

The Lord's Church Faces The 21st Century

Some things the future may hold for the church if the present trends continue. What can and should faithful and concerned brethren do to help change the future course of the Lord's body, the church?

Our loving Heavenly Father would be well pleased if all men gave serious consideration to the greatest of all blessings which can come to an individual during life on earth. That blessing is coming to know Christ as Lord and Savior through obedience to His gospel (Rom. 1:16), and becoming a part of Christ's church, of which He is *head* and *savior* (Eph. 5:23).

The above being true, it is in order that God-fearing brethren be **seriously concerned** about the present state of the Lord's church and the circumstances which will no doubt affect it in a pronounced way in the future. It should be constantly remembered that we, as members of the church, have a great opportunity to help direct the future course of the church that it may be such as would please our Father above. Not only do we have a wonderful opportunity, we have a **great responsibility** to make full use of our potential in this respect. Whatever the state of the church ten years from now, it may well be due in some measure to what we as individuals have done or failed to do. If we would keep this in mind as we travel into the future, it could redound to the well-being of the cause for which our Lord and Savior died.

Years ago I used to wonder if I would be around when the year 2000 came. Well, I was, in my 74th year. Now, I expect to see several more years, though there is no guarantee. The coming of a new century and most especially a new millennium was an event which took on gigantic proportions with quite a number of people. In preparation for Y2K more than a few people laid up stores of food. Some enterprising people must have done well by selling bottled water from various "municipal waterworks," to try to supply an overwhelming demand.

From the religious standpoint, numbers of people expected the coming of Christ and the end of the world. When I was but a child a lady in our community, a self-proclaimed prophetess, said the world was going to end on a certain given day. I can remember the arrival of that day as though it were but yesterday. It was so foggy that morning that one could see no more than a few yards—but the world didn't end! Being yet but a child I had not learned that no one knows when Christ will return. Only the Father knows that (Matt. 24:36). In our day there are multitudes of adults who have yet to learn this important fact. Had they learned this, much of the bedlam and frustration relative to Y2K would never have occurred.

With God time has little meaning. There is no indication whatsoever that He has programmed the Lord's return to some specific time, such as the beginning of a new century or millennium. This has not

deterred the droves of false prophets in the least. They need no valid evidence for their false predictions.

Unlike with God, time does take on meaning on the part of man. It is not a specific year or date that is important, but rather the length of time one has and the use made of it. Apart from the importance of using time in serving God, as He has ordained, it can be highly beneficial from the standpoint of noting trends which have developed in the past and are continuing at present. By these trends we can get a pretty good idea as to what to expect in the future, for at least some period of time. This can be very helpful in a number of important ways.

In our discussion of **The Church As It Faces The 21st Century**, we plan to examine some of the trends which are now affecting the Lord's church. Those trends have developed over a period of years and it would be downright unreasonable to think they would disappear overnight. From history we know that it is often the case that once a trend has been established, it becomes more forceful and entrenched in whatever direction it is headed. This would apply to trends both good and bad. This brings us to the important point of considering:

I. SOME PRESENT TRENDS WITHIN THE LORD'S CHURCH CONSIDERED

It is our intention in the discussion of these **trends** to be realistic. Without doubt there are those who don't like to face reality when reality is contrary to their wishes and desires. It is somewhat appalling as to how far some are willing to go to avoid facing the facts. Isaiah described the Israelites as saying to the prophets: *"...Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits"* (Isa. 30:10). It is difficult for me to imagine why anyone would actually want to be deceived, but there are obviously people like this in our time and though it is sad to say so, some of them are our brethren. The more I observe what people practice and teach in the denominational world, and even within the church, the clearer it becomes that it is a matter of individuals desiring to salve their conscience and have a good feeling. Facing the facts is often not conducive to this good feeling. Due to this, there is this burning desire to hear things which sound good, even though they are not true. It seems that some people want to be lied to, and that is what happens when a person listens to a false teacher. It is a sad day in spiritual Israel when there are those all across the country who are deceiving people with their false teaching, their lies.

It has been my experience to know various people within the church who, in my sincere and honest opinion, upheld things which they knew to be untrue. In some cases material gain could have been involved, and preachers who will preach whatever the people want to hear, as long as they are doing well financially, is a good example of this. But in other cases this is obviously not a factor. Some people look for a teaching which justifies their present manner of life, even though the teaching is not according to God's word. Truth, when presented in its fullness and without compromise, can disturb the conscience and cause severe distress when faced by those who are not walking according to the doctrine of Christ. Such people, when unwilling to repent, often resort to the consolation which comes from hearing good things, though they are not according to truth. It is a rather common thing for someone to utter a facetious compliment to an individual, and have the following response: "I know that sounds good, even though it is not true." It is tragic when people want to hear untrue things though not spoken in facetiousness in any sense of the term.

What is the point in discussing the above? one may ask. It has to do with trends being established and followed which may be harmful to the cause of Christ. Though we will not attempt to be exhaustive, we will consider a few current trends. Some will deny these trends, but they are a matter of reality just as

God's word is a matter of reality and will never be changed, regardless of how many show disrespect for it. We shall begin with the following trend:

The Trend of Unscriptural Worship. Worship is indeed an integral part of serving God as a Christian. Christ warns against *vain worship* (Matt. 15:9). Therefore, worship which is unscriptural is useless. Never have we seen in our lives more unscriptural worship within the church than that of today. This trend commenced several years ago but is growing by leaps and bounds. This trend involves a variety of things, but we shall mention only a few.

Worship As Entertainment. The exalted privilege of worshipping the true God of heaven is something we should in a sense enjoy, but that worship is **entertainment** is from the minds of men, not God. Worship services have come to be outright entertainment in some congregations. The serious and sacred atmosphere which should characterize true worship is absent.

