

## Following the Crowd or the Righteous Remnant?

Written by David Wise

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It's a common phrase in our culture today to attempt to entice someone to engage in an illicit activity to say that "everyone is doing it". First of all, that is a very misleading statement because whatever the activity is I can guarantee you that not everyone is doing it (except for breathing). Young people, and all of us to a certain degree, have a desire to fit in and be accepted by others and particularly by our peer group. Therefore, we have a tendency to "follow the crowd" to attempt to fit in. For the child of God, this runs diametrically opposed to the manner in which we are to conduct ourselves in our Christian walk.

Generally speaking, if you are following the crowd of the world, that will be going in the exact opposite direction from approaching unto God in close fellowship. James says in no uncertain terms that *"friendship with the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God"* (James 4:4). You can't play on both the world and God's team; you can't ride the fence between serving Satan and serving God. If you are intimately acquainted with a close friendship with the things of this world then that declares that you are on the enemy's opposing side from God. Man in his natural state, those who have not been born again by the Spirit of God, still only have his natural and carnal mind, which is wholly opposed to God and God's holy law. *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."*

*So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Rom. 8:7-8). That's why the world is the enemy of God because everything in man's nature (apart from divine grace) is wholly opposed to God's rule and authority. The world hated Jesus, and therefore if we serve Christ, then we will be treated as enemies of the world too (John 15:18-19). Those who live in darkness and do wicked deeds concealed in the dark have always hated the light exposing their actions (John 3:19-21). That's why they hated Jesus as the light of the world, and that's why the world will hate us when we take off the bushel and let our light shine brightly in this world (Matt. 5:13-16).

Why would the child of God want to closely associate with those who are enemies and actively hate our God that we love? We cannot continually expose ourselves to the wicked actions of this world and not expect it to affect us. If we continually expose ourselves to those who talk negatively about God and the church and manifest their hatred towards God, it will inevitably infect our mindset. If we spend enough time with the enemy, then we will eventually start

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thinking and talking just like the enemy. Now, we can't totally isolate ourselves from interaction with the world. We are forced to remain in this world until our death or Christ's second coming, but we are not of this world. We have been made citizens of a heavenly country, and we are only on an earthly pilgrimage for a short period, continually advancing in our trek to our eternal home. While we are still forced to interact with people who hate our God and want to pursue the things of this world, that does not mean that we should be in an intimate friendship with them. Instead, we need to come out from among them and be separate (2 Cor. 6:14-17). If there is not a clear separation and distinguishment between our conduct and the world, then that is symptom #1 that we might be acting as a friend of the world (and enemy of God) and not even know it.

Jesus said *"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets"* (Luke 6:26). Now, we certainly need to live our lives in a godly way to where our deeds should not give an occasion for anyone to blaspheme or speak evil of the name of the Lord, as David's actions did (2 Sam. 12:10). However, when we make that commitment to live in a God-honoring way, the world that hated and spoke evil of the perfect Son of God will certainly speak disparagingly of us as well. If we stand up for truth in this world and let our light shine as we ought, then inevitably some of those in darkness will speak negative things about us. Therefore, if we never have any conflict or disagreement with those who live in an ungodly way, if the world even speaks well of us and brags on us, then it might be because there is no separation between us and the world. If all men without exception, even ungodly men, speak well of you, then that's a strong sign that are friends of the world, and worse, as Jesus compares us to the false prophets, have compromised the message of God to be accepted by the population at large. The Old Testament false prophets in Jesus' comparison crafted their message to tell the people of Judah and Israel exactly what they wanted to hear, regardless of if it was the truth or not. They compromised the word of God and truth for popularity and praise of "the crowd" in Israel. If all men without exception speak well of you in the world, then chances are that you have never actually stood up for the truth of God's word as boldly as you ought.

If someone says that "everyone is doing it", (as we noted earlier that's not true) then that by itself is a good indication that it's a worldly activity that the child of God does not need to engage in. Jesus said, *"that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God"* (Luke 16:15). If we are following the crowd of the world, then the end result will always be

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destruction.

