

Apostasy In Churches Of Christ

With Some Guideposts To Apostasy

By *Bob Spurlin*

Paul, the poignant and provocative apostle, spoke frequently about an impending apostasy, that is, a digression or falling away from “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Paul’s words continue to reverberate from the sacred pages with such admonitions as, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Paul also said: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron...” (I Tim. 4:1-2). The apostle John warned the brethren to “try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (I John 4:1) There are numerous exhortations that serve as **guideposts** pointing to an apostasy. We shall consider a few of them.

THE END RESULT OF BEING ILL-PREPARED

The author of Hebrews wrote the following: “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Heb. 2:1). The Hebrew Christians were being warned that they could slip away from the truth. We can let things “slip,” or “drift,” as the ASV translates that word. This **guidepost** should serve as a sober warning about the trouble that lies ahead. God’s people should always be alert and heed the warnings of the inspired writers. If someone tells you the bridge is out ahead, would you heed the warning? Most intelligent people would readily recognize the warning and stay clear of any danger or calamity. Today it seems that all too often we are ignoring the danger signs and rushing toward eternal destruction, like a runaway freight train (Heb. 2:3). We have all heard of the Trojan horse, by which the Greek soldiers entered the city of Troy unawares. In like manner the apostasy is slowly and deliberately swallowing up the Lord’s church in its path, and many seem to be unaware.

FAILURE TO FOLLOW “SOUND DOCTRINE” (TITUS 1:9)

Far too many are willing to ignore the pure and unadulterated doctrine of Christ and substitute it with anything that catches their fancy. Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, “For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matt. 23:27). Many churches have a veneer of doctrinal purity, but beneath it can be quite different. One cannot know the condition of a banana until the peeling is pulled down. The banana may appear like a wonderful treat to behold, however it may be bruised, putrid or rotten. Consequently a congregation may seem to be sound in the faith, yet delving into what they teach and practice may be two entirely different things. Far too many are increasingly a poor facsimile of what they appear to be (Phil. 1:27; Acts 1:1). Those who have departed from the doctrine of Christ must be marked a “heretic” as Paul gave the directive (Tit. 3:1:10).

THE ABSENCE OF GOOD LEADERSHIP

For thirty years I have learned that there is an acute shortage of those in the eldership that have the courage and fortitude to make decisions which identify and correct those who would lead God's people astray. Church politics is often the norm as the leadership finds itself in a dilemma of making decisions which would correct the problem, yet would face the prospects of losing large weekly contributions. I am well acquainted with an eldership that refused to address serious doctrinal issues, and decided to let it ride for fear they would lose a large number of members. What a commentary on those who claim to be elders in the Lord's church, and yet fail to discharge their God-given responsibility. Peter, an elder himself, wrote the following: "The elders which are among you I exhort . . . Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof . . ." (I Pet. 5:1-3).

EMBRACING UNSCRIPTURAL PRACTICES

John, the apostle of love, wrote the following: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). The doctrine of Christ sets forth the pattern for all things that pertain to the church. Any deviation from this blueprint will place our fellowship with God in jeopardy (I John 1:7). Why would any church of the Lord turn away from God's plan of redemption, worship or any other fundamental doctrine of the New Testament? The cry of the twenty-first century is change, non-traditional churches, youth oriented, excitement, and etc. The **guidepost** warning us of signs leading to spiritual apostasy are those who would be divisive and digress from sound doctrine. Paul writes, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). Holy writ could not have affirmed such warnings with more clarity or simplicity.

Huntsville, Alabama has deep roots in the restoration movement with some of the great pioneer preachers planting the "seed of the kingdom" (Lk. 8:11), tracing its roots to the early 19th century. Men like T. B. Larimore, and others made great contribution to Madison County and North Alabama. This county and its vicinity have long been a bastion of truth and righteousness. However, over the last two or three decades we have seen a digression among some of the larger churches, especially.

THE TWICKENHAM CHURCH – AN EXAMPLE OF APOSTASY

This congregation, which earlier this year had an ecumenical meeting with denominational leaders in Huntsville with the swapping of pulpits, while the media congratulated the Twickenham church for their involvement. This was hailed as a day of reconciliation, yet Paul declares, "be not unequally yoked with unbelievers for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). The apostle Paul makes it crystal clear that we are not to merge or join with sectarian groups in cooperative efforts. Paul further states, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:17). This shows we are not to coalesce or merge with those who are teaching a doctrine that is in violation of the will of God. The **apostate** church seems to have no difficulty in violating these fundamental truths. They have also introduced "The Andy Griffith Show" as a tool in their Bible study program, which is widely distributed through a web site on the internet that promotes this unscriptural method in their version of being "progressive." Apparently Twickenham feels they need something in addition to God's word to stir the interests of those attending their classes. Have they forgotten Paul's words: "Study to show thyself approved unto God . . . rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The Twickenham church has proclaimed themselves as apostate by their unscriptural innovations, fellowshiping sectarians, and the use of heretics like Rubel Shelly and others.

