound like, act like, and **BE** just like their Lord, Jesus.

I'm not talking about "imitating" Him. This is something the modern Church likes to talk about a lot. This is why we have "programs" and "projects" and "outreaches" and "retreats" and "seminars" and we "feed and clothe the poor" and "we invite our neighbors to Church or revival week or the Christmas show". Well, at least we do some of these things, some of the time.

I'm talking about **being** as He is, expressing His very life and nature, and seeing incredibly good and glorious things simply pouring forth from our lives, because that's what we **are**. (This reality, when it is witnessed by men, will prove the reality of God and His love for them and either draw them to God, or cause them to hate us. One or the other. It was this way for the early Church. Why is it, or should it be different for us?)

Jesus said that **to know God IS** eternal life. He **defined** eternal life as knowing God. Biblically, to know God means to be like Him and express His very ways. If we look at the following scriptures together as a whole, that truth will become apparent.

**Jeremiah 9: 23-24**- 23 Thus says the LORD: " Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, **That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.** For in these I delight," says the LORD.

**Jeremiah 22:13-16**- 13 " Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness And his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor's service without wages And gives him nothing for his work, 14 Who says, 'I will build myself a wide house with spacious chambers, And cut out windows for it, Paneling it with cedar And painting it with vermilion.' 15 " Shall you reign because you enclose yourself in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, **And do justice and righteousness**? Then it was well with him. 16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy; Then it was well. **Was not this knowing Me?**" says the LORD.

**2 Peter 1: 2-11**- 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 3 **as His divine power has given to us all**

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**things that pertain to life and godliness**, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may **be partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 **Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

**1 John 2:3-6-** 3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought **himself also to walk just as He walked.**

**1 John 4:16-17-** 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love (in other words, in the nature of God) lives in God, and God in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because **in this world we are like him.**

We can have confidence, or boldness, on the day of judgment, **not** because we prayed a prayer, or joined a Church, or do nice and good things for the poor and needy, or "believed" the gospel on September 16, 1937, but because **WE ARE LIKE JESUS**, our Lord, because we bear His image and likeness.

This is knowing God! This **is** eternal life!

The "sheep" in Matthew 25 are praised by the Lord and invited to come into the kingdom. Why? Because they fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited those who were sick or in prison, etc.

So, what does the modern Church do (occasionally)? They feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit prisoners, etc. Why? Because they are aware of Matthew 25 and want to do the "right" things. It's all external.

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Think about this: The sheep in Matthew 25 were not aware of Matthew 25. If they were they would have known and understood why the Lord was praising them for ministering unto HIM.

What's the point? The point is that the sheep did what they did because of who and what they were, not because they were "trying" to do right and serve the Lord externally. They were expressing a redeemed nature, showing forth the image of the one who re-created them.

Anybody, even the lowest, vilest sinners, can do nice, good and kind things. I believe I've heard that Hitler loved his dog. Even Mafia hit-men and bosses are capable of doing "nice" or "kind" things for others, and inviting neighbors to Church. The issue is, what's motivating these deeds?

There are many things that can and do motivate good or kind deeds. They are all sin, except one; the life and nature of God being manifest through you.

Are believers in this day and age, and the Church as a whole, pursuing (finding or employing measures to obtain or accomplish) conformity to God's will and purposes? Or expressing, in real and observable ways, the very life, nature and ways of God? Absolutely not.

I'm not saying there is absolutely no reality of these things in the life of believers and the Church. What I'm saying is that, for the most part, these two central, core realities are very absent, and it is a great tragedy (a disastrous event), and there will be horrible consequences, and many people will be struck dumb before the Lord on that day, and many will hear, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity," to their eternal shock and shame.

Jesus once said, "You strain out a gnat and swallow a camel." We do the same. We can get focused on a million-and-one things, such as prophecy and end-time events, gifts of the Spirit, evangelism, biblical stewardship, the doctrines of health and prosperity, inner healing, casting out demons, homeschooling, and the timing of the rapture.

If we can focus on all these things and more, why can't the body of Christ focus on the two core, central issues, which are pursuing conformity to God's will and purposes and expressing, in real and observable ways, the very life, nature and ways of God?

I think I know why. It's because those core central issues are not pleasing to our self-seeking, self-preserving, egotistical, spoiled flesh, so we figure out all kinds of ways to nullify or dodge them. Our "pastors and leaders" are especially good at this.

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The problem is: We can't nullify them or dodge them. These core, central issues have been set in place by God, Himself. Are we wiser than He? Stronger?

Yes. Yes. I've heard it all before. I'm critical, judgmental, self-righteous. Who am I to say these things about the Church of the living God? Don't I, myself, have sins and failures in my own life?

I've earnestly prayed for the Lord to show me if these things are so. If I'm passing critical judgment on believers or the Church, I want to and need to see it, and turn from it. I truly, sincerely do.

What happens? The conviction becomes stronger and clearer as time goes on that I am just seeing "the tip of the iceberg", that the apostasy and fallenness of our modern Church is so great that I can't even bear to truly see it.

I'm so tired of seeing believers, myself included, seeking after pleasures, entertainment, ease, comfort, diversions, riches and fame (all for the Lord's glory, of course), respect and honor, recognition, and position, inside and outside the Church. The list goes on and on.

I'm so sick and tired of hearing, "We're doing our best," and, "The Church has always had problems. Why don't you join in and help instead of criticizing?" and, "Stop judging and start loving," and, "We are all called to grow where we are planted," and, "So, are you living this life you talk about?" and, "We're not perfect, just forgiven." This is all a bunch of nonsense, just lame excuses. The fact is, the Lord has given us all things pertaining to life and godliness. There really are no excuses, only extreme accountability.

The truth is, we are unwilling to hear the Lord and obey Him, myself included (please don't think, even for a moment, that I think I have it all together). We have believed a modern, man-centered "gospel" and we don't want to truly deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. We like to believe we can have what this world offers, and Jesus and heaven, too; that we can serve God and our own desires and agendas, too; that we can be Christians and be liked and accepted by the world, too. But the reality is, we're just fooling ourselves.

Or are we? Are we really fooling ourselves? Or do we truly know, deep down in our heart and soul, that we are not pursuing conformity to God's will and purposes? Or expressing, in real and observable ways, the very life, nature and ways of God? Don't we really know that we have a form of godliness, but deny the true power of such (suffering, self-denial, death and resurrection life)?

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I believe that we have to know it. We have to. The question is, will there be a willingness to turn from our sin, and confess to God and each other; and do the necessary things in order for there to be true revival among God's people; and honor and glory received by our awesome Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ? Will there be any willingness to turn away from our lame, pathetic, rotting "Christian" activities, services and so-called fellowship, and turn toward God and a true, costly, biblical discipleship?