

Banner of Truth

"The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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THE LORD'S CHURCH IS FACING PERILOUS TIMES

Salvation is available to man only through the church which Christ built. When the church is adversely affected, the number of people receiving salvation will be affected.

The church which is revealed and described in God's word is of monumental importance. This is true because salvation is obtained only through Christ and His church. Paul said, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ..." (2Tim. 2:10). To be "in Christ" is to be in His body, the church. The apostle also said that Christ "is the head of the body the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). To be "in Christ" is to be in His church; to be in the church is to be "in Christ."

Concerning the church and her place in God's scheme of redemption for man, there is virtually unlimited misunderstanding. This does not have to be the case, since even a limited knowledge of the New Testament reveals God's plan for the church. It is a great tragedy that people have not studied God's revelation concerning the church.

A result of this failure to study has produced even hundreds of different groups which claim to be the church, but they do not measure up to what is revealed in the New Testament. Christ died for His church (Acts 20:28), but for no other.

The importance of the church is seen in the fact that it was in God's mind from eternity. "By revelation," the Spirit had "made known" to Paul "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:3). The "mystery...from the beginning of the world [had] been hid in God who created all things by Jesus Christ" (v. 9). Paul exulted that though he himself was "less than least of all saints," he was nonetheless privileged to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (v. 8). By the revelation of this mystery, "now," Paul said, "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus →

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our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11).

From this sweeping passage, we see that the church was in God's mind from eternity. The church is the manifestation of God's wisdom. This being the case we must know that it is important. Yet, it is a rather common thing for people of today to disregard the church as something that is not essential. But why would God have had the church in His mind from eternity, if it is not profoundly important?

The word "church" is singular, as when Christ said, "I will build my church (Matt. 16:18). The fact that the word "church" is often used in the New Testament in the plural sense is simply that Christ's church existed in many different places. The one, the singular, church is the "one body" (Eph. 4:4). Though "seven churches" in their respective cities are mentioned in Revelation (1:20; cf. cc. 2-3), each by doctrine and practice is still the one church which Christ said he would build.

Sadly, however, perilous times lead to heresy and change.

I. WHAT ARE "PERILOUS TIMES"?

Inspiration warned, "that in the last days perilous times shall come" (2Tim. 3:1). The Greek word CHALEPOS translated "perilous" in the KJV in this verse is translated "grievous" in the ASV. *Vine's* defines it as "hard to bear, grievous." *Thayer's* definition is "hard to bear, troublesome, dangerous."

In the following seven verses (3:2-8), Paul describes the character of people who would make, and make, the last days "perilous":

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.

The "last days," are the Christian Age, and they have truly lived up to this inspired characterization. Even casual observers would surely concede that the world we presently live in is a product of "perilous times." Changes in the last half century are breathtaking and evident. We have seen "times" getting worse rather than better. The most recent generations have not seen these dangerous changes, they just live in them. Assuming the present to be "normal," they perhaps are not as concerned as older folks are. They do not have the same point of reference, and sadly do not realize that times could be so much better than they are at present. My heart goes out to the younger people who have lived only in the perilous times of which Paul warns.

II. WARNINGS OF PERILOUS TIMES

In addition to Paul's warnings to Timothy, there are many other warnings in both Old and New Testaments, which speak of times that would be perilous or grievous. We shall note a few of those warnings. †

Isaiah sounded many warnings relative to evil, we note only one that could have been sounded yesterday in the United States: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet, for bitter” (Isa. 5:20) We see so much of that very thing in our time. Those who see the murder of innocent children by abortion and uphold homosexuality are engaging in the principle about which the prophet was speaking. Isaiah’s “woe” is no less a “woe” now. It seems to me that the element of humanity which has no regard whatever for the sanctity of human life is about as low as people can get. Not only do hard-hearted people favor the murder of the precious boys and girls, made in the image of God, many even exult that abortion is upheld by the law of our land. Since the Supreme Court made abortion legal, there are those who favor the riddance of the aged and infirm from society. This very thing happened in Germany under Adolph Hitler. Some of our people are for assisted suicide.

Let us note only a few warnings in the New Testament. One warning sounded out to the elders at Ephesus has long since been become a reality. That warning is clearly described by Paul: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among of you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29-31). I have seen this very thing happen. A great many congregations have succumbed to the “grievous wolves.” The fact that this condition will only worsen is seen in the strong prevailing indifference. It seems that very few tears are being shed because of the increasing number of our brethren who are turning away from the Truth. This indicates a lack of serious concern.

In Romans chapter one, Paul describes the prevailing evil among the nations before Jesus came. He said, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, (v. 18). Then he speaks of God giving them up

to vile affections, which included homosexuality (vv. 26-27). In the next three verses, Paul mentions a number of the things included in the definition of perilous times we noted earlier. He says that those committing such things are “worthy of death” (v. 32).

To the Thessalonians, Paul warns of persecution to be endured by the faithful saying, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:12-13). This is happening in no little way in our time. No one can truthfully deny that evil men are waxing worse and worse in our present world, and fewer and fewer people are showing serious concern.

We have listed some of the warnings about perilous or grievous times to call attention to the fact that such sinful things make it more difficult for one to live a true christian life. From the personal observation of a single life, we have seen christians turning away from the truth which they have known in the past; and as noted, we have seen those who have come of age during these perilous times, those who do not know of better times.