It is not now unusual for activities to be billed as "entertainment." Various singing groups, other than congregational singing, are advertised as going to "Perform." "Drama" groups and "Praise teams" are the in thing in more and more congregations. In some instances mechanical instruments of music are being used.

A good definition of worship is: "Acts of reverence paid to God by man." Such as the things mentioned above are in no sense of the term "Acts of reverence." Furthermore, such is not being "Paid to God." Such is for the entertainment of the listeners, not for pleasing God. Mere men have assumed authority to provide what men want rather than what God wants. A case in point is the position now made public by Rochester College, which will be discussed elsewhere in this issue of BOT.

Unscriptural Teaching As Worship. The speaking and hearing of God's word is an act of reverence paid to God by men, worship. However, when the teaching done is not according to Truth, vain worship is the result. When it is the design of a teacher or preacher to speak those things which will please men, it is impossible to abide *in the doctrine of Christ* (2 Jno. 9). When *all the counsel of God* (Acts 20:27) is declared, it will not be pleasing to all who hear. In my life I've never heard so many far-out and absurd things taught as is being taught now.

Unscriptural Acts As Worship. We are now hearing of "Baby dedications," women involved in roles in worship which God has never approved, the clapping of hands and waving of arms, singing during the Lord's supper, observing communion on days other than the first day of the week. Drama Groups and puppet presentations are acceptable in a growing number of congregations. The various singing groups should also be included. The list could go much farther but we are limited as to space. All these things involve trends which have already been established in some places, and are the beginning of trends in other places.

The Trend of Unscriptural Works of the Church. Until two or three decades ago, the greater majority of members of the church accepted the fact that the authorized work of the church consisted of three things: Evangelism, Edification, and Benevolence. Things are far different today, though God's word hasn't changed in the least. Many congregations are now involved in a variety of activities which are not approved works of the church.

Family Life Centers (gymnasiums). It is generally the case that Family Life Centers contain a gym. For quite a time brethren hardly referred to the "gym," but just today a preacher told me that a congregation near here had referred to their gym in the church bulletin.

Back in 1978 the Madison congregation, where bro. Ira North was the preacher, got a great deal of

attention when they opened their "Family Life-Educational Center." "Special Speakers On This Exciting Day" were: John Stevens, Norvel Young, Claude Gardner, and Tom Holland. Madison taking what they called, "A Giant Step Forward," seemed to be the beginning of a trend. Since that time numerous congregations have built Family Life Centers. Within the past couple of years two congregations in our area (that I know about), Benton and Broadway in Paducah, have built expensive Family Life Centers. A wide variety of entertaining activities are provided.

The trend of Family Life Centers has been established. An interesting thing about this trend is that when it began to be formed, various brethren spoke out boldly in opposition to such works of the church. In recent times, however, little is heard in opposition to the practice. This shows how that a trend once established, tends to gain acceptance with the passing of time. This testifies to the danger of evil trends.

The Trend of Unscriptural Fellowship. God has a law on fellowship. It is not difficult to understand, but respect for that law has diminished greatly within the past several years. The adverse effects upon the church have been considerable. This trend has become quite entrenched and is growing rapidly. This is perhaps much more evident to those of us who knew the condition which existed forty or fifty years ago.

To Christians Paul wrote: *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine you have learned; and avoid them* (Rom. 16:17). This involves members of the church who are going contrary to God's word. We cannot, with God's approval, extend fellowship to such people. Paul commanded the Ephesians: *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them* (Eph. 5:11). This would include members of the church or others. The apostle John makes it clear that it is contrary to God's will to receive those who *transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ* (2 Jno. 9-11). Other New Testament passages make it clear that faithful brethren cannot fellowship those who transgress God's will and will not repent. It cannot be, in most cases, that God's law on fellowship is transgressed because it cannot be understood. It is so often the case that God's law on fellowship is just not respected.

Another matter of concern is that "sound" brethren who oppose unscriptural practices, and rightly so, will in some cases turn right around and freely fellowship those they have opposed due to false doctrine. When this happens, something just isn't right. Consistency is lacking.

Not only does the trend of unscriptural fellowship involve those who teach and practice all manner of false doctrine within the church, it also involves those in the religious denominations. The day was when this was virtually unheard of, and the distinctiveness of the Lord's church was upheld by most of the members.

Those who fellowship the man-made religions are forcefully saying by implication that the Lord's blood-bought church is not what God's word claims it to be. It is, rather, no better than the churches built by men, which have never had God's approval and never will.

We can only give a few examples of what is happening today, but these should suffice to cause alarm and awaken those who care to the tragic reality of what is happening within the church, how it is being belittled.

Rubel Shelly. Rubel is being mentioned first because he is a prime example of one who at one time (in the 1970s) stood so solidly for the truth, upholding the distinctiveness of the Lord's church and opposing denominationalism. Yet in our day he is supporting and encouraging the man-made religions as if they were from God. He is now destroying the faith which he once preached. Not only has Rubel

preached in a number of denominational churches, often encouraging them and some times casting aspersion upon the one true church, he and the elders of the Woodmont Hills congregation are actively supporting and participating in the Billy Graham crusade which is to take place in Nashville in June this year. Those who fellowship Rubel and Woodmont Hills are also *enemies of the cross of Christ* (Phil. 3:18).

The soul-condemning error being set forth by Rubel and Woodmont Hills is not being kept at home. In August, Larry Bridgesmith and Randy Gill, who are said to "plan and lead worship at Woodmont Hills" will be the "primary participants" in what is called a "Worship Conference" at Rochester College, formerly Michigan Christian. This is the school which brought in denominational teachers to teach members of the church, in what they called their "Annual Sermon Seminar." It was scheduled for May 17-20 just last year. Birds of a feather do flock together. Woodmont Hills has also brought in denominational teachers to teach their people.

