

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths... and walk therein."

(Jeremiah 6:16)

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Reaping The Whirlwind

Charles A. Pledge

Hosea wrote: *"For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk; the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up"* (Hosea 8:7). The northern kingdom of Israel had sown her acts of vanity so long the only thing left was to reap the consequences. It was too late for her to change her course. She was doomed as a nation to destruction. It was just a matter of time. Israel had posited false values and lived by wrong priorities. She had sown the wind. She must reap the whirlwind.

Of significance is the lesson that we gather of that which we sow. One of the immutable laws of the universe is that like begets like. We all shall reap of the kind of life we sow. As surely as people expect to gather corn when they plant corn, so men shall reap the consequences of the nature of life they live. Paul stated it in the New Testament in Galatians 6:7-8: *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."* Whether nation or individual, physical or spiritual, the law of reaping and sowing remains unalterable.

Beyond the immutable law of reaping what we sow is the law that we shall reap more than we sow. This is what enables the farmer to plow in hope. He anticipates getting back at harvest many times more than the

seed he planted. Just one grain of corn, germinated, bearing fruit and barring insect problems, will multiply itself at least 180 times. The watermelon seed, by the same token, can multiply itself in number thousands of times and by weight an unbelievable number of times. So it is with sin. We never reap only the consequences of an act; the evil of that act will multiply itself as long as it is allowed to go unchecked. The point is very simple regarding sin: it will grow, spread, and destroy until it is brought under control by the word of God. Israel sowed the wind of sin and indifference to righteousness and truth. Now, she must reap many times over what she sowed.

The church our Savior purchased with his blood is passing through some dark times; perhaps darker than most of us realize. Not all is doom and gloom. In spite of the apostasy of a large number of our men in whom brethren had high hopes, the Lord is yet raising up capable young men of dedication and determination. But that is not the point. The point is we sowed much of the wrong kind of seed in the past and we must yet reap even worse consequences. Men can't sow the wind without reaping the whirlwind. We in no way defend the **Shellys, Copes, Wallings, Woodroofs**, et. al. There is no excuse for abandoning the faith once delivered to the saints. There is no justification for believing and teaching false doctrine. But where were we when these men started on their downward path? These men, none of

them, began believing and preaching their present error overnight. They didn't go to bed one evening whole and healthy and get up the next morning spouting the devil's doctrine.

Rubel Shelly began preaching his **Big F** and **Little f** fellowship several years ago. In the first place, numerous congregations and schools continued to use him in spite of that and other serious errors. In the second place, Rubel was preaching what a large number of preachers and congregations practiced. I have heard preachers and elders defend having a false teacher to preach to them on the basis that he would have some good things to say and would not teach error while there. The very basis for such an arrangement is abominable! It is reprehensible! Yet, many have been guilty of it. All these men have been used, and some are still being used by those who cling to some semblance of soundness. Closely related to this fact is the practice of men who claim to be sound, appearing on the same church lectureship with men known to be unfaithful. No effort is made to identify and rebuke the sin and error practiced. Rather, the condemnation of witch doctors is preferred on those lectureships. After all, it is a comfortable distance to the nearest witch doctor. One of their disciples is not likely to be present.

Inspiration is very plain about such matters. John wrote in 2 John 9-11: *"Whosoever transgresseth, and*

(Continued on page 3)

Reaping The Whirlwind...



Editorial...

Misguided Zeal

Garland M. Robinson

Some believe zeal is a virtue that is blessed by God under any circumstances. Comments are sometimes heard, "Oh, he means well," "But he seems so nice," "Look at all the work he does," "At least he is doing some things right," etc. Somehow, many people think that zealotry is the main ingredient in being pleasing unto God. How many times have you heard someone being justified in their error on the grounds of their zealotry?

Though the Bible teaches zeal is an essential ingredient in pleasing the Lord, it does not teach that it is all that is necessary. A misguided zeal brings the condemnation of God.

Paul, before his conversion, serves as an example of one with misguided zeal. It was at his feet that those who stoned Stephen laid down their clothes — *"and Saul was consenting unto his death"* (Acts 7:58; 8:1). *"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison"* (Acts 8:3). *"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem"* (Acts 9:1-2). After being converted to the Lord, he would later write of his zealotry saying, *"Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless"* (Phil. 3:6). He reminded the brethren throughout Galatia that he had once persecuted the church with great zeal (Gal. 1:13-14).