We shall now consider some areas where perilous times are seen so clearly, and which are having such a detrimental influence upon people. We shall note some things within the church later, but the prevailing times in our society have an influence upon those who are making any effort to live the true christian life.

III. THE EVIL INFLUENCE WITHIN OUR POLITICAL WORLD

To begin, let us realize that our country and its society are influenced by politics. Virtually every area is in some way affected. Our government is run by a political system. Let us also realize in the beginning that there are no “perfect politicians.” However, some are better than others. Some are more conducive to an upright condition which is more favorable to living the christian life. Some politicians and their parties are known for their stand for higher moral values than others.

There are a great many things within our →

political system which should be of interest to those who choose to live the christian life. Some things are more favorable to living the christian life, and some things serve as a hindrance to the christian life. Some things encourage higher moral values and some encourage immoral standards. There are two things which receive quite a lot of attention; they are approved by some and opposed by others: abortion and homosexuality. Another issue is the redistribution of wealth to those who could work but will not. God's word is clear in teaching that all three of these things are in opposition to the teaching of God's word.

Only been during the past few decades have abortion and homosexuality been used by politicians to encourage political support. I have lived in the times when few politicians would have dared to stand for these two things which are so opposed by God. Along with the upholding of these God-opposed things has been a serious lack of belief in God. Lack of belief in God encourages all manner of evil things, since there is no accountability.

In this election year, abortion and homosexuality have been discussed at length. Not only are these two things receiving more attention; a great many other things, about which christians should be concerned are being discussed. As American citizens, we have the opportunity to show our opposition to the things which are contrary to God's word. We christians should avail ourselves of the opportunity to oppose such. In the past, these things were opposed by the vast majority of our citizens; even those who professed no religious affiliations.

Many people are deeply concerned about this year's elections. It is sad, however, that some will simply not avail themselves of the opportunity as an American to speak up for decency and morality by casting a vote. Christians must "abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9). We can show our abhorrence of evil by opposing it. Failing to oppose evil, we find ourselves in the unevitable position of bidding evil "God speed" (2Jno. 10).

It is heart-warming to see people speaking out in behalf of that which is pleasing in God's sight. Many speak out via publications, websites, and email.

Saying, "If you think things are bad now, just wait," Donald E. Wildmon, chairman of the American Family Association, has the following to say in an email (Oct. 8, 2008:

Dear Walter, The upcoming election is the most critical election in the history of our nation. The very future of our nation's foundation is at stake. Every person will be affected...The upcoming election is the most important in the history of our nation. Yes, if liberals win you will lose some of your religious freedoms and free speech rights. Churches and pastors will not be exempt. You will not be allowed to say certain things about a particular group. Every item on the homosexual agenda will be approved. All the laws protecting the unborn will be wiped away...the future of your children and grandchildren is at stake.

The proliferation of abortion and homosexuality will without doubt encourage even some christians to engage in or uphold these sins. When so many are doing something which is wrong, it has a tendency to encourage others to engage in the same, though it is no less sinful. Also, if something wrong is legal, it makes it no less wrong in God's sight.

Some have suggested, and I wholeheartedly agree, that we go into the voting booth in the upcoming election and when we do, realize that the Lord knows what we do, whether good or evil.

Another thing which has a bearing upon our present "perilous times" is God's influence. Therefore, let us consider this seriously.

IV. EFFORTS TO BANISH GODLY INFLUENCE FROM OUR SOCIETY

The success of the ungodly evildoers in removing God's influence from our society is being reflected in the increase of ungodly things that are being done. It seems to me that a person who actually believes in God could not do what many are doing, and in too many instances seemingly without a guilty conscience. In a great portion of our nation's history, our country was know as a "Christian Nation." This was not from the standpoint that a majority of people were *christian* in the true sense of the term, but from the fact that so much of our country and its existence was founded upon Godly principles. But to call ourselves a

“Christian Nation” now is indeed a misnomer. The one time christian influence is swiftly disappearing ; and the prospects are for this to increase to the detriment to our country.

References to God in many instances are no longer a matter of freedom. The mention of God in schools is now off limits while the references to Islam (Muslims) is allowed. Virtually anything can be taught, even if it is immoral. The Ten Commandments cannot be posted in many places. Some brethren even pass this off saying, “Well, we don’t keep the Ten Commandments.” While it is true, that we are “not under the Law of Moses,” that is not the reason they are disallowed. People who “believe in following the Ten Commandments,” do at least have a belief in God despite their misunderstanding the law we are under. The opposition to the Ten Commandments by our courts and others is due to the fact that these commandments have a reference to God.

The ACLU, American Civil Liberties Union, is a powerful force for evil in our society. What a misleading name; they are rather the enemies of true liberty. In the area of religious liberty, the ACLU is a particularly strong enemy.

Diane Dew, a religious journalist, has described some of the things for which ACLU stands, which are contrary to God’s will for man. In an article, “Revealing FACTS on the ACLU *from its own writings*,” we note the following:

Ever notice how the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) seems to take on only cases that are anti-Christian – pro-sodomy, pro-abortion, anti-family, pro-pornography, pro-prostitution, pro-euthanasia, pro-homosexual, pro-infanticide, pro-crime, pro-humanism, anti-God – and, except for atheism, anti-religion?