Max Lucado. Whether or not this man was ever converted to the truth, I don't know. If he ever was, it sure didn't last. In 1996 Lucado preached a denominational sermon on Radio Station KJAK in Lubbock, Texas. Listeners were taught to just pray what is often referred to as "the sinners prayer," to receive salvation. The sermon included the following:

"...I want to encourage you to find a church, I want to encourage you to be baptized, I want to encourage you to read your Bible....But I don't want you to do any of this so that you will be saved. I want you to do this because you are saved..."

This man, along with many others, simply sidestep God's plan of salvation and follow men.

Lynn Anderson. Back in 1979, well-known preachers who were bidding "God speed" to the denominations were few and far between. Lynn Anderson had the infamous distinction of being one of the few in that day. In 1973, Lynn got some attention when he in a sermon lambasted the church for being a "big sick denomination." Somewhere between 1973 and 1979 Lynn got the idea that there was nothing wrong with being a denomination. This is evidenced by the fact that he led "a Church Growth Seminar" at the United Methodist Church in Abilene in March 1979. A number of denominations were participants in that activity of error.

J. Wayne Kilpatrick. This preacher from the Homewood congregation in Birmingham has been courting denominational people. Not too long ago the congregation had denominational people come in to teach some of their people. A few years back, Wayne became so enamored with the Willow Creek Community Church in the Chicago area that he came back all fired up, trying to encourage faithful brethren to get in on all the great things he had learned from this conglomeration of denominational people.

Joe VanDyke and Magnolia. This preacher and congregation are known for fellowshipping a number of denominations in the area of Florence, Alabama. A prime example was in 1998.

F. LaGard Smith. This teacher at David Lipscomb hopes God will save people without baptism, and he strongly implies that God may well save people without gospel obedience. Only the Lord knows how many people he may encourage to remain in a denomination, trusting that God will save them in that condition.

Howard Norton. While editor of *The Christian Chronicle* he upheld fellowship with the "Promise Keepers," an organization which is denominational to the core. His argument was that one can fellowship the good parts of the Promise Keepers, but not what he called the "bones," a term from his fishy analogy,

as the subject was discussed at great length in the *Chronicle*. Quite a number of our own brethren have participated in the Promise Keepers activities. This is outright fellowship with religious people who have never had God's approval.

Unscriptural Fellowship Gatherings. The best example of this is, perhaps, the Nashville Jubilee, which began nine or ten years ago. This is a cavalcade of some of our most liberal brethren. A great portion of the speakers are very friendly toward denominationalism if they don't engage in outright fellowship. That this gathering of some of our most liberal brethren attracts a crowd of ten thousand or more, should tell us something about the direction the church is going in this area where the church used to be as strong as any place in our nation.

In addition to the Nashville Jubilee, there is the Tulsa Soul Winning Workshop. This gathering also attracts large crowds, and it has much in common with Jubilee from the standpoint of false teaching. "Soul Saving" is not an apt description of this activity. God's law on fellowship is abused and ignored in a frightful way.

In Indianapolis, Indiana there is a gathering now called "Heartland." It has much in common with the two gatherings mentioned above. This is to name only three gatherings. There are others, though some not as large as the above.

Community Churches. Some of our brethren are now engaged in the forming of Community Churches. One objective of this is clearly the opening of closer ties with the denominational people, another violation of God's law on fellowship. This is becoming a trend.

Individuals Known for Violating God's Law on Fellowship. We list only a few, in addition to those already mentioned: Rick Atchley, Buddy Bell, Joe Beam, Randy Harris, Walt Leaver, Marvin Phillips, Gwen Shamblin, and many, many others though perhaps not as well known. It is not only the big name brethren who are now riding the wagon of liberalism in one way or another, scores of others are included.

Those mentioned above as violators of God's law on fellowship are by no means exhaustive. We have little more than scratched the surface. We have based our assessment on valid documented evidence. Even so, many are not aware of the danger faced by the church in the area of fellowship. Some would likely criticize any mention of it, and this could include those who are a part of the danger. But let God be thanked that God-fearing brethren will be concerned and some will give their best in helping to combat it. Those who don't believe the current trend in violating God's law on fellowship will have a great and harmful effect upon the church, have a real problem in their disregard of reality.

II. THE POLITICAL

INFLUENCE UPON MORALITY

That the political influence upon our society is considerable no honest person would deny. At the same time, however, it is a matter of fact that society affects the political realm. There is a mutual influence, but we are primarily considering the effects of our current political system upon the morality of our society.

In recent years there has been a concerted effort on the part of a great many politicians, and their followers, to remove virtually every vestige of godly influence from society. Yet, godly influence has had such an important part to play in the building of society in the past.

A good example of efforts to remove godly influence is seen in our public schools, though serious problems occurred first in the homes. It is not the work of public schools to teach religion, but neither is it the function of the schools to suppress all religion. There are efforts on the part of some to suppress all Bible reading and disallow prayer at all school functions, while allowing a wide variety of things which contribute to the lowering of moral standards. The N. E. A., which has considerable political clout with some, is actually promoting the acceptance of sexual perversion as a normal, acceptable life-style. Evolution, which rules God out of the picture completely, is freely taught. It seems that just about anything of an immoral nature can be taught or advocated. It is so often the case that it is the moral standards which originated with God which are so strongly opposed.