*“Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”*

(Matt. 7:13-14). This is not an eternal salvation text but a discipleship text. The audience who Jesus warns that could fall into the wide gate and broad way of destruction is not the unregenerate but his disciples (Matt. 5:1). You’ll notice that the wide gate and broad way is easy to enter in; there’s no struggle or conflict because the passageway is so broad and open. However, it takes some struggle, some sacrifice to enter into the strait gate and narrow way, and that’s why there are only a few that make the sacrifice of authentic discipleship to pursue that path that leads to the abundant life in the kingdom of God. By contrast, there are “many” disciples who still follow the crowd and pursue the wide gate and broad way that the ultimate end will be destruction and misery for them here in this world. So, if you are following the crowd, where will be your destination? You will be with the “many” who end up at the destination of destruction, destroyed relationships, and no joy here in this world.

Even though by comparison there are relatively “few” children of God who are wholly committed to serving God in the strait gate and narrow way and not pursuing this world, the end destination of the “abundant life” is well worth the sacrifice. Unfortunately, it’s always been true that the percentage of faithful disciples both in the general population and among God’s children have always been relatively small. This “righteous remnant” has always been a relatively “small and few” remnant. In Elijah’s day, he felt that he was all alone in serving God, but God told him that there were 7,000 men reserved who had not bowed their knee to the image of Baal (1 Kings 19:18). That sounds like a large number (and to some degree it is), however, there’s a good chance there were 1-2 million Israelites at that time. Therefore, there were probably less than 1% of the total population of Israel who were not worshipping Baal. Furthermore, it’s probable that these were “closet disciples” since Elijah didn’t see their commitment to Jehovah God manifested externally too boldly, especially since he was by himself on Mt. Carmel just a few days earlier. On the Day of Pentecost, there were 3,000 persons converted and baptized into the church. Praise God! However, during the feast of Pentecost, there were probably 1-3 million Jews in Jerusalem at that time. If there were 1 million people in the city at that time, then less than 0.5% of the total people were baptized into the church. That’s a very small percentage of the overall population in those instances.

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Even among the children of God which are out of every nation, kindred, people, and tongue, percentages tell us that a vast number (maybe even a majority of those) will not hear the gospel. Even among those who hear the gospel, there are varying degrees of commitment. In Jesus' parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-23), it is my opinion that each of the four grounds represent children of God because they all "heard the word", which means they already had ears to hear given in the new birth. While I don't think these percentages are necessarily exact, look at the dispersion in that parable. By the wayside, 25% (1 of 4) hear the word but never believe because Satan clouds their mind. In the stony ground, 25% (1 of 4) hear and believe for a short while but fade away in the midst of tribulation. In the thorns, 25% (1 of 4) bring forth fruit initially but are choked out by the thorns and become unfruitful. Then, only 25% (1 of 4) are the good ground which bring forth much fruit. However, even among the good ground there are varying levels of productivity, some bringing forth 30, 60, and 100 fold. So, those who are good ground are only 25% of those children of God who hear the gospel in this parable, then the 100 fold good ground is only 1/3 of that group or about 8% of the total. Therefore, it's possible that only about 10% of children of God who even hear the gospel are going to be faithful 100 fold good ground disciples of Christ. That might be supported by the fact that when Jesus healed 10 lepers only 1 (10% of the total) came back to worship and praise him (Luke 17:12-19). The other 90% just went back to their former lives and did their own thing after they had received healing from the Lord. Again, these percentages are by no means exact, but I believe this does support the fact that "the crowd" even among God's children will not always be following God's word in good ground discipleship in the manner that we are called unto.

We need to understand that while the large crowd may not be pursuing this pathway of discipleship, the relatively few friends we have that travel this journey with us are the dearest that you will ever have in this world. As our old hymn says, "You may value the friendships of youth and of age... But the friends that most cheer me on life's rugged road, and are the friends of my Master, the children of God." Our dearest friends in this world are those who are committed to the same cause that we are, pursuing and traveling that narrow way along with us. We will be very intimately close with those in the strait gate and narrow way out of necessity. By its course, this way is a constricted and confined pathway, so therefore those on this pathway will be traveling in close communion and proximity. Remember that the end destination of this confined narrow way is life, the abundant life in the kingdom of God. Therefore, don't follow the crowd of the world to destruction, but pursue the strait gate and narrow way with the righteous remnant to the abundant life in the kingdom of God.