

"Half-Baked" Christianity

A meditation upon Hosea 7:8.

"Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; *Ephraim is a cake not turned*. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him for all this." Hosea 7:8-10, KJV

In a previous generation, a churchman observed of the church's relationship to the surrounding culture of that era and said: "I looked for the church and found it in the world. I looked for the world and found it in the church." In the history of American Christianity there perhaps has never been a time when the criticism uttered by that Englishman against the church of his day is not also an apt indictment of Christianity in our culture today.

Admixing faith with culture--something we might call the Canaanitization of Christianity--is something that both testaments warn against. The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians against allowing it to happen. He wrote: **"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty"** (2 Corinthians 6:17-18; Citing Isaiah 52:11.). About allowing themselves to become blended with the culture, to become culturized by Corinth, the Apostle Paul called upon true believers to separate themselves from those who, by their actions and beliefs, violated the covenant of faith. He admonished, **"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God . . ."** (2 Corinthians 6:14-16a).

Using an interesting metaphor, the prophet Hosea warned that, **"Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; *Ephraim is a cake not turned*"** (Emphasis mine, Hosea 7:8). Hosea describes that Israel had violated God's call for them to remain a distinct people from the pagan nations around them (See Exodus 34:12-16.). Because Israel was in clear violation of God's command, Hosea compares Israel to an unturned pancake, an ancient version of *fast food*! Cooked upon hot coals, the cake had to be turned from one side to the other at just the right moment, else the downside, the side closest to the fire, would become scorched and burnt, while the upside, the side away from the fire, would remain unbaked, doughy, and odious. That is how the prophet likened the northern nation of Israel just before their captivity. Their courting of and alliances with the pagan nations, as exhibited by the men of Israel marrying pagan women and their gods, caused the prophet to picture the nation as a "half-baked" pancake fit only to be discarded into the fire of God's judgment.

The question must be asked, is there a sense in which, whether corporately or individually, we like Ephraim, are *cakes not turned*? The question is not irrelevant. In comparing the sins of

Northern Israel--fraud, lying, adultery, alcohol consumption, unresolved anger and outbursts of rage, unfaithful leadership and prayerlessness--can it not be discerned that the sins which plagued ancient Ephraim are also evident in today's professing church? In short, the same sinful influences upon Ephraim in Hosea's day are observable in and amongst Christians today.

For allowing itself to become culturized, the consequence is that the church loses her credibility. What the church is (or is not) speaks so loudly that the culture cannot hear what she says, her prophetic voice as it were. In trying to reform society, the church finds itself in the hypocritical posture of first needing to reform itself; of needing to clean herself up before she attempts to clean up others. "Yep, Son, we have met the enemy," Pogo says, "and **he is us.**" Such is the way worldliness impacts the church. It causes the church to be *half-baked*.

In the 70s and early 80s, Edward Dobson worked with Jerry Falwell's *Moral Majority*. Admitting that the cause was neither moral nor a majority, Dobson is recorded to have assessed the movement, striking at the nerve of the problem. From the movement's inception it was doomed to fail because as he stated: "It was an attempt to change values in the world at large when those values haven't even been changed in the community of faith." [1]

I fear for the Religious Right during 2010 and in the years beyond, that if its own values have not changed, any positive change foisted on America in the upcoming election will be short lived, and in the end prove to be "chump change." A culturized church cannot change the culture.

ENDNOTE

[1] Edward Dobson quoted by John Seel, "Nostalgia for the Lost Empire," *No God But God*, Os Guinness and John Seel, Editors (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) 74.