

A LOOK AT HOW ERROR GROWS

The church of our Lord has gone through many departures from the faith. These departures generally follow the same pattern. First there is a departure in organization, followed by a departure in many fundamental doctrinal points in teaching, and then comes a departure in worship.

THE FIRST MAJOR DEPARTURE

The first major departure from the original pattern revealed in the word of God resulted in the Roman Catholic church. There was first a departure in organization (church government). In their meetings to transact business, elders would select one of their number to preside over the meeting. In the course of time the presiding elder became known as "the bishop" and the other elders as "presbyters" (In the New Testament a bishop, an elder, and a presbyter are one and the same office -- Acts 20: 17, 28). In time "the bishop" really began to feel his importance and exalted himself above his fellow-elders! As more time passed the bishop in a city church was considered more important than the elders of country churches, so the "city bishop" presided over the elders of country churches. The power and authority of these bishops was regulated by the importance of the cities in which they presided. In time there came to be five capitols of the world -- Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople. There was a struggle between the bishop of Constantinople and the bishop of Rome over who would be "universal bishop". The controversy was settled in 606 A.D. when the title was given to Boniface III, Bishop of Rome.

While departures in organization were taking them farther and farther from the New Testament pattern, there were other doctrinal departures taking place. The name of the church was changed to "Holy Catholic Church", and finally changed to "The Holy Roman Catholic Church". A change was made in the subject of baptism when they began to baptize infants as well as believers; and a change was also made in the form of baptism by the substitution of sprinkling and pouring for immersion. A human creed was introduced, then finally there came a change in worship. The first appearance in history of the use of instrumental music in worship was about the sixth century A.D., but no general attempt was made to introduce instrumental music into the worship until after the eighth century A.D.

One can see as he looks at the development of the first major apostasy that departures from the truth come one at a time, and that once the first step is taken away from the truth ERROR GROWS! One step leads to another and another and another!

THE SECOND MAJOR DEPARTURE

The second major apostasy resulted in the Christian church. There was first a departure in organization. Some in the church had a desire for a "general church organization" for the furtherance of the work of the church. In October of 1849 a convention was held in Cincinnati, Ohio and the American Christian Missionary Society was organized. This move was met with bitter opposition from those who believed the church (local congregation) was sufficient to carry out the will of God.

About ten years after the formation of the missionary society, instrumental music was introduced into the worship of the church at Midway, Kentucky. The preacher who did this was L. L. Pinkerton and the year was 1859. In 1869 the Olive Street church in St. Louis, Missouri bought a building from the Episcopalians which had a pipe organ in it, and they began to use it in their worship. This caused quite a stir in the congregation, and a considerable number of prominent and influential members left and began to meet elsewhere. J. W. McGarvey said: "The affair (using the organ at Olive St. -- dt) awakened intense interest throughout the brotherhood, and was regarded as seriously imperiling the unity that had hitherto prevailed in the body at large." After this happened in St. Louis the instrument was rapidly introduced into hundreds of churches.

As the church was departing from the faith in organization and worship, it was also departing rapidly in fundamental doctrine. The digressive churches had their "educational directors", "associate ministers" and "youth directors". They began to celebrate days of heathen worship such as "Easter", "Christmas", and "Holy Week" (they began to observe the Lord's supper on Thursday evening in recognition of "Holy Week"). They began to serve dinners and sell all kinds of merchandise to raise money. They began to use choirs to do the singing. There is almost no end to their departures from the faith! Again, one can see what just one step away from the truth will do -- ERROR GROWS FAST !

THE THIRD MAJOR DEPARTURE

In our generation we have seen a third departure from the faith. The first step away from the truth was the formation of human organizations to do the work of benevolence. These children's asylums (called Orphan Homes) seemed innocent in the minds of many in the church. They could not see how such could lead to a great apostasy! In fact, many thought anyone who would oppose these being put in the budget of the church was an "orphan hater". With the rise of the popularity of the orphan home came the "sponsoring church" to do the work of evangelism. On the heels of the "sponsoring church" came the "Gospel Press", and finally colleges were put in the budget of churches without too much opposition. Preachers began to wear the title of "Doctor". Churches began to build kitchens and recreational rooms in their buildings; "youth directors" and "associate ministers" began to be hired. Brethren began to go on "retreats" like the Catholics and to have choirs like the Baptists. Summer camps began to be supported from the treasury of the church; churches began to operate homes for unwed mothers and "half-way" houses. Youth rallies became the thing of the day. Then came the "bus ministry" with all its carnal reward motivation, and "singles" classes became a big thing. Worship services (in some places) took on the sound and appearance of a group of the Holiness church; prayer meetings were held with dimmed lights and the holding of hands like the Spiritualist. The Holy Spirit movement came and some claimed that they were baptized with the Holy Spirit and could speak in tongues; many began to teach the "direct indwelling" of the Holy Spirit in Christians, and others claimed to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Many began to teach the doctrine of Calvinism -- predestination and the "imputed righteousness" of Jesus Christ; and on and on and on!

Again, one can see how error grows! Just one step away from the truth, and if that step is not corrected it will grow into complete apostasy from the Faith! Thirty-five years ago you could not have told many people in this country who were all caught up in the "orphan home" movement that it would lead to all these things. Many who have stayed with churches where all these departures have come will not admit until this day that the thing which opened the door for it all was support from the church treasury of that seemingly innocent institution called an "orphan home"! Yes, my brethren, ERROR GROWS, and it GROWS FAST!!

The church of our Lord is sufficient to do all the work that God intended it to do. What we need to do is adhere strictly to the pattern of work and worship that is laid down in the New Testament.

~Donald Townsley