

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Jackson, TN 38305
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September 15, 2019

Volume 39, # 38

Attitudes Leading to Apostasy

Israel was oppressed by armies of idolaters again and again because God gave them up to be punished after they rebelled against His law and copied the idolatrous world about them. The Lord would deliver them when they repented and prayed for help. The apostasy did not begin the day the invading and conquering army marched across the land killing and enslaving. Attitudes that led to their downfall no doubt developed gradually over a period of time.

In a private conversation in the late 1930s in the *Gospel Advocate* office, R.L. Whiteside told me that institutionalism would be the occasion of the next great apostasy. I did not know him very well and did not recognize the wisdom in his remark. I thought our fathers before us had gone through that and had put that behind us. In my ignorance I overlooked the fact that the devil uses the same tricks over and over again with only a little change in names and points of attack. Hundreds of thousands of my brethren were as blind as I was so there was not the proper teaching to immunize against the central agencies' taking money from churches and exercising control over them.

We were too ignorant of the devil's devices (2 Cor. 2: 11). Further ignorance was there, too. Far too many were not so well informed of the divine pattern for the Lord's church at work so we could be led to change the plan without even realizing that we were missing the mark. Our senses were not exercised to properly discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14). Is there not still that lack of knowledge on the part of many who should know the difference between "clover and sneeze weed"?

It is human for the teenage boy, his father, and his grandfather to want to be accepted by their neighbors. This requires conformity. The world will love its own and speak well of those who copy its ways (Jn. 15:19; Lk. 6:26). The Lord forbids our conforming to please the world, but this failure to conform brings persecution which we do not like. We like the praise of men (Rom. 12:2; 2 Tim. 3:12; Gal. 1:10).

Our brethren did not invent the family life building or the idea of a central agency with money to have a national "Church of Christ Hour" similar to "The Lutheran Hour" or "The Catholic Hour." We are more effective at following the denominations about us than we are at leading our neighbors to the Bible pattern (1 Sam. 8:5).

During the depression years and the war years we were preaching to get people out of the world and out of human denominations, but we did not preach enough about getting the world and denominationalism out of the men. I remember. I enjoyed hearing men make the good confession and seeing them baptized. I did not realize that the devil was planning such an all-out attack on these new recruits to the army of the Lord. The devil was willing for these people to be members of the church and still enjoy the social gospel dainties of food, fun, and frolic and enjoy the social drink, the social dance, and the immodest styles with a certain bit of freedom to use blasphemy and vulgarity with the crowd. That way they could seek to serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). The love of the world leads to apostasy (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Shrewd and prosperous socialites can exert influence over elders and many quiet people who live by a higher moral code. These fluent worldly people can talk of "caring for poor little orphans" or whatever they need to talk about to lead the majority away from a "narrow-minded preacher." They might even use "good words and fair speeches to deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17, 18). With feigned words they might make merchandise of the brethren, privily bringing in pernicious ways and damnable heresies (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

When the people who are so eager to be "accepted" by their worldly friends become a large number in the church, the lump by that time is leavened and will no longer endure sound doctrine. That church will find teachers who will say what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Such lovers of a perverted gospel will, for a price, be able to get preachers who fulfill their wishes (Tit. 1:11). They can "heap to themselves teachers" of their own liking. It is very, very important to do the proper preaching, reproof, rebuking, and exhorting before the leaven of wickedness has spread through the congregation. (Carefully read 1 Corinthians 5.) One wicked person can be marked, avoided, and rejected (Rom. 16:17, 18; Tit. 3: 10, 11). A Diotrephes with his company can reject the sound brethren (3 Jn. 9, 10).

A distaste for controversy over foolish and unlearned questions which gender strife is in order. Please read the letters to the preachers in the New Testament watching for words like "shun," "avoid," "refuse," and "reject." (See 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.) It is a flashing red danger signal when good brethren begin to object to any and all controversy. Error

can freely enter the flock if there is opposition to opposing it. False teachers like to introduce heresy privily (2 Pet. 1:1).