The depths of degradation to which our society has come has been exemplified in recent times by politicians. The sordid immoral examples of our President are a case in point. His outright lying under oath and the breaking of other laws seems not to have mattered with much of society. The engaging in acts of sexual perversion with a loose woman in the White House by the President has made little difference with many. In connection with this shameful episode by our President, a great many of the politicians in the House and Senate were too cowardly to vote their conscience and hold the President accountable for his shameful deeds. The moral standard of some in Congress may have had so much in common with the President that they would have been reluctant to condemn themselves also in principle.

It has been very noticeable within the past few years that some politicians are using all within their means to oppose what they choose to call: "The religious right," "The radical religious right," or some other demeaning term. Even Hillary tried to draw attention away from her husband by blaming his sinful conduct on a conspiracy of "The religious right."

In the news recently was the report of Senator McCain calling Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell "evil." While I certainly don't agree with much of the teaching of those men, they do have higher moral standards than some of our politicians and a great many other people. It is true that we don't have "Perfect" politicians, but it is also true that some are better than others. It is a very easy matter to see which politicians are in favor of such things as: abortion, sexual perversion, supporting those who will not work, and encouraging out-of-wedlock births, etc. It was reported recently that a group in the Republican party in California (the party which generally supports higher moral standards) have as their objective the liberalizing of the party. Translated, that means lowering moral standards to appeal to those of that kind.

To put it in a nutshell, the opposition to the "religious right," etc. is just another powerful effort to lower our already corrupted moral standards in society even more.

One may ask, "What does the above about politics have to do with the church as it faces the 21st century?" It has quite a lot to do with the future of the church. Inasmuch as society is inseparably connected to the political realm, the more immoral the political becomes the greater the immoral influence upon the church. It is generally the case that the person who is very liberal politically will also tend to be liberal in spiritual things as well. If the moral standards of politicians continue to be corrupted as they have been in recent years, it is almost a certainty that moral standards within the church will suffer.

III. THE EFFECTS OF

THE ECONOMY UPON THE CHURCH

It should be the case that when we, members of the church, have more materially the church would be strengthened, due to the ability carry on more work which requires financial ability. However, that is not the way it works. Material prosperity is not generally reflected in spiritual prosperity. Over the

years I've seen the difference in spiritual interest in a number of countries, some very poor materially and some not so poor. It is true that in countries which are so poor, there are those who are looking for "the loaves and the fishes." But in spite of that, the true interest in spiritual things is greater in the countries which are poor materially.

It should not be so but it is often the case that the more people have materially the more likely they are to "*trust in uncertain riches*" (I Tim. 6:17). Quite a number of warnings concerning the danger of material prosperity are set forth in the New Testament. Christ speaks of "*the deceitfulness of riches*" choking the word (Matt. 13:22). Paul said, "*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare...*" (I Tim. 6:9). He goes on to say, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*" (I Tim. 6:10 ASV).

Perhaps the greatest warning of what material prosperity can do, when people put their trust therein, is found in our Lord's letter to the Laodiceans. The Laodiceans said, "*I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing...*" (Rev. 3:17). They didn't even need the Lord any longer. The result? Rejection.

If our booming economy continues, as some predict, we will not see it reflected in the growth of the Lord's church. Already, prosperous congregations are spending vast amounts on multimillion dollar "Family life," or recreational centers, and other things which do not make the church stronger. The providing of entertainment and some other current things are nowhere labeled as church growth in God's book. Those who are fed, funned, pampered and entertained are often fed on pabulum as spiritual food and never given any *meat*. On an individual basis, the increased prosperity is often expended for "*the things which are seen,*" those things which are "*temporal*" (2 Cor. 4:18).

IV. SOME THINGS FAITHFUL BRETHERN CAN AND SHOULD DO TO

HELP CHANGE THE COURSE OF THE CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

That God intended that His church, purchased at the cost of the blood of His only begotten Son, should grow numerically and in spiritual strength is of all things most obvious. Without such growth how could it accomplish its God-ordained objective of taking the gospel into all the world (Mk. 16:15-16), and serve as "*the pillar and ground of the truth*" (I Tim. 3:15)?

The means for achieving the God-intended growth have been provided. God's all-sufficient inspired word has been provided as a guide (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The "*sincere milk of the word*" (I Pet. 2:2) serves as food for spiritual growth. "*All things that pertain to life and godliness*" have been given unto us (2 Pet. 1:3).

In view of all that is said in the New Testament with regard to spiritual growth and the need for it, it should not even be a question as to whether or not we should grow. This important matter being obvious, we should turn our attention to **How This Can Be Done**. This is extremely important in that we have an awesome responsibility to do all within our might to help guide the church in the right course as the future is faced. A few things to help achieve this objective are being considered. We begin with:

More Study of God's Word is Needed. God-approved faith is derived from the study or hearing of God's word (Rom. 10:17). The strong faith which is needed, and is necessary to meet the *devices* and *wiles* of the devil cannot be obtained from a shallow knowledge of God's word. In general, we are woefully lacking in the study of God's will for man. If anyone disagrees with this, let him stand before a Bible class and ask questions of at least some substance. Listen to brethren discuss Bible subjects, that is, when sports or some other secular matters are not the subject of discussion. Our children are not being taught as they should be. Much of the class time is often devoted to "fun things," crafts or something other

than real study. Even our teenagers are often being shortchanged in that they are treated as children who are not capable of thinking seriously, but only of being pampered and entertained. They should be challenged.

Due to a lack of Bible knowledge on the part of adults serious error may be promoted, and accepted in innocence because of the inability to distinguish truth from error. Once error is accepted, it may be difficult for some to give it up, due to pride or something or other.

Stand Boldly For The Truth Of The Gospel. God's word is not worth much unless one is willing to stand solidly for that truth. Over the years I've observed a great many instances when people who knew the truth would not speak up in its behalf. That "Truth will take care of itself," as some mean by that statement, is not upheld by the Bible. This accounts for the fact that there is so much emphasis in the New Testament on standing for the truth.

