

Discerning New Evangelicalism

Lesson Seven

The Ecumenical Spirit

Three Progressive Steps to Apostasy

Ecumenicism equals inclusivism. The more inclusivistic a person is, the more Ecumenical he becomes. For many people, if you are not Ecumenical, you are some kind of radical. Ecumenicism is not a good thing, although Ecumenicism did not always mean something bad. For the New Evangelical and Liberal Theologian it means something good. It is not! Originally it meant the spirit that sought Biblical unity. Later it came to be synonymous with compromise. Unity became its focus at the sacrifice of the Biblical.

It should be noted that there is a difference between the Bible doctrine of separation and Separatism (as being taught in many places). Separatism is isolationism. That is not what the doctrine of separation is about. Ecclesiastical separation is ending any “fellowship” (the joining of hands in cooperation) with any other local church or parachurch organization that is not true to the Word of God in ALL areas. Personal separation involves maintaining a distance from any corrupting influence of this world’s system.

“¹¹ And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*.¹² While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.¹³ And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.¹⁴ I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.¹⁵ I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.¹⁷ Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.¹⁸ As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:11-19).

Contrary to the doctrine of separation, Separatism isolates people from a world that needs the message and influence of the local church. The difference is avoiding the corruptive influences of the world while continuing to be a Godly influence in the world. True separation separates the sin from the sinner, while not becoming involved in the sinner’s practices or lifestyle. For instance, it is never appropriate to go into a bar to witness. Witnessing is as much what we are, as what we say. What we say is only part of what we are as Christians.

In II Chronicles we find an example of the ecumenical spirit and the progression to apostasy. The ecumenical spirit is the desire for unity over the desire for holiness. Holiness is compromised for unity.

Step 1

“Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab. And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead? and he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war” (II Chronicles 18:1-3).

Here Jehoshaphat, who was king over faithful Judah, enters into an alliance with wicked Ahab who was king over apostate Israel. They joined hands on the basis of what they had in common while purposefully ignoring their enormous differences (agreeing to disagree). It is this type of alliance that is the first step into Ecumenicism. It was an alliance for the sake of unity at the sacrifice of rightness with God.

Step 2

“⁴ And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day. ⁵ Therefore the king of Israel gathered together of prophets four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall we go to Ramothgilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for God will deliver *it* into the king’s hand. ⁶ But Jehoshaphat said, *Is there* not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him? ⁷ And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, *There is* yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same *is* Micaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. ⁸ And the king of Israel called for one *of his* officers, and said, Fetch quickly Micaiah the son of Imla. ⁹ And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah sat either of them on his throne, clothed in *their* robes, and they sat in a void place at the entering in of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. ¹⁰ And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the LORD, With these thou shalt push Syria until they be consumed. ¹¹ And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramothgilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver *it* into the hand of the king” (II Chronicles 18:4-11).

Here wicked Ahab seeks out his false prophets. These “prophets” were *ear ticklers* (see II Tim. 4:3). They were willing to tell the king what he wanted to hear in order to stay on his good side. They were not concerned with truth and righteousness. Their central concern was their own position. They no longer spoke for God (if they ever did), but for men. In this second step of the progression into apostasy, these false teachers reinforce and polarize the error of this ecumenical spirit in the hearts of the people. It always amazes me that if the right people say something almost anyone will follow. That is, almost anyone except the person who has learned to listen for God’s voice.

Step 3

“¹² And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake to him, saying, Behold, the words of the prophets *declare* good to the king with one assent; let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good. ¹³ And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak. ¹⁴ And when he was come to the king, the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramothgilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And he said, Go ye up, and prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hand. ¹⁵ And the king said to him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the LORD? ¹⁶ Then he said, I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return *therefore* every man to his house in peace” (II Chronicles 18:12-16).

The king sent a messenger to the true prophet of God, Micaiah. He informs Micaiah of what the 400 prophets had already said and encourages Micaiah to say the same thing; to “speak . . . good.” They wanted Micaiah to be a man-pleaser as well. After all, the majority can’t be wrong. (Or can they be?) Micaiah assures the messenger that he will only speak “what my God saith.” And He did. His main concern was not unity, or pleasing men, but pleasing God.

This third step in the progression into apostasy is the rejection of the Word of God for the word of men and the hatred of the separatist by the false prophets. They alienate themselves from the only one who is able to recover them by shutting up their ears against the message of God. After all, the truth he speaks condemns them and their compromise. When this happens, the true prophet must be silenced and this is usually attempted.

There are numerous instances in the Old Testament where the true prophets of God were called to rebuke the priests and people of Israel for their failure in their responsibilities in being separated. This has always been a problem for God’s people. They just can’t seem to grasp the importance of this in the spiritual dynamic of maintaining their own personal purity before God.

“¹ Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing* according to their abominations, *even* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. ² For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass” (Ezra 9:1-2).

“²³ In those days also saw I Jews *that* had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, *and* of Moab: ²⁴ And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people. ²⁵ And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying*, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. ²⁶ Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. ²⁷ Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? ²⁸ And *one* of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, *was* son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. ²⁹ Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites” (Nehemiah 13:23-29).

Ashdod was a major Philistine city on the Mediterranean Sea about 15 miles West of Jerusalem. The Ammonites and Moabites were descendants of the two sons produced from Lot’s incestuous relationship with his two daughters after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Like the Philistines, the Moabites and Ammonites were extremely wicked and perverse people with many pagan gods involving unspeakable licentious practices. All of these nations were supposed to have been destroyed or driven out of the land of Israel. The tribes of Reuben and Manasseh occupied the land (Moab and Ammon) on the East of the river Jordan.

“¹⁰ And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? or what *is* our iniquity? or what *is* our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God? ¹¹ Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the LORD, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law; ¹² And ye have done worse than your fathers; for, behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me: ¹³ Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, *neither* ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not shew you favour” (Jeremiah 16:10-13).

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1. How does theological inclusivism relate to Ecumenicism? _____

2. Discuss the difference between the Biblical doctrine of separation and Separatism. _____

3. What is involved in Ecclesiastical and personal separation? _____

4. Read John 17:11-19. Define what it means to be “in the world,” but not “of the world.” _____

5. List, define and discuss the three progressive steps into apostasy resulting from an ecumenical spirit from II Chronicles chapter 18.
 - A. Step One – II Chronicles 18:1-3 _____

 - B. Step Two – II Chronicles 18:4-11 _____

 - A. Step Three – II Chronicles 18:12-16 _____

6. Read Ezra 9:1-2. What was Israel’s failure that caused the loss of God’s blessing in this text? _____

7. Read Nehemiah 13:23-29. What was Israel’s failure that caused the loss of God’s blessing in this text? _____

8. Read Jeremiah 16:10-13. What was Israel’s failure that caused the loss of God’s blessing in this text? _____

9. From your answers to the above three questions, what lesson have you learned about failure in separation and the spiritual consequences? _____