The nation of Israel is spoken of as an example of misguided zeal. By inspiration, Paul wrote to the brethren at Rome saying, *"Brethren,*

my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:1-2). Zeal is good, yea, essential in serving God acceptably, but it must be coupled with the knowledge of God's Will!

The Jews were certainly zealous in resisting and rejecting Jesus, but they contradicted the Lord's Way at every turn. Upon seeing his mighty works and hearing his words of life, they fought the more to destroy him.

Apollos was one who had zeal for the Lord but he needed the proper knowledge to go with it. After being instructed in the way of the Lord more completely, he was a great soldier of the Lord (Acts 18:24-28).

ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

There are multitudes today who have zeal but have no knowledge to go with it.

Those who are seeking to add mechanical instruments of music to their worship may have zeal, but not according to knowledge. The Word of the Lord authorizes "singing" but does not authorize "playing" or "making sounds" with the mouth which imitate musical instruments. No passage can be found in the New Testament which authorizes anything but singing. *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* (Eph. 5:19). *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"* (Col. 3:16; cf. Matt. 26:30; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; I Cor. 14:15; James 5:13).

Those who are seeking to add choirs, choruses, solos — special music presentations — in their worship may have zeal, but not according to knowledge. Such additions are a perversion of the right ways of the Lord. The Bible only authorizes congregational singing in worship. Those who advocate such liberties as "group singing" need to study the words "yourselves" and "one another" in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 quoted above. The Greek word used in these passages is a reciprocal pronoun and involves the exercise of all those who are present in carrying it out. *"Speaking to yourselves"* and *"teaching one another"* requires an interchange of action. The ones speaking and the ones acted upon are the same individuals! The speaking to be done by singing is to be done mutually or reciprocally, at the same time! When certain ones sing and others listen, this is not done.

Those who desire a wider role for women in the worship of the church may have zeal, but not according to knowledge. It may be the "in thing" to have women waiting on the Lord's table, leading singing, leading prayer or even preaching in today's society, but all that is needed to authorize such is a *"thus saith the Lord."* But, no such word from the Lord has been given except this... *"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence"* (I Tim. 2:11-12). *"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church"* (I Cor. 14:34-35).

Those who seek fellowship with denominations may have zeal, but not according to knowledge. There are many today that are joining hands in worship services and activities with those who are the enemies of the Lord. With such "fellowship" Jehovah says, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (Eph. 5:11). *"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doc-*

trine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 9-11). "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17-18).

Those who do not demand a "thus saith the Lord" for all they say and do may have zeal, but not according to knowledge. The Word says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). What we do or say religiously must be authorized by God or it is not in accordance with God's Will.

ZEAL WITH KNOWLEDGE TODAY

A zealous servant of the Lord worships God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The right frame of mind is coupled with the authorized acts of worship in order for his worship to be acceptable unto God.

A zealous servant of the Lord does good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). A benevolent spirit — acts of kindness and sympathy — is held toward all, in and out of the church (cf. II Cor. 9:12-13).

A zealous servant of the Lord seeks to edify every member of the body of Christ. "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification" (Rom. 15:2). "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (I Thess. 5:11). The brethren of the church at Corinth were told, "...forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church" (I Cor. 14:12). "Let all things be done unto edifying" (I Cor. 14:26).

A zealous servant of the Lord

evangelizes with every opportunity. One of the last statements the Lord made on earth was, "...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19-20). "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

A zealous servant of the Lord makes his calling and election

sure (II Peter 1:10). Every child of God must continually examine himself whether he be "in the faith" (II Cor. 13:5). In the process of so doing, one looks at his service in the kingdom. Certain questions are asked: "Am I obedient," "Am I diligent," "Am I enthusiastic in the Lord's work," "Do I have the motivation to exhort others unto every good work?" How would you answer these questions?

CONCLUSION

Are you a faithful servant of the Lord? Is your service pleasing in God's sight? Is your zeal misguided? "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

Reaping The Whirlwind...