THE MAYFAIR CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HUNTSVILLE – AN EXAMPLE OF APOSTASY

Note the following eyewitness report as related to me: Brother Eugene McCracken, from Cleveland, Tennessee, recently called me and stated that he and their preacher attended a workshop at the Mayfair church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama, that was disturbing beyond belief. I have known this brother for nearly thirty years. He has served as a deacon and as an elder. He is a knowledgeable Bible student without any radicalism or extremism of any

kind. He along with their preacher innocently attended this event, wanting information and biblical principles that would enhance their work. What they received was something totally outrageous and foreign to the teachings of the New Testament. Brother McCracken witnessed a church that spent twenty million dollars, according to the church's literature that was made available, on a meeting place that was fully equipped, reminding one of a recreational club with all the amenities that one might expect at the YMCA. One could argue the wisdom of a church using the Lord's treasury on such an act of extravagance. The early church would often meet in the homes of church members (Acts 12:12-13). Later, we learn that Paul preached in Troas, "when the disciples came together to break bread," indicating that a place was needed to meet for worship (Acts 20:7). Undeniably, the church had some place to meet for worship, however there is no indication their focus was upon elaborate and expensive edifices. Conversely, their thrust was in the proclamation of God's power, the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16).

How ironic that the Mayfair church would spend such an outrageous amount of money on a meeting place that will be used approximately four or five hours per week, with some exceptions. Of course it may be used more than that for unauthorized recreation, etc. We are all stewards, while we sojourn upon this earth and the Mayfair elders, as stewards, must make wise use of the funds contributed by the membership. Consider the mission fields on domestic and foreign soil, and those missionaries who wish to go, but churches like Mayfair must turn them away because of their preoccupation with "other things." Do you suppose they have misplaced the Great Commission (Mk. 16:15-16); and what about the widows, orphans, and needy of all types that require care and attention by the church (James 1:27; Gal. 6:10)?

Brother McCracken reported a choir composed of men and women that were performing, while the audience sat with mouths closed. It was observed that women were seen in the isles swaying with the beat as if it were a concert. Spontaneous clapping and other emotion outbursts followed. When we assemble as "the house of God" (I Tim. 3:15) [the church], we should "serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear...(Heb. 12:28-29). Our worship to God is not a concert, it is where God's people meet to pay homage in the prescribed way.

The use of a choir in worship is a violation of the Holy Scriptures, which forbids choirs, and other special singing groups. Conversely the New Testament authorizes the use of congregational singing where every member is urged to participate in this part of the worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Following the worship assembly at Mayfair there were classes with a variety of subjects being taught. Brother McCracken went into a leadership class where six Mayfair elders were present. This brother from Tennessee seized the opportunity and posed this question to the elders: "Where in the bible does it say that we can have a choir in worship?" The elders present were as silent as a tomb and could not rebut the very relevant question. Some apostate churches have decided to follow the steps of ancient Israel, when "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25).

The apostasy seems to be getting a stranglehold on too many congregations, and how sad to see the church of the living God deviating from the divine blueprint (Heb. 8:5). Today, in the Christian Age, we are given a pattern to follow. Paul told timothy, "Hold fast the form [pattern] of sound words, which thou hast heard of me" (2 Tim. 1:13). It is also reported that the Mayfair church has been using known false teachers such as: Buddy Bell, Rubel Shelly, and others that have been wreaking havoc throughout the brotherhood. The Mayfair church needs to repent of their digression and apostasy before God removes their "candlestick" (Rev. 2:5).

Someone has said, "You are a 'legalist' and are tied to the archaic past." Those digressing into apostasy take pleasure in making the charge of being "legalistic" against those who are committed to the "old paths" (Jer. 6:16). We are not afraid of change when it comes to matters of expediency. Change can be good when it comes to improving or refining the overall work of the Lord, which will make it most effective. However, when it comes to changing God's plan of worship, organization, plan of salvation, mission of the church, etc. there can be no change (Matt. 24:35). The Hebrew writer states, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). May we submit the following proposition: If Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday and forever; does it not follow that his word, doctrine or teaching will remain changeless (2 John 9)? The doctrine of Jesus Christ or the New Testament is a "God breathed" or inspired message with God as its author (2 Tim. 3:16-17). There can be no change, alteration, or substitution if we would be in fellowship with our holy God.

2101 Glenwood Dr., Hartselle, AL 35640

Editor's Comment: I have run the above article because it is very timely and needs to be read by many brethren. In addition, the concern shown for our Lord and His church by brother Bob Spurlin is something which needs to be emulated by a lot more of us. For the benefit of those who don't know brother Spurlin, and as a reminder to those who do, let me call attention

to some things which makes his example so powerful, and a cause for our self-examination. as to our loyalty to the Lord.

Bro. Spurlin, a sound gospel preacher for some thirty years, came down with the debilitating disease, multiple sclerosis, five years ago. As is typical with this disease, his condition has continually worsened. Adding to the heart-breaking news of this incurable disease, just a few days later he and his wife were overwhelmed with grief at the loss of their sixteen year old daughter, due to a needless automobile accident.

As brother Bob's condition worsened he learned to use a computer for writing material of a spiritual nature. More recently it has become necessary for him to use a computer system which converts spoken words into written words. It is nothing short of amazing that these physical handicaps have not stopped his efforts in carrying on the Lord's work by the use of printed words; an example is the above article. Under the same circumstances how many of us would have given up, "thrown in the towel"? So many have given up for much less severe reasons, and some for no apparent reason at all.

