

*(Written during the 1990's, this article is as timely today as it was then.)*

## **SIGNS OF DANGERS CONFRONTING THE CHURCH**

Dangers have always confronted the church and always will. In Acts 20 Paul warned the Ephesian elders of dangers. He warned of dangers as he wrote to Timothy (I Tim. 4: 1 - 6; II Tim. 4: 1 -5). He warned the church in Thessalonica of dangers ( II Thess. 2 : 1 - 12). As we near the end of the 1990's, I see many dangers that face God's people, and I believe those of us who are older had better be pointing them out! Bear with us as we look at some of the danger signs we see that are confronting the church.

### **THE DANGER OF HAVING A GAP BETWEEN DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE**

Both doctrine and practice are necessary to success in God's sight. James said, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" ( James 1:25). So we see that having the right doctrine will not avail before God without practice. Let us notice where we fail in practice.

We teach that Christians must know the will of God (Heb. 5: 12 -14; Eph. 5:17), but in practice many do not study at home neither do they attend the periods of Bible study provided by the congregation. We teach that the gospel is the power of God to save ( Rom. 1:16), but in practice we do not preach and teach it as we should because there are people all around us who have never heard a gospel sermon! We teach that the local congregation is the only organization God has to do the work of the church, but in practice many take no part in the work of the congregation, and others do nothing but criticize and "nibble" the church to death! We teach that we should give as we have prospered (I Cor. 16: 1 - 2), but in practice many fail miserably in their duty from this standpoint. We teach we are to be zealous (Col. 3:23; Rev. 2: 4 - 5), but in practice many are so indifferent it is depressing and discouraging to both saint and sinner. We teach that we must be separated from the world ( II Cor. 6: 17; Rom. 12: 1 - 2; I Jn. 2: 15 -17), but in practice many members are not separated from the world in the way they live, the way they dress, nor in the way they talk!

Brethren, this wide gap between teaching and practice will in time destroy the church carrying it into apostasy.

### **THE DANGER OF NOT PUTTING EMPHASIS ON "THUS SAITH THE LORD"**

The cornerstone principle of all preaching and teaching is found in I Peter 4: 11, "If any many speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." When preaching and teaching is based upon human reasoning and logic, the thinking of Christians is being guided by the opinions of men and not by the word of God. God's people are to "walk by faith, not by sight" ( II Cor. 5:7). Brethren, when we are teaching on any subject we are to use the word of God as our authority for being FOR or AGAINST something. We must quote the apostles and inspired men, not the distinguished men of the present or past. They have nothing to do with what is right or wrong. When a gospel preacher preaches on any subject his task is simple: he is to turn to the word of God and find what the Lord has said on the subject and teach this to the people.

Brethren, I see a decreasing emphasis on a "thus saith the Lord" in preaching and teaching. It is a step in the wrong direction that will bring with it the bitter fruits of digression.

## THE DANGER OF THE CHURCH BECOMING A "CATCH-ALL"

The church of our Lord is made weak and is cheapened in the eyes of men when it takes into its fellowship (without asking any questions and with no consideration of the kind of lives these people live) everyone it can beg and persuade to become a part. The Jerusalem church did not take Paul into their number until they checked him out (Acts 9: 16 - 17). This ought to be the attitude of congregations today.

The church that is so concerned with number and money to such a degree that it combs the community to persuade any and all who have been baptized to come and be members regardless of how they live, will lose its spirituality and its power for good.

Whenever church membership ceases to have real meaning in faith and manner of life of its members, that congregation has drifted from its purpose and usefulness in God's sight (Rev. 3: 14 - 22).

## THE DANGER OF THE CHURCH TAKING ON SOCIAL AND DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITY

The church, by the authority of Christ, has been authorized to do only three things: (1) Preach to the lost ( I Tim. 3:15; Mk. 16: 15 - 16), (2) Edify the saved ( Eph. 4: 11 - 15), and (3) Help needy saints ( I Cor. 15: 1 - 2; Acts 4:32).

The social and domestic responsibilities belong to the home and the individual. Individuals are to show hospitality (I Pet. 4:9; Heb. 13:2). Hospitality is to be shown in the home and is not a part of the work of the church (I Cor. 11: 22, 34; I Tim. 5:10; Acts 2:46). A Christian is under obligation to bring his children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ( Eph. 6:4; I Tim. 5:8). The church cannot take over the task of rearing our children for us.

The church must be careful not to let individual efforts in the realm of the social and domestic become too closely identified with the church. Brethren, I see some danger signals along this line. The wise will hearken to counsel (Prov. 12: 15).

## THE DANGER OF A LACK OF PERSONAL CONSECRATION FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

This is seen in the laziness on the part of preachers of the gospel in their failure to read and study the word of God ( II Tim. 2:15). The result of their failure to study is shown in their inability to see dangers and to sound warnings (I Tim. 4: 1 - 6). This is also seen in the divided interest on the part of preachers. Some are too involved in the affairs of this life to be consecrated to their work of preaching the gospel ( II Tim. 2: 1- 7; Phil. 2: 20 - 21).

This is seen in the laziness on the part of Bible teachers. Many fail to study as they ought, coming to class just half-prepared. Many have no desire to take advantage of every opportunity to learn more.

This is seen in members who are unwilling to make the necessary personal sacrifices to be consecrated. They love pleasure more than God, and are not willing to put the kingdom first in their lives (Mt. 6:33).

We have touched on only a few of the danger signs that I see confronting us during these times, but I have determined that I will not keep my pen still nor my mouth shut about these things that I see that can lead to our destruction.

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