

## #25 “Resisting the Pull to Nominalism”

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Too often there seems to be a spirit of apathy, complacency, and a bad kind of spiritual contentment in the church. Granted, there are places where the environment is saturated with the work and filling of the Spirit, but they seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Spiritual nominalism is clearly a problem, and we would do well to think about how we can avoid being pulled into it ourselves.

We can recognize nominalism in our lives if our walks are characterized by a mediocre faith, a subpar holiness, and a habitual indulgence in walking according to the flesh. Nominal Christians tend to let areas of sin go unconfessed, they do not envision what God could do by faith, and they enjoy things that don't make them confront the holiness of God. They do not want to hear about obedience, submission, surrender, the fear of God, and trembling before His Word. Such truths would make them feel uncomfortable. They don't have an appetite for the preaching of the Word. They don't grieve over sin, they are not burdened for evangelism, and they have no passion for being in the presence of God. Their desire to be in God's Word is minimal, and they have little interest in prayer. The authority of God's Word fails to permeate the whole of their lives.

If we want to avoid falling into nominalism, we need to understand what causes it in the first place. When the fear of God is absent among the people of God, sin breaks out like cancer. When the fear of God is present, a thorough self-examination and self-restraint by faith works its way through the people of God as in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 where God executed them both publicly for not giving what they were supposed to give to God. Acts 5:5 says that “great fear came over all who heard it.” We tend to forget that God disciplines those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6). Some Christians are even allowed to become sick or even killed by God if they don't judge the body rightly by allowing sin to go on unchecked and being callous toward the sacrifice of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:30). These punishments are not works of God's wrath, for believers will never face God's wrath because it was poured out upon Christ. But we will encounter God's discipline throughout the course of our lives when we veer off track because God disciplines those children whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6, 10). That God would instruct us and train us in righteousness proves His love toward us because He knows what is best for us. He wants us to have an abundance of eternal rewards, and therefore He will help us to stay on track. We will all face Christ at His judgment seat one day to be recompensed according to our level of faithfulness as believers (2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Being mindful of our coming judgment and of God's discipline for our rebellion helps remind us to live with a healthy fear of God in our hearts and minds. This motivates us to keep doing right and to keep walking by faith. Nominalism can be right around the corner for those who don't fear God as they should.

Nominalism is also caused by those who do not tremble before God's Word. God says in Isaiah 66:2, "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." Those who fear God will also likely tremble before His Word. Those who do not fear God won't pay much attention to God's Word, and they will likely veer way off course in their spiritual lives. Thus, the fear of God and trembling before His Word go hand in hand. God's Word is our only hope for knowing how to live this life, and we must read it, study it, learn it, know it, obey it, and meditate upon it. Those who tremble before God's Word are those who allow it to do its convicting work such that they take any sin in their lives seriously, dealing with it immediately by confessing it before God. We cannot afford to approach God's Word casually, but we must view it as the authoritative and life sustaining truth that it is. A casual view of the Bible leads to casual, nominal living which furthers a casual take on the Bible which deepens the falling away from faithfulness. At some point, to avoid the pull of nominalism, we as God's people must turn to God's Word, revering it and trembling at it. Nominalism is just too casual in its view and approach to God. It elevates man and his experience and devalues God and what He has said in His Word. Those who love God's Word and are in it and living obediently can remain filled with the Spirit. This will keep us from falling into nominalism.

Nominalism will erupt in our churches if we refuse to dig into God's Word on Sunday, if we refuse to preach it with authority, if we downgrade the importance of prayer, and if we water down the meaning and admonitions of Scripture. Nominal leaders will create nominal followers. But, it is also true that God can work through revived shepherds to revive the sheep. Nominalism doesn't have to be the state of the church forever, though sadly in too many places it will be. Let us deal with the state of our own hearts, refusing to become nominal in our faith and choosing rather to be fully devoted to the will and purposes of God. Lukewarm Christians make God sick (Revelation 3:16), so may we be those who are fired up about our Lord.