

Elijah — Halting Between Two Opinions

1 Kings 18:17-21 (KJV)

17 And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? **18** And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim. **19** Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. **20** So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel. **21** And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

Three Prophets

During this era of Israel's history, God used three prophets to speak specifically to the people and to their kings:

Elijah—1 Kings 17-21; 2 Kings 1-2

Elisha—2 Kings 3-9

Micaiah—2 Kings 22

God used all three of these men in unique ways. All three of them were unexpected, uninvited, and un-credentialed. But all three of them had a divine anointing and boldness on their lives that Jehovah had placed there.

Elijah comes along and shows the reality of abundance in a world that is governed by scarcity. That took place when he was sustained at the brook Cherith by the ravens. Once he moves on to Zarephath, an empty barrel of meal and cruse of oil, was not a match for God's sustaining hand. But it is especially true when we see God giving him power over death of the widow's son.

While we may want to look at Elijah as a bold man of God who was unfeeling and uncaring about the overall plight of the nation, this is not the

case. Elijah demonstrates great pastoral care when he helps the widow in 1 Kings 17. But all of that will drastically change when he goes from comfort to confrontation in 1 Kings 18.

How Long the Halting?

The madness of Ahab is seen when he looks to Elijah, that godly preacher, and asks him if he is the one who is troubling Israel. Ahab had allowed his spiritual discernment to be totally wiped away, because of the influence of his wife and the weakness of his own flesh.

The Cry of a Preacher

1 Kings 18:21 (KJV) And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

God in all his grace and mercy has sent a preacher, a prophet to come and help Israel. He did not send a political figure or an environmentalist or a global warming expert to find a solution to their problem... God sent a preacher!

Israel needed someone to come and ask them “how long?”

The Bible is full of “how longs”?

Exodus 10:3—How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?

Exodus 16:28—How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?

Numbers 14:11—How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

Numbers 14:27—How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me?

Joshua 18:3—How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you?

1 Samuel 16:1—How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?

Psalms 4:2—How long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?

Psalms 62:3—How long will ye imagine mischief against a man?

Psalms 74:10—O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?

Psalms 94:3—LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?

Proverbs 6:9—How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?

Jeremiah 4:14—How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

Jeremiah 31:22—How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?

Matthew 17:17—O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

That is a good question to ask... How long? But it is especially good when the cry of “how long” comes from a man that God has sent to us!

“The world is waiting to hear an authentic voice, a voice from God—not an echo of what others are doing and saying, but an authentic voice.”

– A. W. Tozer

“What the church needs today is not more or better machinery, not new organizations or more novel methods. She needs men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. . . He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer!” – E. M. Bounds

How desperately God needs His men in this day! To stand up and cry out, “how long?”

Romans 1:16 (KJV) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Elijah rose in his day... Paul rose in his day... He wasn't ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ... We as preachers must arise in our day!

If ever the American church needed to be called away from the entertainment orientation of our time, this is it. Churches that have strong biblical teaching and are gaining spiritual strength are those who are willing to respond to the boldness of a preacher/prophet who cries out, "How long?"

Perhaps I am a little old-fashioned to believe this, but I believe that churches can grow if they will focus on prayer, on preaching, and on outreach. Perhaps even a little "in-reach" to those who have sat on the pews for years and have never been converted.

The Lord does not need professionals as much as He needs pray-ers! The Lord does not need professionals nearly as much as He needs preachers who get up and preach the Word and then let the seed fall where it will.

Limping Along

1 Kings 18:21 (KJV) And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

That is where the devil works best! He will do everything within his power to get us individually and as a church to live between two worlds. Just enough of the church to give us a little peace and just enough of the world so we have a form of godliness and deny the power thereof.

Limping means to engage in a cultic dance in the celebration of Baal while still performing a devotion to Jehovah. When we look at human nature, we must frankly admit that not a whole lot has changed over the last several thousand years.

Another word for halting is tottering. It has the picture of a man who is intoxicated, drunk, tipsy, befuddled, stoned, and plastered under the influence of alcohol. Remember the words of the Lord to his disciples.

He told them at the end of the Olivet discourse when he was describing the events of the end time... Don't be overtaken with drunkenness and surfeiting (Luke 21:34).

Among the more visible cases of indecision is the example of so-called German Christians who turned a blind eye to the destruction of the Jews. Hitler's fear had spread among the people to such a degree that they were unwilling to put their life on the line to even help the Jews who were condemned.

They were church people who thought they could live faithfully without choosing between the dominant theology of the National Socialism and the cause of Jesus Christ.