The ACLU has been described as “The greatest threat to our country.” When we delve into its goals and activities, we agree. One reliable source says the ACLU has at least sixty full-time attorneys and more than a thousand volunteer attorneys, and three hundred staff members. Their annual budget is 45 million dollars. According to <guidestar.org>, the ACLU had assets of \$175,909,869 as of May 31, 2004. The great financial support of this evil organization by wealthy people enables it to accomplish its objective of opposing so

many things for which people with high moral standards stand. Due to this fact, they have the resources to hire needed attorneys, and this enables them to be victorious over those who do not have equal resources to hire attorneys and pay court costs. Those who stand for that which is right, often have to give up, due to a lack of finances.

This organization and others have contributed greatly to severity of the perilous times which we are now seeing. If the trend continues, we have not seen the worst yet. As the effort to get rid of God’s influence continues, we will see more people who are unwilling to stand against the tide. Although we are not now seeing physical punishment against those who believe in God, if the present trend continues we may well see that in days to come. Although, “we ought to obey God rather than men,” (Acts 5:29), some are reluctant to do so. There is fear of what the authorities may do. Times are not at all like they were in the First Century, when people risked persecution, even physical death, rather than turn away from their faith in God. The church at Smyrna was told not to fear the things which they might suffer, but rather be faithful unto death, that is become a martyr, in order that they might receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

V. THE PERIL OF MAN-MADE RELIGION

Christianity had its beginning in the First Century; Christ, as He promised (Matt. 16:18), built His church. She had her beginning as recorded in Acts chapter two, and from that point is always spoken of as a reality. Those who obeyed the commands of the Gospel, the saved, were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

The church enjoyed great growth in its early days, even when suffering persecution. It was not long, however, until false teachers began to take a toll. Jesus Himself had warned people to “beware of false prophets...” (Matt. 7:15). Paul warned Timothy that “in latter times some shall depart from the faith” (1Tim. 4:1). And, we repeat Paul’s warning to Timothy: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...and they shall turn away their ears from the truth...” (2Tim. 4:3-4). The apostle John warns that “many false prophets” had already gone out into the world...” (I Jno. 4:1). →

We see then that false teachers would become a peril, beginning even in the First Century. Given these warnings, it should not be a surprise that we have many false teachers today; rather, their presence should embolden our faith, that what God's word predicted has become a serious reality.

From the First Century forward, people have been exposed to false teachers. Then, as now, they gathered followers; the false teachers and their followers have formed many "churches," which are unknown to the word of God. In our present time these man-made churches number in the hundreds, even thousands. New ones are continually coming on the scene. The peril caused by these man-made churches is seen in the fact that many people are led to believe in that which is not according to God's will. The "hope" promised by these churches is a false one. These churches, in many instances, have an appeal to people, because they offer that which pleases people, but not God. In a few instances, members of Christ's church turn away from God's true plan of salvation and join some man-made church. Paul warns that this will happen.

Some politicians claim to be religious for the sake of political support. When a person claims to believe in God, and upholds that which is so repulsive to God, we may know that their religion is not for real. In some instances profession of a religion may be for the purpose of material gain.

A stark example of the blending of denominationalism and political forces is the existence of "churches" which embrace homosexuality. Even in the religious world, homosexuals are wielding a strong influence, even though their lifestyle is strongly condemned by God's word. The examples of Sodom and Gomorrah are used many times to show God's disapproval of this evil act or practice. In some man-made churches, homosexual priests are appointed. Society has become so tolerant of immoral practices, that there is little opposition to virtually anything, regardless of how immoral it may be.

The denominational world, which is made up of hundreds or thousands of different groups, which claim to be *christian*, poses a problem now that is greater than ever. True christianity is identified by keeping the Lord's commandments; man-made churches are

identified by catering to what man wants. John said, "This is the love of God that we keep his commandments..." (1 Jno. 5:3). When the commandments of men are kept, it shows a lack of love for God.

Man-made churches become a peril when the christian extends their fellowship to them. God has a law on fellowship, the same as on many other subjects. When this law is not considered, people are being disobedient to God.

VI. OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF PERILOUS TIMES

The Love of the World. We have never seen a time when the love of the world was stronger. This has been a problem which is growing stronger. The seriousness of this problem is that it is strongly condemned by the Lord. John wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him... And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for every" (1 Jno. 2:15-17). Demas forsook Paul in his labors for the Lord, "having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10).

Moral Decay. Moral decay in its wider sense has wreaked havoc within our society. A majority of people believe it is alright to be untruthful in some instances. This is known as values clarification. Thievery is a common thing nowadays. The use of illegal drugs has become a huge problem. Sexual immorality has become so common, that people generally do not raise an eyebrow. About a third of children are born out of wedlock; in some instances much more than that in certain places.

Materialism. Many people today measure success by the number and quantity of material things they possess. Many fail to realize that the things "which are seen are temporal" while the "not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). The example of the people in the church at Laodicea is seen in many people in our time. Christ said he would spew (vomit) them out of his mouth, "Because thou sayest: I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..." (Rev. 3:17). The Lord saw them entirely different to what they saw themselves, just as He sees those today who put their hope and trust in the perishable things

There are many other things or conditions which add to the severity of the present "perilous times." ↴

But we move on to things within the Lord's church which contribute to the perilous times we are seeing today.