Under the above very severe circumstances bro. Bob's love for the cause of Christ has not diminished. Here is a brother whose love has not grown cold. Even when it is very painful for him to move he is with great effort setting forth a warning with regard to the evil which is engulfing many congregations. With respect to the results of Bob's efforts he wrote me: "It is not expected that the apostate churches referred to will give adherence and repent. It is hoped that those who read my piece of writing will see the light of truth and give a responsible nudge to those who need to move."

Bob has written a book, *Tackling Life's Troubles*. He is well qualified to write on that subject due to his own experience. The book also contains a number of articles on a variety of timely subjects. The purpose of the book is two-fold. It sets forth scriptural teaching on subjects Christians need to know about. In the second place, it is being used as a means to help raise funds for the great amount of medical expenses and others which have resulted due to Bob's illness. The price of the book is \$10 and about \$1.50 for postage. It is my understanding that most of the price of the book goes to help with brother Spurlin's financial needs.

You may order the book from the following name and address: Bob Spurlin, 2101 Glenwood Dr., Hartselle, AL 35640.

Web Site: < <http://www.bobspurlin.Com> >

E-mail: < PrechTeach@Aol.Com >

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Former President Carter and the Baptist Church

In *The Paducah Sun*, June 30, 2001, an article by Erin McClam of the Associated Press, sets forth some interesting things about the former president and his relationship with the Baptist Church. The article was entitled, "**Carter encourages divided Baptist to Unite as Christians.**"

Over the years many have commented to the effect that President Carter was one of the most religious presidents that we have ever had. The above article reflects on the former president's religious convictions when compared with what the Bible teaches, and as the Southern Baptist have held with respect to a number of biblical matters for many years. This says some as to the reality of his religion.

One of my reasons for calling attention to this matter is that here we have an example of a person who was intelligent enough to become the president of the greatest country in the world, and yet his stance with regard to what the Bible teaches is one that pales in comparison with the persons intelligence as demonstrated in other areas. The reason why people with so much savvy in secular matters often display almost none in religious matters continues to elude me. Yet, we see this on every hand.

The article calls attention to Carter's bolt of the Southern Baptist Convention in October last year. As to his present affiliation with the Baptist, it is said, "On Friday, Carter said he and wife Rosalynn had found a home with the Cooperative Baptist, an Atlanta-based group of 1,800 congregations both inside and outside the Southern Baptist Convention."

As to Carter's break with the Southern Baptist, a number of reasons are given as to why. Before noting some of those reasons it should be pointed out that a proper respect for God's word would never allow one to become a member of a Baptist Church, period. Christ didn't die for it, and it was not purchased with His blood. It is not found in God's word. Therefore, since there are only two sources of religious authority: God and man, it must exist by the authority of man.

Though the Baptist church is not found in the Bible, it has for many years upheld some of the teaching therein. Some of those long-

held teachings are now rejected by the former president. Note the following:

“The arguments about political intrigue and control, women deacons or women pastors or homosexuality, these things in God’s eyes fade into relative insignificance,” Carter said.

By what authority does the former president aver that women deacons, pastors and homosexuality “fade into relative insignificance in God’s eyes”? We know he didn’t glean such authority from God’s word. God’s word says a **deacon** must be “husband of one wife” (I Tim. 3:12). **Pastors** [elders, bishops] must be “the husband of one wife” (I Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:5-6). It couldn’t be taught more clearly that women are not to exercise authority over men, as set forth in I Cor. 14, and I Tim. 2). The apostle Paul speaks very clearly about the sin of homosexuality in Romans 1: 14-28.

Has God’s will changed with regard to the above? Of course not! What is the basis then of Carter’s change? If the Baptist were right in these things in the past, why are they wrong now? Carter is quoted as saying that he cut his ties with the Southern Baptist because they had “become ‘increasingly rigid’ in imposing beliefs that violate ‘the basic premises of my Christian faith.’”

This raises a serious question with regard to “the basic premises” of Carter’s “Christian faith.” This reveals an important point. That is, it is obvious that the “basic premises” of his faith do not include respect for what God’s word clearly teaches. A “faith” which is not based upon God’s word and utmost respect for the same is worthless! It is worse than worthless, it will condemn one’s soul eternally.

It is also said of the former president, “He [Carter] was further angered by the Southern Baptist declarations that wives should ‘submit graciously’ to their husbands and women should not be pastors.”

Just think about it! Did Carter have a right to be angered by what God’s inspired word says relative to the husband and wife relationship? Note what the inspired apostle Paul said: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body” (Eph. 5:22-23). Our society in general is so very indifferent with respect to God’s word and what it teaches. But to be “angered” by what it teaches seems to indicate an even greater degree of rebellion against God. Another question arises, and that is, “Why has Carter changed so drastically from a few years ago? Could he actually believe that God’s word has changed? Surely not. Has his respect for God’s word decreased? It certainly seems so. This seems to be the case when people sway with the winds of change. God’s word changes not but people change continually.

I do not know for certain why the former president’s attitude toward God’s word is what it is. But there are many instances in which the denominational people have given up their convictions with regard to God’s word. The time was that some of the denominational people had strong convictions about some things, especially moral issues.

It should be of great concern when the denominations drift farther and farther away from the shores of Truth. This make it even more difficult to convert people. A thing which should be of even greater concern, is that we are seeing within our own brethren changes in positions of respect for God’s word. People I have known in the past who had considerable respect for God’s revelation, now have virtually no respect for it.