They were trying to live in a world of "both/and" instead of a clear-cut world of "either/or." That is the call for discipleship for every child of God and for that matter every one who is without the Lord.

The whole matter of this segment in Elijah's life is about the endless lukewarmness of the Church in the face of real issues. What does lukewarmness look like?

It takes both faith and materialism.

It takes both faith and worldliness.

It takes both faith and low spiritual desire.

It takes both faith and biblical illiteracy.

It takes both faith and low church attendance.

It takes both faith and spiritual shallowness.

"Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions." – G. K. Chesterton

The constant pounding of the world, the flesh, and the devil is like the waves of the ocean that continue to lap at the beachfront property and slowly over time there is a great deal of erosion that takes place.

Webster defines “erosion” in this way: To diminish or destroy by degrees; to eat into or away by slow destruction of substance; to cause to deteriorate or disappear.

You can count on three things about erosion and especially spiritual erosion:

It is always slow.

It is always silent.

It is always subtle.

Chuck Swindoll in his book, *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal*, related the following story:

“A close friend recently visited a local church that stemmed from a denomination with deep, centuries-old roots in conservative theology. Those who originated the denomination loved the Scriptures, proclaimed the Word of God, and aligned their lives with its truths. In fact, their peers laughed at them for being so “narrow-minded.” These individuals never planned to start a denomination, and yet their lives sparked a movement that swept the land of England and eventually made its way across the Atlantic into America. However, as my friend and his wife sat in the church that morning with several hundred other people, they noticed that only the two of them and one other person had brought a Bible. Erosion was taking its toll. The denomination’s drift from its sturdy theological roots did not occur in two months, or two years, or even two decades. Instead, it was on a slow, silent, and subtle slide. Given enough time, the denomination will hardly resemble or even remember its original convictions.” (pp. 4-5)

Whether we are willing to admit it or not, the limping along, the fence straddling can take place. We find ourselves involved in matters that even five years ago and certainly ten years ago we would have never found ourselves being moved in that direction.

Who was halting?

Those who may have grown up in a home that honored Jehovah, but the trinkets of Baal began to pull at them when they got old enough to make their own decisions. It takes strength of mind and spirit to withstand temptation.

Those who may have had all the trappings of a relationship with God publically, but in their private lives there wasn't a commitment to prayer, to the Word, and to true spiritual fellowship.

There were those who knew to do good, but did not do it. They fell under the sway of worldly friends and worldly associations and were unable to shake free of them. So, they ended up living lives that were in a position of constant compromise.

How long halt ye between two opinions?

Our Need of Revival

1 Kings 18:21 (KJV) And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

Elijah's call to the nation of Israel had a profound effect on their spiritual senses. The Bible tells us of a very striking response... The people answered him not a word!

Literally every objection that they had against what Elijah had said was utterly silenced. They could not respond in opposition to because they knew they had heard the Word of the Lord calling through to them in the middle of their misdirected allegiance to Baal.

That response ought to be the whole desire of all preachers! That their words would be so anointed, so arresting, and so God-breathed that people are literally taken aback by the holiness, the majesty, and the greatness of God.

But I also must believe that God is not the only factor that is involved in the matter. A minister's personal holiness and his private devotion to God will go a long way toward making men come under the power of the preached Word.

Over my life there have been a few times when I was very much in the same condition as those who heard Elijah that day. I can remember a few sermons that were preached by men that when they were finished, the whole congregation was in the mode of absolute, but very reverent silence.

This is just one instance in Scripture that we are given a description of what took place when the call to God came forth... To Elijah's cry... There was silence... There are other places in Scripture where a response came to preaching:

In Acts 2 after Peter preached... Others mocking (Acts 2:13).

In Acts 24 after Paul reasoned with Felix... he trembled (Acts 24:25).

In Acts 26 after Paul preached to Festus... he said with a loud voice, You are mad (Acts 26:24-26).

In Acts 26 after Paul preached to Agrippa... he said, Almost thou persuades me to be a Christian (Acts 26:28-29).

More times than not... that is the response to an evangelistic call that comes from a sincere preaching who is reasoning with men about the condition of their soul!

What Is the Condition of Your Soul?

The greatest question of life is this: What is the condition of your soul?
How long will you halt, limp, totter between two opinions?

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals He's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and for me.

Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading,
Pleading for you and for me?
Why should we linger and heed not His mercies,
Mercies for you and for me?

Time is now fleeting, the moments are passing,
Passing from you and from me;
Shadows are gathering, deathbeds are coming,
Coming for you and for me.

Oh, for the wonderful love He has promised,
Promised for you and for me!
Though we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon,
Pardon for you and for me.