VII. CONTRIBUTIONS TO PERILOUS TIMES WITHIN THE LORD'S CHURCH

From the beginning, there have been problems within the church. Many of those problems are discussed in the New Testament. As we noted earlier, there were false teachers even in the First Century; but, in our time we have personally seen an vast increase in problems in the last several decades. We shall give attention to some of them beginning with:

A Serious Lack of Study. The church was once known for its knowledge of God's word. Even those who were critics from outside the church would make such comments as the following: "One of the things about the church of Christ is that they know their Bible." We do not, for good reason, hear that said today. We have simply quit studying as we should. This is having a telling effect on the church in general, as brethren are no longer making a distinction between right and wrong. Too many are opting for a *spiritual food diet*. "Strong meat" is off the list, and lots of "milk" is on (Heb. 5:12-14). Those on the milk diet are "unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he [they] is a babe."

Poor Teaching. One thing which contributes to this condition is poor teaching. It is often the case that the students [in Bible study] are not challenged to learn, and especially those things which the writer of Hebrews calls "strong meat." It could be that the teacher is not capable of teaching those things which are richer than spiritual milk. It is not likely that the student will advance in knowledge above the teacher. Teaching may be poor because the student neither asked nor expected to do anything that will measure his progress toward a better knowledge of God's word. Good study materials can be a great help in learning giving the student structure and enabling him to test his knowledge. Too often, students do nothing more than sit, listen to someone talk, and then and forget most of it.

Another aspect of poor teaching is that things which are controversial may be skipped or glossed over. This may be due to the desire of the teacher to not say anything which might be upsetting to the hearers. A

desire to be pleasing to men rather than God is seen in many instances. The apostle Paul is an example which all teachers of the Bible should emulate. He was one who "shunned [not] to declare...all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

The Influence of Lackluster Preaching. The type of preaching which used to be heard in the majority of pulpits is seldom heard now. There was a time when our preaching was generally distinctive, setting forth God's word without fear or favor. In a great many instances today's preaching is lukewarm, and sometimes geared to fit what people are looking for. What people are looking for is often not what the All-Seeing Eye requires. A popular childhood game was "What does it take to please you?" When it was discovered what the player wanted, efforts were made to provide that. Some of our preachers are also experts at the game "What does it take to please you?"

I have known of instances where a person was taught the necessity of baptism for remission of sins, and was baptized. But "lo," when he learned there was more involved in obeying the gospel than being baptized, there was rebellion.

There are some good schools of preaching, but some are not. Some young men are going to our "christian schools" to learn God's word and how to present it. In too many cases, however, the schools are off in left field, and those young men do not receive the training which is expected by our Lord. We can personally compare Freed-Hardeman College in 1953, to FHU now. What a blessing was the training years ago; but, things are different now, both at FHU and other "christian schools." It is sad that in many cases, the schools are a detriment rather than an asset.

With regard to some of the preaching done today, the preacher which is known for his jokes and story telling is in demand. That is what is wanted by some, but it is not that which results in real edification. The increase of faith by preaching comes about by preaching the Word (Rom. 10:17).

Unscriptural Works of the Church. The New Testament authorizes three areas of work by the church: evangelism, edification, and benevolence. That is what we used to see supported by the church. Now, we see quite a number of things outside that category. Several years ago, the Madison church of Christ was out →

front in innovative works, particularly an entertainment facility, Family Life Center, which basically was/is a gymnasium with other trimmings. From that point onward, the entertainment craze seemed to catch on with more than a few congregations. With the added entertainment there was less interest in the area of spiritual things.

B.C. Goodpasture wrote a telling article, (*Gospel Advocate*, May 20, 1948), “The Mission of the Church,” in which he addressed this matter. Among other things, he said, “For the church to turn aside from its divine work to furnish amusement and recreation is to pervert its mission. It is to degrade its mission. Amusement and recreation should stem from the home rather than the church.”

It is not unusual today for a congregation to engage in food, fun and frolics, especially for the youth. It is not wrong for christians to eat together and enjoy the fellowship, but this is not a work of the church. But some reason, or conclude that “The end justifies the means.” But they are dead wrong.

VIII. OVERCOMING PERILOUS TIMES

In view of the perilous times we are seeing today, one could become discouraged, were it not a fact that victory can be ours, in spite of all the evil one may face. I often think about what the christians of the First Century faced. If they could overcome all the evil and maintain their faith, surely we can do so. We do not know what will come in the future, but as of now we are not likely to suffer physical persecution.

In the future, if Islam reaches their goal, those who live the christian life could well see physical persecution, even death, at their hands. We should have given attention to the threat of Islam as a major cause for perilous times. Most Americans seem to be unaware of the nature of the Islamic religion. Some are so blinded that they refer to Islam as “a peaceful religion.” Nothing could be more deceitful than the idea that Islam is peaceful. It had its beginning by wielding the sword and much of its gain has been from the same practice.

Getting back to the subject of overcoming the perilous times we face, there are many things to encourage us in our christian race and warfare. But these things involve and require availing ourselves of the provisions which God has provided. We know that

Jesus has made salvation possible by His great sacrifice; He has done His part, but salvation requires our God-approved part.

John says that “the victory that overcometh the world” is our faith (1Jno. 5:4). The theme of the Book of Romans is “justification by faith.” Of course this is a faith that works and obeys God’s will. James makes it abundantly clear that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:17-24). The works which God requires is that which God has ordained and commanded His servants to do, which is to say: “work out you own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). We faithfully work fearing that we have somehow failed to measure up to what God requires.

It was Paul, the finishing fighter (cf. 2Tim. 4:7), who asked, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” After mentioning a number of things he says “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:35-37). He then lists a number of things which he says are not able “to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 39). The path to victory, he said is to “put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). After the mention of other means of withstanding the Devil, he says, “Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (vv. 17).

