

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Problems God's People Must Face & Solve In The 80's If Churches Are To Grow!

[obviously written in the early 80's, but still a needed message]

In the beginning let me state that I do not believe that the Lord's church is going to be destroyed from the face of the earth, or even from American soil. I believe God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), and He said that He would set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28). It cannot be destroyed because we have an indestructible Word which is the seed that produces the kingdom (Luke 8:11; I Pet. 1:23-25). While I believe the church can never be destroyed, I do believe that *congregations* may die or lose their identity (Rev. 2:5; 3:1-6). The churches that Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Luke and Timothy established and labored with have long ceased to exist. Local churches in a given part of the world may suffer from these same problems and all go into apostasy and lose their identity as the Lord's people, or go totally out of existence.

Brethren, I believe that churches of Christ in the United States do face a survival problem in this decade if we do not wake up and turn some things around! Churches of Christ have some common problems that must be realized and cured or they will bring death to many congregations and will decrease membership in others. The 80s are not

like the 40s, the 50s, the 60s or the 70's in churches of Christ. There is a growth problem that must be faced head-on! We cannot make this problem go away by "sticking our heads in the sand" and ignoring it, nor by taking a "business as usual" approach. Let us take a long, hard look at ourselves NOW (I Cor. 1:26; II Cor. 13:5). I don't believe there is anything pessimistic about facing facts.

We are losing ground in many congregations as faithful saints grow old and pass away. Just think of how many we are going to lose in the next ten years! Who will replace them as leaders and stable "pillars" in these congregations? Most of the churches of Christ in the cities have a leadership who came from the rural churches where they were converted and trained. Many rural churches have died (or are dying) and are no longer converting the young and "feeding" city churches with material for leadership. And the city churches in many places are not doing that well in converting and training new leadership either. Many congregations that have been in existence for ten or fifteen years have no eldership — and no immediate prospects for one! One of the great problems we face is a leadership problem, and losing our present leaders in death will compound that problem! Let us face up to this problem NOW and put forth a greater effort to encourage young family men to begin to prepare themselves to be elders in the Lord's church.

We are losing ground as the world attracts many. Many preachers have divorced their wives and have married again. Elders, deacons, song leaders and Bible class teachers have done the same! Many members of the church are involved in illicit affairs and all kinds of other sins of the flesh. Yes, brethren, worldliness is one of the main issues we face, and it is taking its toll among us. The divorce and remarriage issue will be one of the problems we will have to deal with for years to come. The problem of worldliness must be faced and dealt with because it will have a devastating effect on congregations that do not deal with it!

We are losing ground as people we do baptize fall by the wayside before they can become productive in the Lord's kingdom. Many cannot take

tribulation and persecution that comes because of the Word. Others are overcome by the deceitfulness of riches. The love of others waxes cold because of worldliness.

We are losing ground when we are losing 60% to 75% of our young people — and some congregations have lost the last three generations! Some of the causes for this are materialistic homes, division in the local congregation, and brethren who cannot get along with one another. This constant strife has its detrimental effect on our children. Many times we have failed in our teaching programs. There is just a combination of things that have contributed to the loss of our children to the world. This trend must be reversed if the church is to grow. We must not only teach our children the truth, but we must set the proper example by practicing those things that are taught.

Another problem we face is that men in our society are less and less interested in the gospel and the salvation of their souls. We are baptizing more women than men in many places, and if this trend is not reversed we will become a church made up of women. A church made up of women loses its financial base and has a hard time supporting the preaching of the gospel. The "macho" image has caused men to be less and less interested in spiritual things. The "macho man" drinks in bars, wears his shirt open to his belt buckle, and seduces all the women he can. His temper is hot, and he will break your head if you get in his way! Now isn't this a terrible "role model" for our young men? Our young men need to see fathers and grandfathers who strive to do the will of the Lord, and be taught to honor and respect them. They need to be taught that real strength comes from striving to follow the example of our Master, Jesus Christ.

Basic Problems In Churches of Christ Today

1. Zero-growth in many places. The solution to this problem is for every member to be committed to teaching someone else the gospel.

When the church is busy teaching publicly and privately it will grow (Acts 5:42).

2. Fragmentation (or division). The cause of Christ of late years has (in many places) been disgraced by brethren biting and devouring one another! Division is very unpleasant, hinders progress and growth, and leads to sins of all sorts (Gal. 5:15; James 3:14-18). Fragmentation discourages weak members and they drift away from the church. It disturbs children and keeps young people from obeying the gospel. Our society has produced many self-ambitious men who love to have the pre-eminence among the brethren, and if they don't get their way, division follows. This fragmentation over non-doctrinal issues must stop, and these "Diotrepheses" must be dealt with and exposed for what they really are (3 John 9,10).

3. Materialism; the seeking after "things and stuff" - such as better cars, houses and furniture. Jesus said that no man can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24) because his affections and obedience would be divided. He would fail altogether in his duty to one or the other. One he would love; the other he would hate. One would be neglected. The man who is serving mammon has taken his eye off of heaven, his eye is evil, and he is filled with darkness (Matt. 6:23). This man may think he is godly because he talks about God, believes in God, and goes to worship God where God is worshipped, but he is really living for earthly things; he serves mammon. He is like the nations that were moved into Samaria: "So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images" (2 Kings 17:41). Many in the church today say they fear God, but spend every waking hour serving mammon! We must wake up and realize that the only thing that is important is serving the Lord, putting His kingdom first, then all the "things" we need will be "added unto" us (Matt. 6:33).

4. The destruction of the family. We live in a nation that grants one million divorces a year! This break down in the family has reached

into God's people! We are going to have to do more teaching on what God wants the home to be. We are going to have to teach our children that marriage is for life (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14; Rom. 7:2). These principles must be deeply impressed in their minds from childhood.

5. Many professed Christians don't know Christ and God; they have no personal relationship with them. One develops a strong personal relationship with God and Christ by daily Bible study, daily prayer, by tribulation and meditation, by attending the services of the church regularly, and by trusting God for temporal needs. When members of the church develop the relationship with God and Christ that God intended for us to have, we will see a big turn-around in the Lord's church.

- Donald Townsley

TEACHING CHILDREN BY EXAMPLE

Parents sometimes send their children to Bible study and church services instead of coming with them. This is a serious mistake. In later years the likelihood is that the children will stay at home and miss Bible study and worship, due to the example of their parents.

Fathers and mothers who try to talk their sons and daughters into acting a certain way but who lack the conviction and courage to act that way themselves, usually have little success. *Actions speak much louder than words!*

Children need to be shown the good and right way by the example of their parents. Don't *send* them to Bible study; *bring*

them and be in worship yourself! That old "Don't do-what-I-do-but-do-what-I- say" approach reflects a poor attitude.

Bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord involves training them through a godly example. Parents who neglect this aspect of training are failing to follow God's word. Many will not face up the seriousness of their parental neglect until it is too late. Our children are precious. They deserve the influence of the best example we can give them. Let us not fail them.

—Irvin Himmel

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"A Sacred Trust!"* (text: Luke 16:10-13); Sunday evening: *"2 Samuel: A Man After God's Own Heart!"*