

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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When Will This Congregation Depart?

Trends and dangers among the people of God are frequently discussed by faithful watchmen in spiritual Israel. But people are generally slow to heed such warnings. This is not new. Paul and other faithful preachers warned in their day of things that would happen after they were gone from the scene (Acts 20:28-31). While few would profit from such warnings, at least Paul would be free from their blood.

When our nation was suddenly plunged into the bloodiest and most costly war on December 7, 1941, it was not without warning. Some of our own wise statesmen had been saying that we had better get our house in order; that we would somehow be drawn into the world conflict. The exact mechanism of it was not spelled out, but the warnings were being sounded. But they fell on deaf ears until we found ourselves gravely crippled, and only then were some willing to listen to danger signals. Somehow, brethren generally are like that. Only when the havoc of division and its heartaches are upon us are we willing to get our heads out of the sand and see the trends and dangers that lurk in the way. Only then will some be willing to study issues that already have brought havoc.

Recently in a gospel meeting here at Westwood a lesson was presented by my son on some "trends" among us, and the question posed was, "Where are we headed?" Reception of the lesson was apparently very favorable. Someone raised a very sobering question to me: "When do you reckon this church will depart?" Not "Will it depart?" but "When?" He then made the observation that all the great churches we read about in the Scriptures did so, sooner or later.

Where is the Jerusalem church? That church had so much glorious history associated with it. It was there the church had its beginning (Acts 2:1-47). It was one of the largest churches ever, numerically strong. They were also of "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). You know the great and wonderful things that happened among them. Yet, where is that church? How long did it remain true?

Where is the Antioch church that was such a radiating center for Christianity in those early days (Acts 13:1-14:28)? It was here that disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). But where is Antioch now? How long did they hold out and remain a faithful congregation? The same observations can be made for Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, and others. Soon they were gone and no longer stood as a monument to the Lord's cause. Such has happened to other great churches closer to us in time. Churches that once were radiating centers of the old Jerusalem Gospel have either died out or departed into digressive practices. That causes us to raise the sobering question, "When will it happen to this congregation?"

No claim is made to being a prophet or having any special insight into such matters, but I am going to tell you "when" such will happen to this church (the Westwood Church of Christ).

This church will depart when it says, "no" to God on any point of teaching or practice. You see, the church of the Lord is in the business of saying "yes" to God. Its role is to say "yes" to God in all things wherein God has spoken. The church belongs to God. He planned it (Eph. 3:10). Christ purchased it (Acts 20:28). Christ is head over all things to it (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ is king, He is the lawgiver (Jas. 4:12). The church is not a democracy but a supreme monarchy. Moses said in prophesying of Christ, "It shall come to pass that whosoever shall not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people" (Acts 3:22). Whatever we do, in word or in deed, we are to do it by His authority (Col. 3:17). It becomes treason to say "no" to the King.

The nation of Israel decided they would say "no" to God regarding the kind of government they would have. They said to Samuel, "Nay, but we will have a king ..." This was not God's will, and He had stated His desire. But they said, "No" we will have a king. God said in effect, "You can say 'no' if you want to, but this is a bitter day for you." He told them the manner of their king and what he would do. Still they said, "no" give us a king. God later declared that He gave them their king in His wrath and took him away in His anger (Hosea 13:11). This was not the only time that nation said "no" to God. They adjusted themselves to the idea of telling God "no." In Jeremiah's day, when God pleaded with them through Jeremiah to walk in "the old paths," they bluntly refused saying, "We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6:16). Their rebellion and arrogant spirit became more and more pronounced and set a pattern until it reached the ultimate in the rejection and brutal crucifixion of the spotless One himself. Finally, God's longsuffering with them as a people came to an end with the crushing devastating destruction of Jerusalem, the center of their national life. They brought upon themselves such tribulation as was not known prior to, nor since. Their house was left desolate. But, bear in mind that they set for themselves a pattern of saying "no" to God.

When this church willingly says "no" to God on any point of doctrine, practice, precept, or expression of His will, any biblical principle that will be the beginning of the end for this church as belonging to Him! Is it that serious? It was with Israel of old. Just one thing is important with God (read Jas. 2:10; Gal. 1:6-8; Mark 10:21). Can you name one thing in the will of God we can say "no" to God about with impunity [exemption from punishment, harm, or loss]?