The book of Revelation depicts a battle between the forces of righteousness and Satan. A great point of encouragement to us is the fact that God’s side is victorious. But we notice from the letters to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2 and 3), that victory was promised to the “overcomer” in each case. Christ says, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).

Of the many assurances of victory, we close with Paul’s victorious farewell,

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing. (2Tim. 6-8).

—Editor

The Church Is a School

—So, Whom Shall We Hold Accountable for Our Poor Education?—

[NOTE: The following is a lecture delivered at the 2008 Garfield Heights Lectureship under the title *The Teaching Program of the Church*.]

Regardless of dispensation or covenant, God has always had a “people” (Heb. 11:25; 4:9; 1Pet. 2:10); a people for His “own possession” (Ex. 19:5; Deu. 7:6; Tit. 2:14; 1Pet. 2:9). His “eternal purpose” is the “church” (Eph. 3:10,11), which is all about “the redemption of God’s own possession, unto the praise of his glory” (1:14). Broad, general principles relating to God’s people hold true throughout the ages. One such principle relates to the need for God’s people to be taught, to be educated, in God’s word and ways.

Education variously means to: provide schooling for; to train by formal instruction; to develop mentally, morally; to provide information; and, to persuade to believe or act in a desired way. One of the first comprehensive statements about the teaching and education of God’s people is given by the Spirit in Deuteronomy chapter six, where through Moses, the Spirit speaks of the “statutes,” “ordinances,” and “commandment” of Jehovah God. He presses the need for people to “do,” “hear,” “keep,” and “observe” these things. He turns his attention to the importance of education when alluding to the inevitable time children of God’s people will ask, “What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which Jehovah our God hath commanded you?” (v. 20). Twice, then, He stipulates the need to “teach” and “talk” about these things (vv. 1, 7). If ever there were a mandate about the education of God’s people, we find it in verses 7-9:

...thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way,

and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house, and upon thy gates.

He further pegs this education both to the blessing and the perpetuity of God’s people; that is, that “ye may increase mightily” (v. 3), and that “he might preserve us alive, as at this day” (v. 24). Let us then, relate this principle to the church, the people of God.

The church is “the body of Christ” (1Cor. 12:27) comprised “severally [ἐκ μέρους — of distinct, individual] “members”; thus, emphasizing her functioning, her unity. The church is the “temple of God” (1Cor. 3:17; cf. 2Thess. 2:4; Eph. 2:19-22); thus, she is the place where worshippers come before God (cf. 1Pet. 2:5). The church is “God’s building,” the “house of God” (1Cor. 3:9; 1Tim. 3:15; cf. 1Cor. 7:24; Rom. 6:8; Tit. 2:11); thus, she is the familial place where God and His children (cf. Jno. 1:12; 1Pet. 1:3) live together. We could continue with this list of metaphors: “God’s husbandry” (1Cor. 3:9), “flock of God” (1Pet. 5:2; Ac. 20:28, 29), “kingdom of God” (Mk. 14:25; cf. Rev. 1:6), army of God, and so on. Let us now proceed to show that the church is also a school; and, under our heading — *The Teaching Program of the Church* — let us specifically focus on this “school’s” need for a program with curriculum, standards, measurements and goals.

A school is a place or establishment for instruction; a place or environment where one gains instruction or training in virtue, accomplishments of the like [*Oxford English Dictionary*]. “School” comes to us via Middle and Old English, *scole* and *scol*, which themselves come via Latin, →

schola. Behind all these is the Greek word, σχολή [scholē]. It is interestingly connected to a verb form, σχολάζω, which carries the ideas of freedom from obligation in one area with view toward devotion in another [cf. 1Cor. 7:5 — “ye may give yourselves”]. In other words, school is a place, a setting, where having the leisure or freedom from other obligations; we devote ourselves to study and learning. As an aside, it would appear that we — the church in present times — have this “leisure...freedom from...obligations” thing pretty well down pat; but, the same cannot be said for the devotion to “study and learning.”

Among the many beautiful ways to view the church, none is certainly lovelier than that of a place, a setting, where people are schooled in “the teaching of Christ” (2Jno. 9). The only time we find σχολή in the New Testament is the “school of Tyrannus,” where for “two years,” Paul, having “separated the disciples” focused on “reasoning daily in the school” (cf. Acts 19:8-10). Every church of Christ is ideally such a “school,” where disciples are “separated” and placed in an environment of “reasoning” and learning.

IS THE CHURCH IS A SCHOOL?

It should suffice merely to note the “house of God,” “the church,” is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Tim. 3:15); but, there is much more.

Isaiah said this “house of God” would be a place to which “nations” and “peoples” would trek knowing that in that house “the God of Jacob...will teach us of his ways” (Is. 2:2,3).

When the house, the church, was built, “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers...” (1Cor. 12:28). “Teachers,” are absolutely essential “for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11,12). Teachers imply students; the church, then, is comprised of teachers and students; teachers and students imply a school; thus, the church is a school.

In First Corinthians chapter fourteen, the whole discussion about who may “speak” to the assembled church (cf. v. 23), is focused around the need that the “church may receive edifying” (v. 5; cf. vv. 3, 4, 12, 17, 26). It takes “each several part” — one of them being teachers — to bring about “the increase of the body unto the building of itself in love” (Eph. 4:11-16). So many churches of Christ are “weak and sickly, and not a few sleep” (1Cor. 11:30), because they are not being edified, or built up; and, this because they are not educated; and, this because too many churches are, in no sense of the term, schools.

