## Lesson 9: When Christ Is Not in Charge...

"Why doesn't God help me?" she sobbed.

I had no idea. She was a stranger. In our brief phone conversation I learned that she was in her early twenties. Her boyfriend had broken up with her. Now she desperately wanted him back. What disturbed her the most was God's refusal to come to her aid. People might let her down, but surely she could count on God to get her out of this devastating situation. It was as if she were saying, "Dear God, where are You? Why have You forsaken me?" She professed faith in Christ and all at once she woke up to the unthinkable possibility that God had dropped out of her life. Crying out to God and finding no sign of divine help led her to desperation. I feared she might take her life.

So I probed for the cause of God's silence. "Did you violate your conscience in your relationship with your boyfriend?"

"Well, yes. We were living together. He said he's getting a divorce from his wife, but he hasn't gotten it yet."

"No wonder the Lord will not bring him back to you. He belongs to another woman!"

"But why did the Lord bring us together?" she insisted.

"He didn't bring you together. You broke His law in coming together. Now why should God help you get by with breaking His law?"

"Well, what do I have to do then?"

"You have to repent and give that man up."

"But I need him," she argued. "I can't stand to live by myself."

"You'll have to choose. You can't have friendship with God and a relationship with this man at the same time."

The conversation ended and I had no further contact with this anonymous caller. I had learned, however, that she had attended a good Bible teaching church which she identified by name.

## Shutting Down Our Access to God

When I reflected on this conversation I was amazed that anyone who had ever studied the Bible even a little bit could actually expect God to help them save an adulterous relationship. Yes, she had some pangs of conscience about this sinful relationship, but evidently it had never occurred to her that she had shut down her access to God in prayer by this sin. She was a sheep who had gone astray far from the Shepherd and now she was lost in the moral wilderness where Satan as a roaring lion was ready to destroy her.

But then I began to think about much more respectable ways in which moral and spiritual chaos is spreading in American evangelical churches. For one thing, in far too many churches adultery is tolerated without any concern over how this leads the church into the moral wilderness where that young woman was!

Roy Knuteson relates the following incident in Calling the Church to Discipline:

"What do you do with a church member you know is committing adultery?" a pastor asked a group of ministers. There was silence.

"You'd better leave him alone," an experienced minister finally warned. "If you make an issue of it you'll split the church. Take my advice; leave him alone."[1](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-when-christ-isnt-in-charge#endnote)

Churches abusing their pastors is another way life and power are lost. There has been an epidemic of churches firing pastors, not because they have sinned, but because a few disgruntled members decided they wanted to get rid of them. The church couldn't figure out how to fire these members so they resolved the conflict by firing the pastor.

Erwin W. Lutzer, Senior Pastor of Moody Memorial Church, told of one especially outrageous incident:

A young man was pastoring his first church. The officers asked him to visit with a wealthy man who attended the church. They were not sure that he was saved and they wanted the pastor to present the gospel to him. He followed their instructions and the rich man was offended.

Then the church burned and the congregation did not have the money to replace it. The rich man offered to provide the money for another building if they would fire the pastor. The young pastor sat through a meeting in which the church voted to dismiss him. No one on the board stood up for him. No one but the janitor of the school where they were temporarily meeting spoke to him as he left. He walked away into a driving rain and never pastored another church. What did this do to Christ? Think of the damage this did to this young man and to the church itself. The next pastor must have discovered that he was preaching to a dead (though orthodox) congregation. Did he labor in vain without ever knowing why God could not bless that church?

New recruits have gone to foreign countries with high hopes of converting the heathen but their hopes were dashed and their faith was thrown out of focus when they discovered war raging between the missionaries.

Any individual, any church, or any Christian group can drift away from Christ without committing any obvious sins. The respectable sin of unbelief is enough. The Bible warns, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." (Heb. 3:12).

One leader of a major denomination in Texas said, "We're so well organized, we could continue on for six months without the Holy Spirit and never even miss Him!"

The Laodicean church was like that. Our Lord said nothing to that church about immorality, false doctrine, or firing a godly pastor. Outwardly, the church was doing so well they were not aware of any needs, but they were totally unaware of their true condition in the sight of God. Our Lord said they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17b). The church was lukewarm and the Lord was ready to vomit them out of His mouth (v 16). Christ was not in the church. He was outside knocking on the door and calling to anyone who might hear His voice and open the door to meet with Him (v 20).

Disconnected from Christ multitudes of His professed followers have abandoned the powerful love relationship with Him which He died to create for our good and His glory and have put Him to open shame.

We need to set our house in order before we can preach to the lost world. We need to start meeting in prayer with Christ obviously present and actively in charge. He alone can reproduce His life in us and establish His kingdom over us. He is alive and ready to actively take charge wherever believers unite to learn to obey all that he commands. We need to repent of the past sins of the church. We need to passionately pray for a new birth of Christlikeness in the church and in our marriages.

We must be satisfied with nothing less than Christ-centered faith and fellowship. To that end we need to unite in the pursuit of true worship in order that we might experience the fullness of new life in Christ. That pursuit is the subject of our next session.

### POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

* What are some "respectable" ways we allow moral and spiritual chaos to spread in our churches?
* Where do we start in establishing a holy standard within our churches?
* What are some "respectable" sins which allow us to drift away from Christ?
* How can Heb. 3:12-13 be built into the life of a local church body?
* How can we encourage one another to be sensitive to sin?
* How can we lead our prayer times at home, in small groups, and in church to focus on perfecting our love for Christ?
* How can we become sensitive to the silence of Christ in our midst? To His absence?

## Research for Instructor

"The thing I fear second only to hell itself is that I would learn to do evil and think it is good," Dr. G. Allen Fleece, former President of Columbia Bible College, declared. In the light of this, study the times in the Bible when the rule of God was overthrown in the believing community and lawlessness prevailed (Judges 21:25; 1 Kgs. 16:29-33; 2 Kgs. 11:1-3; 2 Chron. 33:1-9). See how lawless people created an amazing counterfeit for true Christianity (Mt. 7:21-23 and Rev. 3:14-22). The ultimate counterfeit will be when the man of lawlessness sits in the temple of God claiming to be God (2 Thess. 2:3-12; Rev 13:1-18).

## Endnotes

1 Roy Knuteson, Calling the Church to Discipline, (Nashville, TN, Action Press, 1977), 15.