When we review the things in God’s word which Carter does not respect, we can find some of the very same within the Lord’s church. It is becoming a much more common thing for women to exercise positions of leadership over men, which God forbids. Homosexuality is not being opposed as it once was. No, God’s word hasn’t changed; brethren have. Now, what about the “basic premises” of brethren’s faith? In an increasing number of beliefs and practices among our brethren, it is clear that “basic premise” of their faith is not what it once was. When one’s “faith” violates the clear teaching of our Master, something is tragically wrong! A strong attitude of disrespect for biblical authority is being demonstrated when brethren unfairly criticize and speak evil of those who stand up for God’s word without compromise. This happens often now.

- - - Walter W. Pigg

An Example of Calvinism

For quite some time I received material by e-mail from an individual in California. He is an example of one who is a Calvinist. though I don’t know what he claims to be religiously. It is difficult to understand how one can believe in this doctrine, but a great many denominational people do.

The individual discusses Acts 2:38 and mentions other instances where people asked what they must do to be saved. Then he says:

“So we see that people may be pricked in their heart and they may acknowledge their guilt and the Holy Spirit convinces them of their sin and at this point they come to the end of themselves. They want to do something but they CAN NOT repent and believe because they are SPIRITUALLY DEAD! A corpse can not do anything but lie there and be dead. The same with a person who is spiritually dead.”

The only proof (?) offered in support of his conclusion that the spiritually dead can’t do anything is that “A corpse can not do anything but lie there and be dead.” God’s plan of salvation doesn’t have anything to do with a corpse, and illustrations don’t

prove anything. The pattern of those who received salvation by obedience to the gospel shows that the spiritually dead can do something. Faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). This faith, including faith in God (Heb. 11:6), must lead a person to repentance (Acts 17:30; Lk. 13:3). With the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10). When one obeys the Lord in baptism, his sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38), and he puts on Christ (Gal. 3:27). He is also added to the church (Acts 2:47). One can obey these commands or refuse to do so. When one who is dead in sin does these things then he is alive spiritually and saved, but not before. The idea that the Holy Spirit has to come down and work on the heart of the sinner before he can obey the gospel and be saved is a doctrine of men. Why all these multitudes who are now dead in sin? Is the Holy Spirit way behind in working on the hearts of these so that they CAN BELIEVE? Who can believe the Holy Spirit is to blame?

- - - Editor

A Letter from the Elders of a Congregation

Editor's Note: The name of the congregation is being omitted, but we think this example speaks well of elders who have this concern. Other than the omission of the congregation's name, the letter is exactly as published in the church bulletin of that congregation.

TO THE _____ CHURCH OF CHRIST JUNE 17, 2001

As elders of the _____ church of Christ, we have a great responsibility placed upon us. As elders we must oversee and lead this congregation in accordance with God's word. The following scriptures are some reminders to us of the great work that we must do.

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; nor for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock” (I Peter 5:2-3).

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

We understand, according to these scriptures, that we do have the obligation to oversee the work of this congregation. Involved in that is to feed the flock, to be examples and to watch for the souls of those who are members of this congregation. We must do this because we realize we are going to give account for how we have carried out these obligations.

To fail to take heed to these obligations will mean that we will have failed God, ourselves and yes, you, as members of this congregation. As members of this congregation, you have placed your souls under our care and watch. We consider this a sacred trust.

We want to do what we can to help you to grow spiritually (2 Peter 1:5-11) so that Heaven one day can be your home. Among other things, there are provided for you opportunities on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening to assemble together as God's people in Bible classes and worship services to exalt and glorify God and to “grow in grace and in knowledge” (2 Peter 3:18).

It is sad, but some, who are under our oversight, willfully forsake one or more of these services each week. We believe such actions are wrong. Such conduct is destructive to one's good influence and is in violation of the teach of the Scripture and the principles found therein. Since we believe this to be true and because of our care and concern for your soul as elders of this congregation, we are calling upon those who are forsaking the services to make a change, that is, to repent and make a public confession of such conduct.

Beginning July 1, 2001, if you are forsaking the services, whether it be Sunday morning Bible classes, Sunday morning worship services, Sunday evening worship services or Wednesday night Bible classes, you **will not** be asked to teach a Bible class, assist in teaching, lead in our worship services, or to lead in any other work of this congregation, until you repent and demonstrate your love and loyalty for God and His Word. Those who are unfaithful in their attendance of the services should not be **leading** this congregation in our worship and work, but they must be **led back** to the Truth, **repent** and **resolve** to be faithful to the Lord. We must put the Lord and His church first in our lives (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1-3; I John 2:15-17).

We prayerfully hope that you will carefully consider these words. If you have any comments or questions about these matters, please contact us. Let us strive to work together, to help each other to grow spiritually so that we can be together in Heaven one day. We solicit your prayers on our behalf.

From the Elders: The elders are named.

Again, we commend the elders. We believe this is a very good example to follow. It is a bad example to encourage unfaithfulness, yet it happens so very often in many places. -- Editor

The Preaching of John The Baptizer

By Marvin L. Weir

John was a stern, straightforward, uncompromising preacher. His diet, diplomacy and dress did not impress the religious leaders of the day. *“Now John himself had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his food was locusts and wild honey”* (Matt. 3:4). This preacher was no *“reed shaken with the wind”* (Matt. 11:7). The truth would always flow forth from the lips of John, regardless of who his audience might be.