The statement in Jude 3, "...that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," is a powerful admonition. That word *contend* carries the idea of fighting for something, in this case the truth.

"**Preach The Word,**" is the instruction given to Timothy by Paul (2 Tim. 4:2). This doesn't authorize a "perverted gospel" or anything except the true word of God.

Reject Dangerous Literature. Error can be taught through the printed page as well as orally. Publications which are known for error should be rejected, as well as class literature which contains error. It is becoming more difficult to find reliable class literature.

Keep Informed. The uninformed individual is more likely to be influenced by error. It is to the advantage of concerned brethren to know what is going on within the brotherhood, and to be aware of the dangers which exist. The individual who "doesn't want to know" what is going on is a prime target for error. (See page 10)

Don't Be Intimidated. When people stand up for the truth without compromise, they may expect some criticism. It is not uncommon for preachers to be fired, simply because they stand up for truth and will not compromise. Brethren who will not preach "*all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27), due to fear, should not preach. It is not unusual for individuals to keep quite as a tomb when truth is being attacked, because they are afraid. It is a matter of fact that in too many instances truth is allowed to suffer due to cowardice on the part of those who know the truth.

Don't Fear Being In The Minority. We are living in a time when those who stand for the truth are in a minority in many congregations. One who is going to follow the majority, will in many instances today be found in error. God's faithful people have almost always been a minority and that is certainly true today.

Oppose Error From Every Source. This means: elders, preachers, teachers or whoever. A number of brethren will not stand in opposition when elders uphold error. No elder, preacher, or any other person has a right to uphold or encourage error. Those in the leadership in a congregation have a God-given responsibility to uphold God's word. Sadly, there is often failure in this important area.

It is so encouraging to learn of brethren (including women in God-approved roles) who are willing and unafraid to stand up boldly against teachers of error, and uphold truth.

Don't Remain In Error When Efforts To Uphold Truth Are Rejected Over A Period Of

Time. It is sad that some members of the church feel so attached to a congregation, that they will continue with it even when it has gone away from the truth. Rather than get off a sinking ship, they remain aboard and go down with the ship. There is a point at which one becomes a *partaker of evil deeds* by remaining in and supporting a congregation in error.

Paul's Emphasis Upon Standing For The Truth Of The Gospel. The apostle points out that the gospel is "*the power of God unto salvation*" (Rom. 1:16). It is by the gospel that men learn the truth which makes men free from their sins (Jno. 8:32). When the gospel is perverted it no longer accomplishes its purpose. The false teachers would not be given place by Paul, as stated plainly: "*no, nor for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you*" (Gal. 2:5). There is an urgent need to follow Paul's example in this regard. To the Philippians, Paul says he was "*set for the defence of the gospel*" (Phil. 1:17). He goes on to urge these brethren to "*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel*" (v. 27). We have never seen a greater need to be united in our *defence of the gospel* than at the present time.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

For our own spiritual well-being and that of relatives, friends and others yet to come, we should be deeply concerned about the church as it faces the 21st century. The course of the church in the future will affect untold numbers of souls, either for good or bad. As members of the church we have an important opportunity and awesome responsibility to help guide the church in the direction God would have it go. If we are to avail ourselves of the wonderful opportunity before us and live up to the serious responsibility which is upon our shoulders to use our potential to contribute to the strengthening of the church there are some important things we must recognize. We must face reality.

The Present State Of The Church. Our Savior must be saddened by what men have done to His church on the human side. In city after city where many congregations exist, it is so often the case that truly sound brethren can find only a few congregations where they can worship with a clear conscience. Serious departures from the truth are found not only in the big city churches; a great many churches in small towns and rural areas have also been affected. To attempt to shield ourselves from reality by denying the facts can only cause more harm.

A Continuing Trend. So many of the problems now confronting the church are not a temporary matter. A trend has been established and entrenched which will not disappear at the wave of a hand. The error which has fastened itself upon such a major portion of the church has developed over a period of years. That the present trend will go away overnight is only wishful and unreliable thinking. True signs of a change for the better are not seen by those who accept reality. Many of the brethren who are familiar with the problems which plagued the church in the mid and late 1800s are convinced that the problems now facing the church are even worse than those. With their assessment I agree.

The Moral Decay Of Society. There is no question but that the moral standards of our society have reached the lowest state ever in the life of our country. As we have noted earlier, there is a mutual connection between politics and moral standards. Forces which are opposed to the God-ordained moral standards are working to take our nation into complete moral ruin. Their success is no less than frightening! However, in the face of all the evil in our present society, and even in the church, we should take courage with the realization that:

We Can Be Victorious. Paul exhorted the Corinthians: "*be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*" (I Cor. 15:58). We can depend upon the Lord, when in many cases we cannot depend upon men. If we set

our minds to overcome the evil in the world, and "*seek...first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*" (Matt. 6:33), nothing can defeat us.

The apostle John sets forth a key to victory in the Christian race: "*and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*" (I Jno. 5:4). Without a faith in which we "*stand fast*" (I Cor. 16:13), we need not expect victory.

The apostle Paul should stand before us as an example we are going to emulate. He looked forward to "*a crown of righteousness*" and states the basis for his assurance: "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Walter W. Pigg

Preacher Wanted

The Hickory Grove congregation is interested in a sound preacher for the work. The congregation has about 75 for Sunday a.m. attendance. It is located about eight miles from Murray, KY. The church does own a house for the preacher. The phone numbers of the elders are on page two of *Banner of Truth*.