(Continued from page 1)

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. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." In his first epistle, John made fellowship with one another conditional on walking in the light. We read in I John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Let the liberals say what they will, John tells us that if we want fellowship with God and persons who have fellowship with God that we must walk in the light God gives; the light of his Word. John tells us in 2 John that the sphere of fellowship with God is the doctrine which proceeds from Christ. To go beyond this places one outside God's fellowship. Plainly, numerous men who formerly preached the gospel have become wise beyond that which is written and no longer preach the doctrine of Christ. To even wish them well in their efforts is to partake of their evil deeds — how much more to use them and defend them!

Obviously, we are going to lose many more to the false doctrines

presently espoused by the Shellys, Copes, Wallings, Allens, etc., before we get things reversed. We need to learn some lessons, swallow our pride, admit our failures to take an unflinching stand and stand there long ago. The pragmatic position of **Form Criticism, Existentialism, and Neo-Orthodoxy** will continue to take its toll among gullible and ignorant brethren for some time to come. The inroads have been made in our schools and papers. There are no instant brakes we can apply. It is a long, laborious task ahead fraught with disappointments, grief and sacrifices. The battle is not for the timid and fearful. He who is concerned about his image had as well stay home.

Yes, the winds of indifference, worldly attitudes and actions, materialism, and the desire for the new and novel have been sown. As Israel of old, spiritual Israel, the church, had better prepare to reap the whirlwind. But let all those who love the Lord and tremble at his word take up the sword of the Spirit and fight the good fight of faith. The battle has always belonged to the Lord for those who will honor him in submissive obedience. Let those who would sow the wind of compromise repent and join in the battle or get out and join the enemy in name as well as in practice.

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Who Is My Brother? With Whom May I Have Fellowship?

Gil Yoder

It may be true that "we be brethren," but some brethren walk not with Christ our elder brother (1 John 1:7), and to have fellowship with them is to abandon our Lord.

Much has been written lately about the questions of "brotherhood" and "fellowship." Much of the talk began with the so-called "Restoration Summits," the first one being held August 7-9, 1984, but the questions have been brewing for an even longer period of time. The first "summit" was a meeting of one hundred men from among the churches of Christ and the "independent" or "conservative" Christian Church, fifty from each side, to seek ways to unite the two churches. Though there may have been a few present not willing to compromise biblical principles, many were there seeking unity at any cost. Unity to them was more important than obedience to God's will!

The subject of unity necessarily involves the questions of brotherhood and fellowship. Some mistakenly equate the two terms. One side feels that fellowship should extend unto all who are brethren. Another side believes that only those with whom they have fellowship are their brothers. Both of these positions are tenuous. Fellowship and brotherhood are not synonymous.

WHAT IS A BROTHER?

The term brother and its related terms (sister, brethren, brotherhood) are used in several ways within the Bible. They are used in their literal sense: brothers and sisters in the flesh (Matt. 12:47; Acts 1:14). They are used to refer to members of the same nationality (Acts 2:29,37; 22:13). They are used of members of God's spiritual family (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:6; 7:15; cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). It is with reference to the latter that our question of brotherhood deals. Now let us answer the question...

WHO IS MY BROTHER?

Obviously, all who are members of God's family are brethren. God's family is also referred to as the church (1 Tim. 3:15) and the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5). To enter God's family is to enter His church — His kingdom. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). All who have been born again are brethren.

Jesus went on to say, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The birth of water and the Spirit takes place when one obeys the instructions of the Spirit in scriptural baptism. We should not be surprised therefore to find that God adds to the church those who have been baptized in order to have the remission of sins (Acts 2:38,41,47). This does not though mean that everyone who is "baptized" enters the kingdom.

Scriptural baptism must be accompanied by faith and confidence in Christ and His Word (John 3:16; Mark 16:16; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6), and genuine repentance from past sins, including the repudiation of denominational error (Matt. 3:7-8; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30). This latter fact alone calls into question the baptism of those who enter the Christian Church thereby!

Those who have been properly baptized become the children of God (Gal. 3:26-27), and hence are brethren in Christ.

Who then is my brother? It is he who has complied with the prerequisites of salvation and has been baptized for the remission of his sins. May all become so!

WITH WHOM MAY I HAVE FELLOWSHIP?