John was not popular and in demand with the religious elite of his day. Neither would he be invited to preach for most congregations that claim to be churches of Christ today! The reason why John was rejected in his lifetime and would not be accepted today is the same – John was not afraid to rebuke sin. Rebuking sin is not “politically correct,” and most people would rather be “politically correct than right with God. The reason is twofold: they fear men more than God (Cf. Mt. 10:28), and they love *“the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God”* (John 12:43).

The character of John’s preaching provides us with many valuable lessons. Let’s learn from him.

JOHN WAS NOT AFRAID TO ASK BURNING, PENETRATING QUESTIONS

As John was baptizing in the Jordan River those who were willing to confess their sins, the religious leaders had gathered around him. *“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham”* (Matt. 3:7-9).

The Pharisees and the Sadducees did not want to give up their traditions and accept the truth regarding the Messiah. They gloried more in Abraham than they did in Christ. Many members of the Lord’s church today would rather imitate the Pharisees and Sadducees than the Savior. They reject the New Testament pattern for the church and glory in men who are leading them astray from God’s truth. They are depressed by the word of God but delight in the false teaching that flows freely from the lips of Lucado, Shelly and like kind.

Preachers today who rebuke sin wherever it is found will not be popular. Many so-called preachers tiptoe gently through the tulips when discussing marriage, divorce and remarriage. They are more concerned with the security of their job than they are with the souls of men. John was not such a preacher. Herod decided to take for himself his brother Philip’s wife. John had the courage to tell Herod, *“It is not lawful for thee to have her”* (Matt. 14:4). Yes, it cost John his life, but he saved his soul.

JOHN WAS NOT AFRAID TO TELL THE FALSE TEACHERS OF HIS DAY THAT:

“The axe lieth at the rood of the trees” (Mt. 3:10).

The axe is ready to cut down one by one those who refuse to comply with the will of God. The Pharisees and Sadducees claimed to be God’s people, but they would not give up their traditions and conform to His will. So it is today with so many who **claim** to be following Christ! The great need in the Lord’s church today is for elders and preachers who will demand *“fruit worthy of repentance”* (Matt. 3:8) while warning that *“even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire”* (Matt. 3:10).

Each fruitless tree (a person who has rejected the will of God) will ultimately be cut down by the Word of God. Jesus has forthrightly declared, *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I speak, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (Jno. 12:48).

We need preachers today like John who will tell people to heed **what** they hear (Mk. 4:24) and **how** they hear (Lk. 8:18) because the axe lieth at the root of the tree!

JOHN WAS NOT AFRAID TO WARN PEOPLE OF THE WRATH OF GOD AGAINST THOSE WHO REFUSE HIS WILL

The time is going to come when the wheat will be gathered into a place of safe keeping, but the chaff will be burned with

“*unquenchable fire*” (Matt. 3:12). A day is coming when the Lord’s church will be thoroughly purged. The hypocrites and wolves in sheep’s clothing will feel the axe that will forever separate them from the blessings of God.

A baptism of fire is reserved for those who for whatever reason refuse to obey the gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9). The baptism of fire will also be the reward of all false teachers and those who follow them. The baptism of fire (Matt. 3:11) is clearly defined as the “*unquenchable fire*” (Matt. 3:11) of an eternal hell.

True greatness will be determined by Christ and not by man. The Lord said that no one that had arisen was greater than John the Baptizer, though the least in the kingdom was greater (Matt. 11:11). Even so, preachers of today would do well to measure their preaching by the preaching of John!

5810 Liberty Grove Rd., Rowlett, TX 75030

Response To A Reader

The following was received from a reader, dated May 12, 2001. It is quite typical of critical responses, in that it does not contain even one specific reference to a New Testament passage to show wherein I’m in error nor to justify the bitter attitude of the reader. The reader’s response, word for word, was as follows, and my response follows it.

Brother Pigg: There is only one Savior of the church and it is not you, nor publications like yours, nor those who align themselves with your ways of trying to save the brotherhood. Jesus Christ is the only savior, and, I might add, the only judge! Why not preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified and leave the saving and judging of the church up to the One, (the only One) who is holy and righteous enough to do so? Isn’t it obvious to you yet, that all you who have set yourselves up as “saviors” and “judges” of the brotherhood are not going to stop those who want to move forward in love, unity and peace?
Stan Cook, Gadsen, Alabama

Brother Stan, I invite people to respond to what I write, even when it’s so very critical as is yours. I can make a mistake in what I write, and would be thankful if brethren responded in accordance with Galatians 6:1. If I have committed an error, I would consider it an act of love on your part if you would point it out. Will you be kind enough to do that Stan?

Now, let me respond to some of the things you said in your letter. “There is only one Savior...” and it is not me, my publication, etc. Stan, have I in any way indicated that I or my publication is a savior? Please, in honesty, where did you get the basis for that accusation? Will you let me know?

You say that Jesus Christ is the only Judge! Stan, have I set myself up as “Judge”, in the sense of the only judge, which is Christ? If Jesus Christ is the only Judge, how do you account for yourself as a Judge”? If you have not judged me, and that unjustly, then it must be impossible for one to be a Judge. Yet, you are judging me severely. Stan, can you not honestly see that? Surely you must see it. You ask, “Why not preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified and leave the saving and judging....?” Paul did say, “For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (I Cor. 2:2). But have you not read where Paul made judgments concerning: Hymenaeus and Philetus, Phygellus and Hermogenes, Hymenaeus and Alexander, and Demas? Have you thought of the fact that “Christ and him Crucified” included these acts of judging? Did you know that Christ said, “Judge righteous judgment” (Jno. 7:24).