A Sound Preacher Wanted

The congregation in Sullivavan, MO, is interested in finding a preacher to work with them. Resumes may be sent to the church at: 97 Florence, Sullivan, MO 63080. Tom Easter at (753) 468-4382, or Jerry Craft at (573) 732-4753, may be contacted for more information. A preacher who uses the King James Version is desired.

Do you need to send us a change of address?

JUST BEING SPIRITUAL

Alan Adams, Assistant Editor

A precious loved one once lead a family prayer and kept repeating the word "just": "We *just* want to praise your name." "We *just* thank you for all our blessings." "Father, we *just* love you, and are *just* happy to be here." Brothers leading prayer sometimes take on an almost unrecognizable voice. Many preachers elongate their vowels; thus, "God," with a short -o- becomes "Gaaaaawd," and "Jesus" becomes "Gee (long emphatic pause) zussssss." Some get low and breathless when they say "Just (prazzzz) God (Gaaaaawd).

This could simply be nervous habitual redundancy, or some personal tic. But, given the time, place and people, it could also be that some people think that such things are connected to, even reflective of, piety or spirituality. We're not talking about observing certain cultural amenities, like removing one's hat before entering the assembly, or bowing in prayer, and so on. Rather, we have in mind, at best, behavior that is assumed rather than natural. At worst, it could be affection: 1) a show of pretense, or display; 2) artificiality; 3) a particular habit, as of speech or dress, adopted to give a false impression.

Whether cast in the best or worst light, one certainty is, this sort of thing has nothing to do with being "spiritual." It's the same type or erroneous assumption made by the Pharisees with their "trumpets," "streets," and "phylacteries" (Matt. 6:1-6; 23:5); and the Gentiles with their "vain repetitions" and "much speaking" (6:7-8). To "be seen of men" (or, heard) in a certain light or way, does not imply that things are really that way, or more importantly, that God sees it that way.

The Pharisees had made up a whole hand-washing ceremony to display their piety, but Jesus called them on their faulty premise; that being, external dirt contaminates the inner man. The Lord says that defilement starts from the inside and works its way out through "that which proceedeth out of the mouth" (Matt. 15:1-19). So also, it must be by the *substance*—not the style or tone—of that which comes from a man's mouth, that his spirituality is measured.

Peter, addressing Christian women with non-Christian husbands, encouraged them to win those husbands, not by their words of ornamentation, rather with "chaste behavior coupled with fear" (I Pet. 3:1-4). Surely, "chaste behavior" and "fear" are spiritual qualities, but they are not in themselves manifested by "outward adorning." Let's be clear here: We can by the way we dress show that we are *not* godly people, but we cannot necessarily, by the way we dress, prove that we are, in fact, God-fearing or "spiritual." It is by way of the "hidden man of the heart," a "meek and quiet spirit," and "through good works" (I Tim. 2:9-10) that we "profess Godliness."

That is why it's folly for people to think by: wearing crosses on their necks or ears, and T-shirts that proclaim how much they love Jesus; putting bumper stickers on their cars that say "Honk if you love the Lord;" and, going out to "March for Jesus," that they are somehow being spiritual. Their zeal perhaps cannot be questioned; but, "zeal" and "knowledge" can sometimes have an awful time coming together (Rom. 10:1-3).

I just don't see a lot of difference between people using breathless, pleading, and whiny voices; dramatic gestures; super-accentuated pronunciation; repetitive modifiers; or jewelry and T-shirts to emphasize their spirituality; and the Pharisees attempting to do the same thing with their "phylacteries" and the "borders of their garments" (Matt. 23:5).

I have no doubt but that this is where all the denominational titles came from: Reverend, Right Reverend, and Pastor. But, many in the church are not far behind. I know brethren who cannot sign a letter without putting a Ph.D. after their name. I've even, personally, seen brethren put Ph.D. on their mailboxes. And now comes the pretentious title of Master of Divinity. Surely, people who parade such titles must simply exude spirituality on a level only to be envied by the rest. On one level, these things can be viewed as being almost childishly silly; but, on a different level they point to a dangerous, even sinful, way of thinking (Cf. Jas. 2:1-4).

There are *spiritual* "blessings, songs, sacrifices, brethren," and we are to be a "spiritual house" (Eph. 1:3; 5:19; I Pet. 2:5). Let's be clear as to what "spiritual" means.

103 S. Willow St., Cowan, TN 37318

Rochester College Goes

Deeper Into Serious Error

Rochester College (formerly Michigan Christian) got the attention of many sound brethren when they announced their "Annual Sermon Seminar," scheduled for May 17-20, 1999. This "Seminar" brought in denominational people to teach members of the church. If anyone got the idea that this was just a slip-up in judgment in bringing in people from man-made religions, and that it wouldn't happen again, they should reflect seriously on the following letter from Rochester College to the elders of the Riverview church of Christ in Riverview, MI:

"Dear Friends,

These are challenging times for all of us in Churches of Christ. Typically, grandparents and their grandchildren prefer different music, different translations of the Bible, different styles of congregational worship, different styles of praying, different ways to communicate truths from God's word, etc. All of our congregations are challenged to provide a worship service that satisfies our senior members while providing a worship experience that also connects with our youth.

If your congregation has made a transition to a contemporary worship style, or if your leaders just want to consider some contemporary ways to lead praise and worship in congregational settings, or if you just want to learn about alternatives, we invite you to become a participant or a sponsor of the Zoe Worship Conference to be held on the campus of Rochester College, August 11-13, 2000.

....

...Primary participants in the conference will be Mr. Larry Bridgesmith and Mr. Randy Gill, both alumni of Rochester College, who plan and lead worship at Woodmont Hills Church of Christ in Nashville, TN, and Jeff Walling, a well-known brotherhood speaker

....