We have mentioned those who believe that fellowship should be extended to all brethren. The late brother Reuel Lemmons, and for many years considered faithful to the truth, argued at the first "summit" that unity between the Christian Church and the churches of Christ already exists, because members of both groups have been born again, and that those who do not recognize this unity commit sin. Many have argued this point since then. It does not seem to matter if serious doctrinal differences exist between us (or for that matter whether or not members of the Christian Church have truly been scripturally baptized and entered the kingdom). If one has been baptized (some would even include those baptized for purposes other than remission of sins), we are supposed to accept them in fellowship, they say. Fellowship, we are told, is simply a recognition of brotherhood — not evidence of endorsement. This position is simply not taught within scripture.

The fact that one may be my brother does not automatically mean that I should have fellowship with him. This is true for several reasons: (1) Paul condemned the Corinthians for keeping fellowship with a brother that was living in fornication with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5). (2) He commanded the Romans to mark and avoid brethren who taught false doctrine causing division (Rom. 16:17). (3) He told the Thessalonians to have no company with brethren who walked disorderly (2 Thess. 3:11-15). We cannot be in fellowship with every brother, regardless of his standing before God, and expect to

be pleasing to God ourselves! To do so is to partake in their sins; it is indeed endorsement of their error (2 John 10-11).

On the other hand, we dare not reserve fellowship only for those who hold the same opinions as we. When opinions are made tests of fellowship, we bind where God has not bound. In this area Paul taught us to follow the principle of liberty (Rom. 14:1 — 15:1). We must take care to distinguish our opinions from doctrines taught within the Bible.

With whom may I have fellowship? I may have fellowship with all who submit to the will of God. The only scriptural basis for fellowship (unity) is the revelation of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3-6). We must agree with all that He taught, or else we must be divided! It may be true that "we be brethren," but some brethren walk not with Christ our elder brother (1 John 1:7), and to have fellowship with them is to abandon our Lord. As much as we want unity, we cannot have it at that cost!

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Lessons From The FIRST GOSPEL SERMON

Ian McPherson

Acts chapter 2 is a type of pivot point in the Bible. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles in accordance with Old Testament prophecies and in accordance with the promise Christ gave to the apostles (John 7:37-37; 16:7-15; Acts 1:5,8). With this outpouring of the Holy Spirit came the revelation of the New Testament message that was previously unknown to man and hidden in the mind of God (Eph. 3:1-5). The gospel that we are to preach today is a result of this miraculous revelation of God's will. It is impossible for anyone to know God's will without being taught it through words written in the Bible. Through the preaching of the gospel, the church of Christ came into existence. The day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is the point in history that the church was established and the gospel in its simplicity and completeness was first fully preached.

Let us notice some important facets of this first gospel sermon that must be followed by all faithful gospel preachers in the Lord's church today.

IT WAS A SCRIPTURAL SERMON. Acts 2:4, *"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."* The source of Peter's words was the **Spirit of God.** Although we cannot speak by direct revelation today as the apostles did, we must still speak only what is revealed to us by the Spirit in His Word. Although the method of **imparting truth** has changed, the **message itself** has not changed. It is up to each preacher to study the text (2 Tim. 2:15) and relay accurately to men the message of God. **Scriptures do not have their source in the mind of man, but rather in the mind of God** (1 Cor. 2:11). Preaching must **never** present the opinions of men, but must always contain a *"thus saith the Lord"* for everything that is taught.

IT WAS A CHRIST-CENTERED SERMON. Christ's death on the cross was no accident. Peter preached, *"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain"* (Acts 2:23). God planned the crucifixion of Christ from before the creation of the world and knew that the cross would have very powerful drawing power.

An account is told of a missionary preaching about the crucifixion of Christ to a crowd in India. A Hindu priest was in the crowd becoming very restless. He suddenly sprang to his feet and pleaded with the missionary to stop. When the preacher inquired as to why, the Hindu admitted that they had no one like the crucified Christ in the Hindu religion and he was afraid the people would forsake their Hindu temples and follow Jesus.

Peter's sermon not only contained the emotion of the cross, but also the powerful and indisputable evidence of the resurrection of Christ from the grave (v.24) and His glorious exaltation to the right hand of God (vs.33-35). In fact his entire sermon was centered around Christ. When Paul came to Corinth he said he was *"determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2). The gospel cannot be preached without having **Christ at its very center.** Faithful preaching must exalt Christ.