You suggest that “those who want to move forward in love, unity, and peace.” will not be stopped.” Stan, if what you have written me is a sample of those who “want to move forward,” I pray that I’ll never be among them. You shouldn’t be..

Stan, why have you written as you have? Could it be that some truth that I have presented “stepped on your toes,” and you became angry at me because of what God’s word says? The Lord told Samuel that when the people rejected him (Samuel) they had rejected the Lord. When people don’t like what God has said, they shouldn’t be critical of those who stand by God’s word and uphold it. - *Walter W. Pigg*

Morals Have Changed

Alan Adams, Assistant Editor

A well-known radio personality refers to daytime Talk Shows as “Museums of modern American societal decay.” I would extend that description to include almost everything on television, and, in particular many news programs.

According to one of the major network news programs, there is a court case pending, involving an unmarried pregnant teacher. The teacher is a divorcee and her baby was fathered by someone other than her former mate. The school where she is teaching has indicated that she must either abort her unborn child or possibly be terminated. The school argues that it is not

proper or conducive to good education for an unmarried pregnant woman to be a teacher and be seen by impressionable Junior High students.

The school is not so concerned about what this woman did that caused her to be pregnant, but rather that she is visibly pregnant. Kids can see; they know she's not married; they conclude, "If it's okay for Ms. Jones, then it's okay for me." The teacher, in her defense, says, "Morals have changed." I believe that some analysis is called for here.

When we speak of "morals," this implies a standard, an objective code, to which we appeal so as to determine whether a particular action is right or wrong. Morals, or morality, cannot refer to mere subjective choices, likes or dislikes, whether on the part of one person or many. If we say this or that is "immoral," and we mean that we do not **like** this or that, then the whole concept of moral/immoral becomes meaningless. Under that sort of definition, two people can simultaneously like and dislike the same thing; thus, the same action can be at the same time both moral and immoral. This woman has obviously had sexual intercourse with a man who is not her husband. It is true that a lot, maybe even most, of Americans do not find this type of activity distasteful, they don't mind it; they don't dislike it. So, when this woman says, "Morals have changed," she really means that many or most people like or approve (at least they don't dislike or disapprove) of the type of sexual activity she has engaged in.

Further questions must be raised, however. If only one person "likes" something that is otherwise disliked by most other people, may that person then say, "Morals have changed"? If not just one person, then we ask *how many* people must begin to "like" something (or, cease disliking it) before we can justifiably say "Morals have changed"? No, this woman and others like her are wrong. Morals, that is the moral standard, have/has not changed, rather "God...gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (Rom. 1:24). People like this woman have not "discovered" this unique definition and usage for "moral (or, morality)" through deep thought and analysis, rather "even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those thing which are not fitting" (Rom. 1:28).

The moral standard has not changed. "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness..." (Gal. 5:19). It doesn't matter one whit how many Americans now "like" these activities or no longer find them distasteful; but "they which practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21)

This woman has "committed great whoredom" (Hos. 1:2), but God loves her just as He does all sinners. If she would stop her foolish word games and genuinely repent and obey the Gospel, our Father, out of "the multitude of [His] tender mercies [will] blot out [her] transgressions" (Ps. 51:1).

As contemptible as this woman's actions are, her employers' are no less so. Had they simply fired the teacher because of her poor example this would set for the children she is teaching, we would applaud. However, they mentioned another alternative: Abortion. The only thing worse than the brazen and blatant sexual immorality in our society today is the absolute unwillingness to accept personal responsibility for its consequences. Through sexual perversion and abandon people contract AIDS and they are called "victims." No, the victims are innocent people and children who get it though no fault of their own. A woman "plays the harlot" (*See page 12*) and an innocent baby is conceived; so, her employer suggests getting rid of the baby. How self-ish!

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are not immune from this type of sophistry. So many Christians seem to "like" (or, do not find distasteful) short, tight, revealing clothing, so-called "bathing suits"; they "like" dancing and drinking; they enjoy movies and music that are full of sex, violence and innuendo. I'm told we must be more "progressive" in our thinking. "Morals have changed you know." No! "Nakedness" is still a "shame" (Rev. 3:18). Modesty and discretion are to govern the way we dress (2 Tim. 2:9; I Pet. 3:3). "Revelling" and "lasciviousness" [*Gr*, the unchaste handling of males and females] are still "works of the flesh" which will keep you out of Heaven (Gal. 5:19-21).

Brethren, this is a wicked world in which we live. We must love and support one another and encourage one another to "deny...ungodliness and worldly lusts, [and] live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:12).

104 S. Willow St., Cowan, TN 37318

What Draws 'EM, Keeps 'Em

Leon Cole

A number of years ago I wrote an article with the above title. The lessons taught then were needed and some of the same

lessons are still needed. Everybody wants the church to grow. Church Growth seminars and Church Growth experts have multiplied like rabbits in the last several years. We do not question the sincerity of many of these efforts. Let's face it, the church is not growing like it once did and we should have genuine concern for souls who are lost. But this concern must not prompt us to employ techniques that are at best questionable and some times totally without Bible authority. There is a line that must be drawn between that which is authorized by Scripture and that which is not.