Yours for the Master, Signed: Elton Albright

Director of Church Relations."

The tragic and sad thing about Rochester College is not only that those actively engaged in it are partaking of and bidding "God speed" to the errors of men, but that there are those who support the school financially and otherwise, without which the school wouldn't exist. The same can be said about several other of "our schools." Those who support error are partakers of that error (2 Jno. 9-11).

That which struck me most in the first paragraph of the letter was the outright presumption that is exhibited by this school, that they have the authority to provide a smorgasbord of acts of worship whereby everyone can have the worship they want, not what God has authorized as acceptable. The denominational world has been doing this sort of thing for a long time, but it is rarely that they come out as boldly as has Rochester College! I challenge the college to show on what basis "All of our congregations are challenged..." to provide the kind of worship which pleases men rather than God. Will they be so bold as to change John 4:24, to read: "God is a Spirit: and He can be worshipped from the menu of Rochester College, as desired."

A thing which stands out in the second paragraph of the letter is that the "Zoe Worship Conference" has as its "Primary participants" two men from the apostate Woodmont Hills church in Nashville, TN, where Rubel Shelly is the preacher, and where the elders and Rubel Shelly are active participants in bringing the Billy Graham Crusade to Nashville in June this year, and will take an active part in this crusade of error. Since Larry Bridgesmith and Ran Gill are alumni of Rochester College and ended up at Woodmont Hills, this is a sample of what the school has been producing in the past. Added to the apostates of Woodmont Hill is another enemy of the cross of Christ, Jeff Walling.

Drinking of the above error is not cheap. It will cost individuals \$50 each, and after July 1, \$60.

Where did this idea of "contemporary worship" come from? Sounds like some Shelly influence. The very idea that the worship of God can be changed to suit each generation is outrageously absurd. There is not a scintilla of scriptural evidence that such a thing is permitted. If authority for it is not from God, which it isn't, it has to be from man. (*P. 14*)

If there is any authority for changing the worship of God from generation to generation, to suit what each group of people want, it has escaped me. I don't believe anyone else has found such authority.

The above letter concerning worship has reminded me of Cain and Abel and their worship. When they brought their offerings to the Lord, the Lord had respect for Abel's but not for Cain's. From Hebrews 11:4, we learn, "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous....*" It is interesting to note that when the Lord did not respect Cain's offering that "*Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell*" (Gen. 4:5).

With some, worship is so different today, in that those engaging in "contemporary worship" often seem to exult in worship for which God has not respect. If, however, these brethren are called in question, then they may be "very wroth."

Contemporary worship should always be, in every generation, only that which God has approved in His word. That is the only acceptable worship. When people engage in acts of worship which God has not authorized it is *vain worship* (Matt. 15:9). It is unfortunate that with a great many brethren that which is called "Contemporary worship," includes much that God has never approved. That is what Rochester College, though the "Zoe Group" of error is willing to aid people in doing.

Brethren, if the above is not enough to cause one to weep, what would it take? As I've said before, some brethren are more loyal to a school than to God's word. If the above outlandish error is supported by brethren, what better evidence could there be that what I have said is indeed true? Have brethren ever stopped to think what evil influence will be brought to bear upon their sons and daughters when they are sent to Rochester College?

Walter W. Pigg

READERS' RESPONSE

"Everyone really enjoys and appreciates the good reading in the BOT... - **Gene Johnson.**" - MO.

"I appreciate the work you do with your publication, Banner of Truth. Please add me to your mailing list. Thank you - **Wayne Bowen.**" - GA.

"Enclosed please find a contribution to help your efforts in contending for the faith through Banner of Truth. We are standing for the Gospel in this place and truly appreciate your publication. Keep up the good work... **Names withheld.** (*It is a great encouragement to us to know of those who are "standing for the Gospel." May the Lord richly bless as you continue so to do. -Ed.*)

"I would appreciate receiving Banner of Truth. Enclosed is check to help a little with postage. Sound teaching is needed so much. Thank you -**Grace Davis.**" -TN. (*We are always thankful for the help we receive which enables us to carry on the work with BOT. We are also thankful for the interest and concern shown by those who read the paper. Yes, "sound teaching" is needed so much in our time. There can't be too much. - Editor.*)

"Because of 911 we have a new address. Please note the change as we don't want to miss a single copy of your paper. Thank you for waking people up to liberalism, and teaching the truth. We also try to spread the truth. We appreciate your stand so very much. May God bless you - **Paul & Shirley Tuller.**" - TX. (*Thank you for letting us know of your change of address. This helps us to save quite a bit in postage. Thanks for your kind words. -Ed.*)

"I was introduced to BOT by a fellow Christian. I am interested in being on your mailing list. After reading the January 2000, issue, I'm in total agreement with the contents, with special emphasis on, 'Has the Church Changed?' - **Elizabeth Sanders.**" - AL. (*We are happy to add you to our mailing list. Do us a favor and introduce BOT to others. We wish to increase our circulation to 6,000 this year - Editor.*)

"I just received your December issue of BOT. After reading your article on calling names I feel I must write and commend you on it. A very good article, well timed. I have been receiving BOT for a while and enjoy it very much. Keep up the good work. I pass it along to a dear sister and now she looks forward to it - **Gene Owens.**" - AL. (*Thanks for your favorable comments and we are thankful that you pass BOT on to others. This helps us greatly in increasing our mailing list to those who have an interest in the paper and will benefit from it. - Ed.*)

"I really enjoy getting BOT, but our congregation puts them out so I don't really need to get one mailed to my home. Thanks again for your boldness in speaking all the truth and for sending me BOT! - **Steve Preston.**" - GA.