IT WAS A SCRIPTURE-FILLED SERMON. Peter quoted Scriptures and applied them properly. He quoted Joel 2:28-32 and from it proved that what they were observing was the fulfillment of that prophecy (Acts 2:14-21). He quoted Psalms 16:8-11 and 110:1 to prove these prophecies referred to the resurrection of Christ and His exaltation into heaven (Acts 2:25-36). Many today are preaching very eloquent sermons with wonderful illus-

trations but very few Bible references. It reminds me of the woman that went to the preacher after his sermon, shook his hand and said "you needed a sermon with your illustrations!" Although well placed illustrations are needed and can be powerful and interesting, we must remember that unless we quote the Scriptures, we are taking away the convicting power from our sermons. Peter did not simply, refer to these Scriptures, but **quoted them word for word**, and it was the word of God that convicted the 3,000 Jews to repent and be baptized (Act 2:38-42). When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness he defeated Satan by accurately quoting Scripture (Matt. 4:4,6,10). In the early church many Jews were wanting to go back into the old covenant and Paul settled the argument once and for all by quoting and applying the scripture. He said in Galatians 4:30, "*Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bond woman and her son: for the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.*" As New Testament Christians who love the word of God, disputes can be settled with a "*nevertheless what saith the scripture?*"

When Scripture is read in sermons it needs to be the **very word of God** that is quoted. Preachers must not read from a paraphrased version of the Bible or from a version that follows the concept of "Thought Inspiration." Only accurate versions, presenting word for word translation, should ever be used in the pulpit. In Matthew 22:32 Christ quoted Exodus 3:6 which says: "*I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*" In this argument he used the tense of a verb to prove that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still living. By this powerful argument Christ silenced the Sadducees who did not believe in life after death and the resurrection of the dead. Every word and every syllable of the Bible is verbally inspired; and, if the message is going to convict and teach accurately, then our sermons need to be **Scripture filled** messages like Peter's on the day of Pentecost.

IT WAS A CLEAR AND LOGICAL SERMON. Notice the logical arguments that Peter used to prove

a point. In verse 15 he proved that the disciples were not drunk because it was "*the third hour of the day.*" In verses 22-23 he presented undeniable and logical evidence to convince his hearers that Jesus was the Christ. In verse 29 his simple application to Scripture proved beyond doubt that Christ, not David, was the one spoken of by the prophet. Our preaching must be clear, presenting arguments that hearers can understand. Speculation should never be a part of preaching. Long words and fancy philosophical arguments should be avoided. The Lord's pulpit needs sermons that will convict the gainsayer and silence the mouths of speculators and false teachers. We must "*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*" (1 Thess. 5:21).

IT WAS A HEART-CONVICTING AND LIFE-CHANGING SERMON. Acts 2:37 says, "*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" Thayer's Lexicon says this means "They were smitten in the heart with poignant sorrow." Unfortunately, there is sometimes a tendency today to have sermons simply aimed at making people "feel good about themselves." It is said that preaching about specific sins is too negative and will only turn people off. Although we must edify the righteous in our preaching, we must also convict the sinners. The purpose of the Holy Spirit coming was to bring the message of truth that would "*reprove the world of sin, righteousness and judgment*" (John 16:8). There are many like those in Jeremiah's time who were crying "*Peace, peace; when there is no peace*" (Jer. 6:13-14).

Before Peter baptized the penitent believers on the day of Pentecost we must remember that he spent some time with them talking about sin and its consequences: "*And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation*" (Acts 2:40). We do not have the "many other words" of Peter recorded here, but by reading through Acts and seeing what was taught on other occasions we have a good idea of what he said. About 3,000 repentant souls

responded to the gospel and were baptized that day. However we can have little doubt that there were many like the rich man who went away sorrowful because they were not willing to surrender worldly pursuits that were hindering their following Jesus (Matt 19:22). Also, there could have been many like the Jews in Acts 7:54 who "*gnashed on him (Stephen) with their teeth,*" and like Felix who **trembled at the preaching** of "*righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*" (Acts 24:24-25). The aim of gospel preaching is to convict hearts, change lives and edify hearers who have good and honest hearts. If people reject the message of Christ, it is their fault, not the preacher's. But if sin and righteousness are not clearly taught it is the preacher's fault (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