If a certain false doctrine is being taught, brethren may be found who promote the error, others may oppose it, and others may insist on giving it the silent treatment. An ill wind of doctrine takes over where it is promoted and where it is not opposed. It stays out only where it is vigorously opposed. The line of least resistance is the "on the fence" position, but the popular false doctrine or practice ultimately takes over congregations that take such a position. Read your church history or observe the churches in your area if apostasy has brought division to some if you would be convinced of the need for fighting a good fight.

Jesus the Christ was one of the greatest controversialists this world has ever known. He was like a lamb in suffering the brutal treatments from the hypocrites and false teachers. He was the lion of the tribe of Judah in fighting their pride, hypocrisy, traditions, and love of the world. Have you carefully read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? No careful reader could overlook the fact that He was constantly in open word battles with those who opposed His message. He loved the souls of those with whom He did battle. Those who crucified Him were asked in His name to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. He prayed for them while on the cross, but He did not fail to try every possible way to turn them from error. See Matthew 23 for an example of His sharp rebukes.

A church is not destroyed every time a brave and effective battle is fought against error. "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them. . . . Then all the audience kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul ... and after they held their peace, James answered, saying . . . Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 15). Error was corrected and truth was advanced by this earnest contention for the faith as commanded through Jude (Jude 3).

This matter of binding Jewish ordinances on Gentiles came up again and again at different places. Much of the book of Galatians deals with this danger. Even Peter and Barnabas were influenced by the pressure. "When Peter came to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. . . ." (Gal. 2:1, 12). Our Lord demands that we war a good warfare (1 Tim. 1:8; Tit. 1:9, 13; 2:15; 3:9-11).

Too many, even good people, are mentioning their dislike for controversy in religious journals, etc. It is by means such as papers that we can study and prepare before we are faced "head" on by the heresy. Unless brethren generally strengthen their knowledge and conviction on the marriage law very many churches are going to be harmed seriously as some have been. This is one example of what I am writing about. Heresy is pleased to enter "privily," but truth is to be proclaimed boldly by people who are equipped with the whole armor (Eph. 6:10-20). Please do not say, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace.

The "afflictions of the gospel" and the persecution that godly people suffer grow out of the fact that true disciples stand fast against heresy (2 Tim. 1:8; 3:12). Paul the prisoner was thankful for one who was not ashamed of his chain (2 Tim. 1:16-18). Shall we raise the white flag of surrender or shall we fight a good fight? There is no concord between Christ and Belial (2 Cor. 6:14-17). Politicians and unsound brethren wonder "What will people think?" when brethren shun not to proclaim the whole counsel in season and out of season.

I began trying to preach when I was young, timid, and cowardly. Several expressed their pleasure and hope by saying: "Irvn, I am glad you have decided to preach, and I hope you won't be a fighter!" That sentiment was rather common in my home area. Do you have any idea how these churches of that area went during the turmoil of the 1950s?

The egotistical, arrogant, and bitter attitude expressed by B.C. Goodpasture in the *Gospel Advocate* guaranteed division. This attitude was expressed in the simple and easy to be understood words: "Quarantine the antis." This carried the idea of: Do not listen to these that question the social gospel and church support of central agencies in public or private lessons. There were sincere but uninformed people who went along with this official decree who did not know what was happening. They thought there was something about some who did not believe in caring for poor little orphans. The problem of the social gospel and denominational machinery never entered their minds. They obediently followed the promoters of the big machines. Those who asked for book, chapter, and verse were crushed, if at all possible.

- Irvn Lee (1914-1991), via *Guardian of Truth*, Jan 2, 1986

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- > "Pride is the most peculiar disease known to humans. It makes nearly everybody sick except the one who has it!"

 - > "We could learn a lot from crayons. Some are sharp, some are pretty, and some are dull. Some have weird names, and all are different colors, but they all have to live in the same box!"

- > "An Egotist is a person who seems to be ME-DEEP in everything!"
 - > "MATURITY IS DEPENDABILITY. It is keeping your promises and coming through rather than breaking your promises and then confusing the issue with alibis!"
 - > "Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured!" - Mark Twain
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*Exodus for the Christian!*" (Text: 1 Cor. 10:1-11); Sunday evening: *Part 2*.