I have been reading BOT given me by Vernon Key and wife Bernice. I would like to be on your mailing list. I appreciate your standing firm for the truth. We need many, many more men like you to stand up for God's word of truth. I'm enclosing a check for the new

press or other expenses - **Nixie Lolly.**" - **AL.** *(Your name has been added to our mailing list. We are thankful that bro. & sis. Key introduced you to BOT. Yes, there is a great need for many to stand firm for the truth. That is what I intend to do, and it is because of concerned people like you that we are able to publish the paper. Your check will be used for the expenses of BOT. Concerned brethren supplied the funds for the press, for which we are so thankful. We have been greatly encouraged - Editor)*

"I wish to thank you for your bulletin. I always enjoy reading it, and I hope you will continue to keep me on your mailing list this year - **Charlie Turner,**" - **TN.**

"I just read your excellent article 'I Just Don't Believe In Calling Names!' I have never seen such a thorough study of this timely topic in years. I appreciate your good insight and study. I also have enclosed some support for the Banner as you use your abilities to strengthen those who love the truth - **Novie Perry.**" - **FL.** *(Thanks for your kind comments and financial help. Many oppose calling names, except in a positive way, but the N. T. pattern is to call names positively and negatively -Ed.)*

"I read where 'Banner of Truth' was published monthly and deals with error in the church. Would you please put me on your mailing list? - **Dorothy McClane.**" - **OK.** *(We do deal with some of the error within the church today, and there is much of it. We deal with matters other than error also. - Editor).*

"The January 2000 Banner of Truth came today. I certainly read it with interest. Today I also received a catalog of sorts ... trying to get me to join a book club! On the inside cover is said, 'Dear Christian Reader.' I wondered how they knew that I was a Christian!!! Got my name from some mailing list for a price I would imagine. The catalog was filled with books by Gwen Shamblin, Max Lucado and others. Thanks to you and Banner of Truth I was forewarned and they will sell me NO BOOKS! Do continue to keep us informed - **Faye Bullington.**" - **TN.** *(It seems rather ironic that whereas people should be willing to pay a price for Truth, it is so often the case that a price, some times high, is paid for error. To both Shamblin and Lucado the term "Christian Reader" would include many who aren't truly Christians. The quest for money often disregards truth. - Editor).*

"I just wanted to let you know that I enjoy reading the articles in Banner of Truth. They are very informative and it is so good to know that we have Christians who will stand up for the truth and fight the good fight. Please keep up the good work - **D. Patrick.**"

"My sister passed her copy of BOT to me and I've enjoyed it very much. Please put me on your mailing list. I would like to have as many of your back issues as you can send me. Especially the Feb. 1999 issue, as I had never heard of Gwen Shamblin! She needs to stay in the weight-loss industry and out of preaching, because she has no concept of what the church is, and she knows just enough scripture to lead the unlearned astray! How sad! It seems the devil has found a fertile field and he's working overtime. Yes we have way too many in the church who will not take a stand against error and unrighteousness. But some of you still do and the Beautiful Bride of Christ will endure. Praise His Holy name! My check is enclosed to help you to continue to fight error with truth of the gospel - **Evelyn Henderson.**" - **TX.** *(It is most encouraging to hear from readers like you. It is good to know that there are those who love the truth all across the land. I do wish more would take a bold stand in behalf of truth, it would do much to stem the tide of error. Thanks for the check, it helps make our work possible - Editor).*

"I ordered the copies of 'Banner of Truth' and a subscription to it. Really appreciate you sending them to me. It is sad to see what is happening to the Lord's church. The younger generation is bringing the world and denominationalism into the church. It seems to be spreading fast. Seems like the older ones got it started. Thank you and God bless - **Wanda Thompson.**" - **MO.** *(Your assessment is right on line, I think. The younger people would not be falling for error as they are, had it not been for the older ones who allowed and in too many cases encouraged it. Thanks for the check to help make Banner of Truth possible. We are grateful to those who choose to be "fellowhelpers to the truth." - Editor).*

Welcome to our New Readers! Let us have your comments and suggestions.

Do Half of Kentuckians Believe Murder is Acceptable?

In an article in the Feb. 19, 2000, issue of the *Murray Ledger & Times*, entitled: "Kentuckians divided on abortion question," some information of concern is set forth.

The article states that "The Bluegrass State Poll of 800 adults showed that 54 percent called abortion 'murder' while 29 percent said they didn't feel that way." An interesting note about this poll is that it says Kentuckians were "evenly split" in their view of whether abortion should be left as a private matter for women to decide, or having a government ban on abortion.

According to the poll only 54 percent believe abortion is murder. It is a sad day when only that percent believe abortion to be murder, when children who are very much alive and could live as normal human beings, even when taken from the mother many weeks before the natural time for birth, have their brains sucked out, or are torn from their mother's womb in pieces. How can anyone deny that this is murder? This would also apply to the taking of the child's life before it could survive outside the mother's womb.

The most appalling thing about the poll is that half of Kentuckians believe that a mother has a right to murder her innocent child in cold blood just because she doesn't want it to live, if the poll is accurate. It would be a sad commentary on society if only ten or twenty percent believed murder to be acceptable, but we know it is much worse than that.

- - - *Editor*

Naomi's Health Report. In Jan. & Feb. she had surgery on a carotid artery and the balloon procedure on a renal artery. They were unable to get the stint in place in the renal artery, but it is believed the balloon procedure will help for some years. Her blood pressure is much better than before the procedure. Before the above she had a dye test. She has withstood the ordeal quite well and is almost back to normal, though in some pain.

Editor's e-mail address listed below.

<wpiggbot@prodigy.net>

Banner of Truth on bro. David Lemmons' web is listed below.

<http://www.hcis.net/users/dlemmons/BOTlist.htm>