IT WAS A MOTIVATING SERMON WITH AN INVITATION. "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:38). After giving the terms of pardon, Peter then urges the people to obey (v.38-40). It is becoming more and more prevalent for the invitation to be left off sermons, yet how can we expect a genuine response of sinners without it? An invitation, clearly giving the conditions of pardon, should be a part of every sermon. Although most of the listening audience may be faithful Christians, there may be someone who needs to obey the gospel or repent of sins. Also, young children who constantly hear it will more easily come to obedience when they reach the age of accountability because they are continually admonished to repent and be baptized.

The first gospel sermon was a great and powerful lesson that convicted the hearts and brought about the baptism of about 3,000 souls. We must take a lesson from Peter so that we too can convict souls through the preaching of the gospel.

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Still The Most Critical Problem

Bill Jackson, deceased



The question is often asked, "What is the most critical problem facing the church today?" The answers are varied and often given in keeping with that particular man's interest and concern, and for all the answers, all of them play a part in today's time of discontent, unrest and turmoil. And, when we state that which is to us the MOST critical problem, we know that some may disagree. Still, the answer we would give is this: **THE LACK OF QUALIFIED, SCRIPTURAL AND FUNCTIONING ELDERS!** We know this problem then aggravates some of the others; indeed, were it not for this problem, some of the others could not have been given birth, or would have been "nipped in the bud."

Where did we go wrong regarding the eldership? Certainly the Scriptures furnish us unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16,17), and the point is clear that the Scriptures then furnish us completely unto the organization of the church and the functioning of those within that organization. The list of qualifications, set forth in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1, with other passages relating to the eldership, lets us know the spiritual qualities to be in the men thus to be appointed. And, there is no shortage of material in the New Testament regarding the work that is given the elders, with such words as "oversee...feed...take care of...watch for souls..." making it very clear. In looking over all that is said in the New Testament regarding the eldership, we see no lack, nor would we expect to find such, since the Scriptures completely furnish us! Looking at all that God has provided, is it not clear that men have chosen to ignore what the Word says, and have proceeded by their own devices?

It has been disappointing through the years, in seeing how some brethren have approached the matter of appointing elders, with thoughts of spirituality set aside while men are selected by some other rule. It has also been disap-

pointing that, while there must be the desire of the man to serve (1 Tim. 3:1) before he can be appointed, some who have the desire and are most anxious to be appointed have again and again given little thought to the work as being spiritual in nature. One other disappointment has been in seeing men appointed, and then they have little concept of what an elder is to be and do, and other than having meetings to see to the finances of the church, do little else. Perhaps a summary statement here would be that too often money is the prime consideration, and souls are forgotten!

It must be admitted that in some instances we have a problem when we really have not appointed the wrong men. There is a problem because the men appointed have not grown. And, growth is expected...it must be! One newly appointed as an elder, for all spirituality and all wisdom, is still newly an elder, not having so served before. He will have to apply, to work, to study, to labor, to continue to be what God expects him to be, and to function as an elder whom God can bless! It should be clear that one cannot so insulate himself with concern for a congregation of people, that he knows nothing of problems, errors, apostasies, and threats to the faith that must be just beyond his doorstep. We live in a

mobile time, and sin and Satan always have been. How could I be a guardian, shepherd, and protector of the flock, and yet have no concern for the forest fires raging out of control all around me, and knowing that at any moment some of those sparks may land and ignite right where I am?

Ours is a most hurtful time. A perilous time, Paul would say (2 Tim. 3:1). Many things of spiritual import are hurting; many things are lacking; and many things are being perverted. Our need for QUALIFIED, SPIRITUAL, and FUNCTIONING elders, I think, heads the list of things we truly need, and which things we must have if we're to be the people of God. We speak of "adhering to the pattern," and we must, but shall we default in this aspect of the pattern?

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"A friend recently gave me a copy of S.T.O.P. I enjoyed reading it. I would like to be added to your mailing list. There seems to be so much published declaring change is needed just for the sake of change without regard to what the scriptures authorize. We must continually be on guard to teach sound

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