Again, when this church decides to give more heed to human feelings than to God's approval, it will be gone! There were those who would not confess Christ because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42). Surely we are to be conscious of human feelings and human association. But getting and maintaining human association on any basis other than what is God-pleasing is self-destructive. Nobody was more sympathetic and compassionate than Jesus, and yet there was never a human feeling or emotion that he was willing to allow to interfere with the Father's will. In agony he prayed three times in the garden, "Not my will but thine be done." *Anytime this church becomes so concerned with getting people and keeping people at the expense of anything in the will of God, it will have gone!* I have known of congregations, when disciplinary action was clearly a requirement of the Lord, to say, "we can't afford to lose anybody." Some have said, "I know the Bible says to do this, but he is too good of a giver, and we can't afford to lose his contribution." *Who can afford to lose the Lord's approval?* Who can afford to just let people go on their merry way to torment? In any matter if we become more concerned about human will than divine will, this church is no longer His church.

Finally, if we allow just one untaught generation to grow up among us, the church will drift and be gone! This can happen either by neglecting to teach them fundamentals or by their being taught falsely. In Judges 2:6-13 we read about a generation growing up and forsaking the God that their fathers served. They did evil and forgot God and were influenced by the doings of the people of the land in which they dwelt. The people served God all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that outlived him. They had seen the mighty works of God, but a generation grew up untaught and unappreciative of God's works.

Generally when a generation goes wrong, the preceding generation has to accept some of the blame for a lack of training and preparation. This is not to say that the generation that departs has no blame, for they do. Every person bears guilt for his own sins (Ezek. 18:20). Everyone will give answer to God for his own deeds (2 Cor. 5:10). But our children are our greatest heritage, and each generation is responsible for teaching and training for the next. Someone asked, "When should one start training a child?" The reply given was, "Start with their grandparents before them." There is much truth in that observation. Had

the prior generation in Judges 2 followed instructions given in Deuteronomy 6:6-ff it would have been a likely deterrent to their departure.

What safeguards are we setting that the next generation will be strong in the Lord, faithful to the book, true to God? Let me tell you if you are not doing what you can to teach your child true principles and set before that child a good example in Christianity, then you need not whine and wring your hands and say, "I don't know what happened. I did the best I could." Well, some have and despite their best efforts, the child as a free moral agent took a wrong course. Samuel was a good man, a man of God, but that was not an absolute guarantee against boys going wrong when they were on their own. But I am talking about parents neglecting to teach, who will not put forth the effort to equip themselves to do the job, and maybe on top of all that become poor examples to their children in other matters of Bible principles.

That prior generation did not fight against the wickedness in the land as God directed (see Judg. 2:2-3). God scolded them for not obeying His voice in this. It was not enough to teach about the one God, they needed to aggressively oppose and fight the idols. They had not done so.

Brethren, neither we nor our children can hold idols in our hearts and serve God. Such idols become a snare to us and our children. An idol is anything we allow to come between us and loyalty to God. Idolatry is not dead. Money, prestige, affluence, popularity, pleasure, are a few that plague this generation.

It is a great tribute to Joshua's influence that the people remained faithful all the days of Joshua. Joshua was a great and good influence on his time. Whatever others may do, remember that you are an individual and you will stand alone before God. Nobody will be able to answer for you. And even as you must one day stand alone in judgment, you should be willing, if need be, to stand alone to be faithful to him. You may think, "I am only one" or, "My voice is not being heard." But remember God hears, and God sees. And He it is that we are to serve.

Yes, somewhere in time, if it continues, this congregation will doubtless go the way of all others. It will eventually make its departure, like others. But, my resolve is that when it happens it will not be because of my influence and teaching, but rather in spite of it. *Let each of us so resolve!* And let us make our purpose and aim, "to serve the living God."

- Dorris V. Rader [slightly Edited -GFS]

* "Peace floods the soul — when Christ fills the heart!"

- * “A bitter world cannot be sweetened by sour Christians!”
 - * “What we have done for ourselves dies with us — what we have done for others remains!”
 - * “Nothing is more dreadful for a sinner nor more wonderful for a Christian than to be alone with God!”
 - * “The business of our lives is not to please ourselves, but to please God!” — Matthew Henry
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THIS WEEK’S LESSON: The sermon for Sunday morning is: *“Go, and Tell This People!”*
(Text: Isaiah 6:9-12).

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)