The church at Antioch from the outset took this school business seriously. Through teaching, the church was born in that great city leading to Barnabas’ being sent there, who in turn went and fetched Saul from Tarsus and “brought him unto Antioch” (Act 11:20-22). For a “whole year,” they “gathered together with the church, and taught much people” (v. 26). In time, they added to their faculty: “In the church...there, [there were] prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1). It did not, however, stop there. “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them,” and subsequently they were “sent forth” on the First Missionary Journey (vv. 2-4). Having completed that “extension teaching” tour, and upon their return, “Paul and Barnabas tarried in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord” (v. 35). Born of teaching; built up by teaching; initiating — shall we say — “branch schools” in other places; and coming home to continue teaching: What a church; what a school.

ARE OUR CHURCHES COMPETENT SCHOOLS?

Many of the things which frustrate people today about modern public education may also be said about churches of Christ today in their failure to

adequately fulfill their obligation to be schools. It is ironic that the same complaints about our public schools, may justifiably and generally be made about churches of Christ.

First, there is the problem of **few willing teachers**. It would be a rare, yet blessed problem, for a church to have more teachers than she needs. Something is terribly amiss when few Christians show interest in being educators in their local churches. Jesus, to whom we pledge fealty (cf. Rom. 10:9,10), was “the Teacher” (Jno. 13:14). Like all of his apostles, Paul wore various hats: “preacher, . . . apostle, and a teacher” (2Tim. 1:11). He was “a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” (2Tim. 4:7), and was a teacher “everywhere in every church” (1Cor. 4:17).

“Elders” should undoubtedly “labor in the word and in teaching” (1Tim. 5:17); and, “aged women” are to be “teachers of that which is good” (Tit. 2:3). In fact, given sufficient time, all “ought to be teachers” (Heb. 5:12). The “word of Christ dwell[ing] in [us] richly,” we will not only “in all wisdom [be] teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Col. 3:16), but in other venues as well.

From the new birth (cf. Jno. 3:3-5), let us stress to God’s children that to follow the Master one must aspire to be, and be, a teacher.

Second, there is the problem of **few qualified teachers** (cf. James 3:1). We are sobered, and some perplexed, by James’ imperative: “Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment” (Jam. 3:1). His point? Undisciplined, unqualified people should not presume to teach anyone.

Heaven forbid that any of us wittingly, unwittingly, arrogantly, or ignorantly should ever be “false teachers” (2Pet. 2:1); and, yet we are aware that throughout the Christian Age, there will ever be a market for such “teachers” as there will always be those who will “heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts” (2Tim. 4:3).

Teachers can be unqualified by virtue of the fact that “they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm” (1Tim. 1:7). They can also be unqualified by virtue of the fact that their lives are not commensurate with what they presume to teach — “thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself” (Rom. 2:16-21). Jesus said, “every one when he is perfected shall be as his teacher” (Lk. 6:40). That is not a comforting thought given the *quality* of education and teachers found in too many churches.

Responsible leaders in our churches must take seriously this matter and not allow unqualified people to teach. There must be criteria and guidelines to be met by those who would. In tandem with our Bible school programs, we should have teacher training programs as well. The present day “tag you’re it” approach to teacher recruitment is not honorable.

Third, there is the lack of a **systematic, comprehensive curriculum**. It is a sad reality that not a few people “go to church” for years, only to come out with a disjointed smattering of knowledge of God’s Word. It is equally frustrating that some Christians only know bits and pieces of the Bible as they relate and contrast to the doctrines of men. They may know, for example, that the faith only doctrine is false, because James said “not only” (Jam. 2:24); but, they may not at all know the Book of James in general, nor his point in chapter two in particular.

We need to see the Old Testament as elementary and secondary education and the New Testament as higher learning. Our education programs should be designed to allow the “tutor” — the Old Testament — “to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24), life and will we must strive to master. We need planned curricula that show us how the parts form the whole. The names of the sixty-six books of the Bible should be taught early; and, soon thereafter, the various categorizations →

of those books: law, history, literature, prophecy, et al.

Paul referred to the period from the “judges until Samuel the prophet” (Ac. 13:20); and, Peter spoke of the period of “the prophets from Samuel” (3:24). It was Jesus himself, who “beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk. 24:27). He showed how events in His life “fulfilled [the things] which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me” (v. 44). It is folly for Christians to never learn the periods of Bible history; the main events and characters of both testaments; the three dispensations; and, the two covenants. How does one “master” the Master without knowing the people and events which led up to the “fullness of the times” when God sent Him “forth” (cf. Gal. 4:4)? One might as well try reading (cf. Eph. 3:4) the Bible without ever learning the alphabet.

Fourth, we generally have no mechanism for **measurement and assessment** as to a person’s growth in knowledge and attendant virtue. Parents would be outraged if their teenaged children were tested and found to be wholly deficient in fundamental skills. In our churches, however, there is little or no concern when Johnny or Susie, after years of Bible classes, cannot recite the books of the Bible, and are not familiar with Samuel or Barnabas.

We need teachers who prepare lessons that challenge and test their students, who demand that those lessons be done; and, they need elders and parents to back them. It cannot go without repercussion that we glibly give lip service to “grow[ing] in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2Pet. 3:18), without any attempt to measure whether or how much growth is taking place.

