

The Plumbline of God

December 23, 2007

“Behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more.”

These words, from the eighth century before Christ, were certainly written for our learning and admonition. In this we are reminded that though times may change, though customs may vary, though dispensations may give way to new and better ones, human nature remains essentially the same.

The time was the eighth century before Christ. It was indeed a propitious and prosperous day in both Israel and Judah. The shrines and altars at Bethel and Gilgal were crowned by prosperous worshipers who were interpreting the word money as meaning “God with us”. Prophets and priests, silenced by gifts and bribes, catered to a people bent only on self-gratification. They were at ease in Zion. The glory that was Israel’s had indeed departed.

The man was Amos. His home was Tekoa, a little village south of Jerusalem and west of the Dead Sea. Amos was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. He was a poor man who made no pretensions of rank or influence, and although he made no claim of being a prophet, God chose him to become, as his very name suggests, a man with a burden.

On the occasion of the vision under consideration, Amos saw the Lord standing on a wall with a plumbline in His hand. The wall was so obviously out of perpendicular that it could not stand; it was headed for a fall. Amos saw the plumbline as God’s testing of Israel’s fidelity to His blueprint or pattern. It was God’s way of saying that it was not enough for Israel to have and to claim the house: the house must be plumb; it must be straight; it must be according to the pattern.

After the passing of the vision, Amos, convinced that from this verdict there was no appeal, picked up the plumbline and went forth to preach. He went to Bethel and Gilgal, delivering a series of messages that were designed to cut to the depths of their calloused hearts.

The truths that Amos preached are timeless, truths that cannot be limited to a particular age or people. He preached that sin was sin, regardless of who committed it or where. He preached that mere ritual was not pleasing

to God; that God was not some vain monarch who was pleased with big gifts and empty phrases. He preached that God had utter contempt for forms of religion that neither disturbed the conscience nor changed one's life. He preached that the greatest peril Israel faced was prosperity. As Amos drove home these points, it was evident that all of his sermons were founded upon one basic conviction: God is a God of law.

In Revelation 11:1-2, a vision was presented to John that is not unlike that presented to Amos. John saw a vision of the temple, the altar, and the worshipers. A reed was given to him with the command to measure the temple, the altar, and those who worshiped therein. Notice that the measuring device was given to him, not made by him. The purpose of this was the same as the plumbline of Amos. It was to determine what was approved of God and that certain definite standards must be met.

In both the law that came from Sinai and the one that was to go forth from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:24), we have the principle that Amos set forth in chapter five, i.e., that we must learn to hate evil and love good. David said: "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104). One of the great needs of our age is to learn the fine art of hating evil.

Whether our times are the most evil ones, I know not. I only know that in our generation we have been exposed to wars and riots, filthy people and filthy inventions, obscenities and profanities. Indeed our young do not even remember things being different. Some of us occupy a vantage point in that we can recall when those who would have peddled their filth had to do it secretly. This is no longer true. We can recall the times when acts of stealing, murder and such like were not considered the sole products of one's body chemistry or his poor, unfortunate environmental circumstance. Such sins, and a thousand kindred ones, were not excused under the heading of "man's temporary stumbling in the upward progress of mankind." A departure has occurred!

We are experiencing falls within the fall. We have lived to see the time when our children are being taught that man has no real significance, that he is no different than the rock that lie in a garden or a rodent that scurries among the plants. We have lived to see the time when the criterion for right and wrong is not based upon divine revelation but rather upon the current demands of society or the wishes of the individual. We have lived to see what Amos saw! Sin is more glamorous than ever before. Drugs and alcohol are the subjects of jokes, infidelity has become a status symbol, perversion has become an accepted life style, dirty books are called literature and filthy shows are called realism. It is in the fullness of this time that all Christians should rise up as a mighty army and declare

that all such is sin, not just someone's mistake or hang-up! God hates such things! To be His, we must do the same.

Solomon stated in Ecclesiastes 3:8 that there is a time to love and a time to hate. I submit to you my brother, that the time to both love and hate with a new intensity has arrived. Indeed it is time to quit — time to quit laughing at the lewd jokes and humming the tunes and stuffing the pockets of those who are absolutely liquidating the values for which we stand! It is time to raise the old plumbline of God and say, listen world, we hate your filthy jokes, we hate your profanity and gutter language, we hate your depraved sense of humor, your nudity, your infidelity; in short, we hate any and every thing that's tearing down all the Lord died to build up!

There is a Cause; is there not an Amos? We, like he, must become burden bearers. We, too, must be able to discern between good and evil. We, too, must be willing to cry aloud and spare not, lest we one day awaken to see the Lord's people decimated not from without but from within.

Amos, what seest thou? A plumbline, O Lord. Have we seen it? Are we building accordingly? Are we conforming to the blueprint of His will? What kind of house are we building in our generation?

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