When we start asking, "What can we do to draw people to the church?" we better be careful how we answer. What is used to draw them in will be that which we **MUST** use to keep them. Those drawn by manipulation must be held by manipulation. Denominational churches that depend on musical concerts and entertainment to attract people find themselves in a trap. If they do not regularly schedule a parade of "pickers and grinners" they will soon lose their church.

Churches depending on "rah-rah pep rallies" and trips on chartered busses soon find themselves constantly trying to please the appetites of gluttons, neurotics and fun and thrill seekers. Spirituality takes the back seat to physical gratification. A slick tongued orator may draw a big crowd, but when the brighter lights beckon and he moves on the disciples soon dissipate.

The most noble of benevolent services cannot be depended upon to grow a church. When we try to use benevolence as a manipulative tool to attract folks to the church we will soon find ourselves holding an empty bag. When the "loaves and the fishes" play out the crowd moves on to greener pastures.

Even now the membership list in many congregations is padded with names of people who seldom attend. They were converted to the "fun and games syndrome" which they conceived to be the doctrine of Christ. Pies in the face of youth ministers, parlor games, and appeals to the sensational will not bring one to the Christ who purchased the church with his own blood. Silly antics will not prompt a heart rending cry of "Men and brethren what shall we do?" or prompt a display of genuine repentance.

"If I be lifted up," Jesus proclaimed, "I will draw all men unto myself" (Jno. 12:32). Paul determined "...to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). To be sure we will be loved for benevolent deeds and we surely ought to practice Christian fellowship and there is a time for "having fun," but Jesus preached and Jesus lived— that's the drawing power for the church.

We should be very careful about pulling people into the church by means other than how God directed. Remember the gospel is the power to save (Rom. 1:16). We need to be sure we are converting people to the Lord Jesus. Remember — **What Draws 'Em, Keeps 'Em!**

109 Brank, Greenville, KY 42345

Free 20 Page Tract

Some brethren have developed a tract, defining **Non-Denominational Christianity**. The purpose in developing this Bible-based tract was for strengthening the faith of brethren, and for use in evangelistic efforts. The reader or student is encouraged to read and study the Bible while reading the booklet. The material is not copyrighted and may be duplicated as desired.

This material is **Free of Charge**, and may be ordered from: *Clarence E. Hall*, 207 Cedardale Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70808. Brother Hall's phone is: (225) 344-6519.

Why not make use of this material, which has been provided by the goodwill of a brother in Christ who wants to get the Gospel of Christ to people who need it so greatly?

Banner of Truth Lectures June 2002

A definite date has not been set for the **2nd Annual Banner of Truth Lectures** but we should know the date soon. It is not too early to be making plans to be a part of this important event. At least 24 lessons will be presented in four days. That is equal to the sermons heard in most congregations in a twelve week period. That is a spiritual feast indeed!

A lectureship is not just for preachers and their wives, but for anyone who wants to know more of God's word and enjoy the fellowship with brethren of like mind. If you've not experienced that fellowship, do try it! It's Great! - *Editor*

When is a Preacher “Too Old”?

Once a brother was talking about the need for a preacher in the congregation where he worshipped. He said they were looking for a man 40-45 years of age. Facetiously I asked, “On which side must he part his hair?” One is amazed at the criteria some times used as a basis for selecting a preacher. This is especially true with regard to age.

If a preacher is “too old” at 50 but not at 45, what made him “too old”? Is it his additional experience as a preacher? Is it that he has learned more than the “desired” preacher should know? Is his increased wisdom more than is needed? Or, is it possible that he may lean a bit too much toward the “old school” of preachers?

Just think what would have happened to the Restoration Movement in the 1800s if all preachers had been cut off at age 45. Much valuable preaching that was done would not have been. It sure appears that in too many instances today the preacher who is best qualified to do the work that God has given the preacher to do (Cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-5) is not the one who is in greatest demand.

In a great many cases it appears that a young preacher, even much younger than 45, is desired in order that he may be more likely to serve as a director and provider of entertainment. But come to think of it, some of the preachers who are not so young seem to be quite entertainment-minded.

- - Editor

Please Bear With Me! I receive a great many requests for information, and always try to accommodate the requests. But some times I am so far behind in my work that I simply can't get to the things I need to do as quickly as I would like. If I don't respond, **Ask Again.** - - Editor

READERS' RESPONSE

“I do appreciate receiving your publication, so please edit your mailing list accordingly so that I will continue to receive it in the future... - **Stephen Bradd.**” - IL. *(We do thank you for sending a change of address. The only reason we delete a name is that it is requested or we do not receive a change of address. - Editor_.*

“I did not request your publication and would appreciate it very much if you would take my name off your mailing list - **Stan Day.**” - MI. *(Thanks for letting us know you do not want to receive Banner of Truth. When names are sent to us to be added to our mailing list, we have no way of knowing whether the person wants to receive the paper or not. Many times a reader will think he may do someone a good deed by having the paper sent to that individual. We don't knowingly send the paper to those who don't want it. Again, thanks for letting us know and we will remove your name. - Editor).*

“Congratulations on your stand for the truth. I share your sorrow that false Catholicism was fellowshiped. I look forward to getting your publication, and thanks....From what I have seen in your “Banner of Truth” site, I believe you and I are on the same wavelength—that is, that we share a concern about the false ‘liberalism’ infiltrating the church today. I was rather intrigued by the articles on the weight-loss program promoted by one of our sisters. I had never seen an article on it. It has come to the Gilmer church of Christ which I left seven months ago, due to a young liberal preacher....In any event, GOD BLESS YOU FOR STANDING FOR THE TRUTH, and I eagerly look forward to getting your publication.... - **Phillip Williams.**” - TX.