Finally, there is the problem of “**social promotion**” and people “**graduating**” with no real knowledge of the subject matter: the Bible. The United

States spends more per capita on the education of its citizens than any other nation; yet, we cringe at the the reality that irresponsible people hand “diplomas” to people who can neither read nor well comprehend them and send them out into the world.

In our churches, irresponsible people fail to encourage and emphasize teaching and the need to prepare qualified teachers; they make no pretense at any sort of system or curriculum which results in a students’ being “perfected” (Lk. 6:40); they are not interested in requirements and measurements, and challenging students; — and so — they “promote” and “graduate” their students, who in turn become the next generation’s unprepared, unqualified, and incompetent “teachers,” “preachers,” and even “elders.”

At whose feet do we lay all of this? This is — shall we say — not the podiatric problem of the few. Elders, preachers, teachers, parents, children, and “members in particular”: all bear some culpability. Let us each pray; let us study with special attention to the church’s, among other things, being a school, an educational institution. Let each determine to do something see this realized in our own local churches.

A “well-educated” church will grow, flourish, and be there for future generations. Remember, as noted above, how Moses said that teaching, talking about, and explaining God’s statutes and ordinances is necessary that “ye may increase mightily” and that “he might preserve us alive, as at this day”? One “counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (Heb. 3:3) has said this and more. Some foolish Jews once queried, “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” (Jno. 7:15). “Jesus therefore answered them and said, My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself” (vv. 16,17).

Shall we, in this matter of teaching, schooling, be “about our Father’s business? —AA

Essentials For Acceptable Church Growth

[NOTE: This article was written more than thirty years ago, when I worked with the Hickory Grove congregation. A discussion of the need for acceptable church growth is needed just as much now as it was then, if not more so. The church is not growing in number or in spiritual strength as the Lord expects it to do.]

When our Savior gave himself to purchase the church, there is no doubt but that He wanted it to grow. The Great Commission is ample proof of that. Not only was it His desire that the church grow, but He desired that the growth be on an acceptable basis. Where there is an increase in numbers it does not necessarily mean that there has been an increase in spiritual strength. If the church is to grow acceptably (numerically and spiritually) there are a number of things which are essential. Let us notice a few of those essentials; you may think of others.

A PROPER EXAMPLE

This is so necessary for church growth. The importance of a proper Christian example is emphasized by Paul in his first letter to Timothy. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Tim. 4:12) Christ exhorted his disciples to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your god works, and glorify you Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16) These, and many other passages, impress upon us the need to be a living example of Christianity before others.

When we, as a congregation, fail to live up to christian principles we are seen by other as hypocrites, or as those who do not take seriously that which we profess to believe. When such is the case, why should we even expect anyone else to want to become one of us? It is true that our examples, whatever they may be, do not relieve the individual of his responsibility to prepare to meet God, but at the same time it is highly unlikely that we can influence others to live the good life God expects of His human creatures when we are unwilling to do so. The apostle Paul addressed some questions, to the Romans which had

to do with influence: "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preacheest man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" (Rom. 2:21-22).

A DESIRE TO WIN SOULS

This must characterize one before he will put forth much effort to reach the lost. There are two categories of lost people: those who do not obey the gospel, and those who backslide or drift into error after they have obeyed the gospel. That those who do not obey the gospel are lost is shown by Paul (2Thess. 1:7-); that backsliders are lost is made clear in James (5:19-20). If one does not have love and concern for the lost in both categories he will do little to reach them.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Effective leadership is another essential to church growth. It is true that a congregation will not grow beyond its leadership. In some instances, despite poor leadership on the part of those designated as leaders, a congregation may yet grow; but, when this happens, one may be sure that leadership, in the true sense of the term, is being exercised by somebody. Congregations do not grow "in spite of their leaders," but they may grow in spite of the designated leaders. Growth implies leadership from some source. Congregational leadership is not vested in one person. In a limited sense every member should exercise some leadership. This can be done by encouraging one another and by setting the proper example. But some within the church have greater leadership roles than others.

A Bible class teacher should be a leader by teaching and by example. Deacons should be leaders by way of example in serving. The preacher should exercise leadership through teaching and by way of serving and exhortation. The eldership has the most responsible place of leadership within the congregation. The fact that the elders are to "feed," take the "oversight of" and be "examples" to the flock (I Pet. 5:2-3) makes them second to none in the role of leadership. The responsibility of the membership →

to follow the leadership of the elders is set forth by the Spirit (Heb. 13:17) — “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account....”

In view of the responsibility of leadership which the Lord placed upon the eldership the congregation should look to the elders for plans and methods of carrying on the Lord’s work. This does not mean that the abilities and potential of the membership (other than the elders) should not be utilized. Effective leaders will seek the suggestions of the entire congregation and make the best possible use of them in planning the work of the congregation. But it is the responsibility of the God-approved leaders (elders) to make the final decisions

THE PROPER SPIRITUAL FOOD

This is a must for acceptable church growth. The only proper spiritual food is the word of God. This means to abide in the “doctrine of Christ” (2Jno. 9), to preach no “other gospel) but only the “truth” which makes men free. The teaching of the *truth*, which is spiritual food, involves two types of teaching: teaching the untaught or non-christian, and those who have been baptized into Christ. The need to teach the untaught is brought out in the Great Commission as recorded in Matthew (28:19-20) — “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you....” The need to teach the taught is bound up in the need for the “church [to] receive edifying” (cf. 1Cor. 14:5; Eph. 4:16).

A congregation must teach the untaught in order to convert people to Christ. There could not be numerical growth without this. But there must be a continuation of teaching those who have been converted in order that there may be spiritual growth. The teaching of the congregation involves reproving, rebuking, and exhorting with regard to christian opportunities and responsibilities. Most of us, however, prefer teaching which affects others rather than ourselves. Preachers and teachers notice this in the response they receive to their teaching. But the teaching which we may like best may not be that which will result in the greatest acceptable growth of the congregation.

—Editor

Banner of Truth Faces Financial Realities

We have been so fortunate over the years to receive adequate financial support for *Banner of Truth*. We have been encouraged by our brethren, congregations and individuals, who responded to our needs in a great way.

Until recently there has been no need for us to ask for additional help, and we have not done so. However, in rather recent times our situation has changed considerably. This has been brought on primarily by the increase in paper and postage.

Postage has increased more than twenty percent this year. Just recently the cost of paper has doubled. A little more than a year ago, we were able to purchase 200,000 sheets of paper for \$1,580, but our last purchase of 100,000 sheets cost us \$1,580.

Since we use over thirty thousand sheets of paper each issue, our cost is almost \$500.00 per printing. Postage is well over \$1,110 each issue. Ink, plates and miscellanea average about \$50.00. Altogether our cost is near \$1,700.00 for each issue of B.O.T.

On August 1, we had a balance on hand of approximately \$6,170.00. Our expenses for August and September were approximately \$4,473.00. That leaves, on October 1, a balance on hand of \$3,467.

We would hate to see our work curtailed, nor do we want to disappoint the thousands of BOT readers.

We do not like to make such appeals for help, but we know of no other way to keep our work going.

—Editor

The Myth of Peaceful Islam

Over the years, there have been many myths, some of which are insignificant as no harm may be involved. This not the case, however, with some myths. This certainly is not the case with The Myth of Peaceful Islam.

A recent article prompts our thoughts on this subject. It comes via *The Paducah Sun* (Oct. 21, 2008), and is entitled *Taliban Kill Christian Aid Worker*. The article is by Amir Shah of the Associated Press. Consider the following excerpts —

Kabul, Afghanistan — Taliban assailants on a motorbike gunned down a Christian aid worker in Kabul on Monday and the militants said she was killed for spreading her religion—a rare targeted killing of a Westerner in the nation’s capital.

“Gayle Williams, a 34 year old dual British–South African national who helped handicapped Afghans, was shot to death as she was walking to work about 8 a.m., said Interior Ministry spokesman Zemeru Bashary.

“A spokesman for the militants said the Taliban ordered her killed because she was accused of proselytizing.

“‘This woman came to Afghanistan to teach Christianity to the people of Afghanistan,’ Zabiulla Mujahid told The Associated Press. ‘Our (leaders) issued a decree to kill this woman.’

“A spokeswoman for the aid group SERVE — Serving Emergency Relief and Vocational Enterprises — said it is a Christian organization but denied it was involved in proselytizing.

“‘It’s not the case they preach, not at all,’ said the spokeswoman, Rina van der Ende. ‘They are here to do NGO (aid) work.’”

The article at hand points out that Afghanistan is a conservative Islamic nation. “Proselytizing is prohibited by law....” The article also speaks of the twenty-three South Koreans taken hostage last year, two of whom were killed. This is an example of “Peaceful Islam.” It is only a drop in the bucket, so to speak, of the “peace” which true Islam propagates when it gains enough power to do so. The same thing could

be expected in our country if Islam gained complete control, which they have as their goal.

In view of all the terror which has occurred in the past two or three decades, why are so many of our own people, even some in high places, being duped by the myth that Islam is a peaceful religion. It never has been. Even from its very beginning, it has made “progress” by the sword, as history confirms.

We hear a lot about “Radical Islam” being behind the acts of terror. I wonder if those using that term have been led to believe in the Peaceful Islam myth. It is a matter of fact, for all who care to know, that true Islam is what so many call Radical Islam. True Islam is radical.

There are number of sources from which true information about Islam can be learned. A good place to start learning is the Koran itself. This is their “Holy Book,” but much of this brand of “holy” is evil rather than good. Even if you do not have a copy of the Koran, much of what it teaches is available on the internet.

It appears that most of our people still do not realize the danger of Islam. Yet, it is the fastest growing religion in our country and in the world. An Islamic source says there are “over 7 million” followers in America. It now outnumbers Catholics.

One writer says that Islam has historically developed in four stages: 1. Evangelism. 2. Consolidation of power. 3. Revolution. 4. Islamic State. Our country is seeing the stage number one, evangelism; though, it extends beyond what we normally think of as evangelism, the 9-11 terrorist attack being a case in point. In this event, as well as many others, thousands of Americans have died through this “evangelism.” With regard to stage number two, the consolidation of power, Muslims are now being elected to places of power and influence in U.S.A.

We shudder to think of how our lives would be changed if our country should become an Islamic state. As noted in the case above, true christians would be shot dead for professing and advocating their faith. It is past time to awake. We should have awoken long ago.

—Editor

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Jn. 20:30, 31; Rom. 10:17

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Be Baptized

*Mat. 28:19; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:47, 48;
22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12;
1Pet. 3:21*

Be Faithful Unto and Until Death

*Mat. 25:21, 34; 2Pet. 1:1-11; Rev. 2:10;
1Jno. 1:6-9*

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