“Use as needed for Banner of Truth - **Murray Cook.**” - TN. *(Thanks for the check. It will help us to keep on keeping on with Banner of Truth - Editor).*

“My wife and I really enjoy Banner of Truth. We would like for you to send it to our new address - **Joe Chun.**” - AR. *(Thanks for sending your change of address - Ed.).*

“I would like to receive Banner of Truth. I've been reading my sister's and I don't get them all. Put me on your mailing list - **Wanda L. Martin.**” - AR.

“I wasn't sure which address to send a change of address, but felt it would get to you. Thank you for such a wonderful publication - **David Dozier.**” - TN.

“We are still enjoying reading Banner of Truth. Keep us on your mailing list, please - **Gene and Sue Colley.**” - KY. *(Thanks so much for your encouragement. We are encouraged by those who enjoy reading B.O.T. Thank you for the check to help with expenses - Editor).*

“Your article on the subject of Indifference in the May issue of BOT was a masterpiece. It is my hope you will be able to continue your good work for a long time. How badly such teaching is needed. Here is a small contribution for the publishing of BOT - **R. S. Lowe.**” - **KY.** *(It is a shame that so many people care little about the spiritual side of life. A time of regret will come one day, but then it may be too late. Thanks for the check - Editor).*

“My sister had one of your bulletins. I enjoyed reading it very much. I would like to be on your mailing list for the Banner of Truth. It is awful that the churches are getting away from the truth - **Nancy Todd Sutherland.**” - **TN.** *(Yes, it is indeed tragic that so many churches are getting away from the truth. It is hard to figure out why people want to do that which will result in their own eternal loss, but there are many warnings in the New Testament that this very thing will happen - Editor).*

“The enclosed check is to help with Banner of Truth. Note the change in my address - **Grace Davis.**” - **TN.** *(Thank you for the check and change of address. - Ed.).*

“Praying you will always stand firm for the truth and may not be afraid to defend it, Jude 3. Please excuse my writing, I’m sorta shaky. I’m 87 and continue in the Lord. Please continue to send your paper....Praying this contribution will help in some way. Almo is really my home - **Charlene Cain.**” **TX.** *(I trust I’ll never be afraid to uphold God’s truth. If there is anything worth fighting for it is God’s truth. It is so encouraging when people in their golden years are still concerned about doing God’s will. Many young people are not as greatly concerned. You have our sympathy in the loss of your dear husband, Graham Cain. I knew O. L. Cain, who used to worship at Hickory Grove. Your check will certainly help in our work with Banner of Truth. Wishing you the best in the days to come, and may you many more years - Editor).*

“We continue to appreciate Banner of Truth - **Lenard Hogan,** for the church at Hornbeak.” - **TN.**

“I am an active member of the I. B. Road church of Christ, I. B. Road, Lamka and director, Tyrannus School of Christian Apologetics and Bible Correspondence school.... I would like to receive your scripturally sound Christian literature, “Banner of Truth,” regularly....- **Tualchin Neihisial.**” - **India.** *(Your name has been added to our mailing list to receive Banner of Truth monthly. We trust it will be useful to you - Editor).*

“Here is a small check. Use as needed. We still enjoy Banner of Truth very much. Keep up the good work. Add these to your mailing list - **Truman Lewis.**” - **AR.** *(We greatly appreciate all those who help, regardless of the amount. - Editor).*

Some Deceiving Words, Phrases, Statements, etc.

Pro Choice - Freedom to make a choice to murder an unwanted child, even at the point of only minutes and/or inches away from birth, at which point the innocent child could live without the mother.

A woman has a right over her own body - It is not the woman’s “own body” that is under consideration. It is body of an innocent child which is in the mother’s womb. It is a child which has a right to life. It is claimed to be the “mother’s body” to justify the wanton murder of it, because unwanted.

A Woman’s right to choose. A right of the mother to kill her unwanted child. God has never given this “right” but evil people assume it.

A Non-issue. This term is used when an issue is being debated, but when the defenders of the issue cannot uphold it by valid scriptural evidence. It was once an “issue,” but when it can’t be defended it becomes a “non-issue.” An example of this is the effort of brethren to uphold the use of women translators. When their efforts were futile, it then became a “non-issue.”

You misunderstood me. This can be very deceiving when some error is taught in clear words, and the teacher claims to be misunderstood when their hand is called. If not called in question, no claim of being misunderstood is made.

I didn’t say that. This is rank deceit when one denies having said something he did say. It may rightfully be called “lying,”

Editor’s e-mail: < wpiggbot@apex.net >

View BOT on bro. David Lemmons’ web at:

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

Readers may get on David’s **LemmonsAid e-mail** by sending an e-mail to the address below:

< LemmonsAid-Subscribe@YahooGroups.com >

Welcome New Readers to *Banner of Truth!* We appreciate hearing from you.

