

# **THINGS THAT HAVE BROUGHT (AND DO BRING)**

## **DEPARTURES FROM THE FAITH**

Since its establishment on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the church has faced many dangers and experienced many departures from the faith. Dangers have always faced the church and always will. Men of God must always be sent for the defense of the gospel and ever be ready to contend for the faith (Phil. 1:17; Jude 3). As in the days of Isaiah many today call "evil good and good evil" and "put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isa. 5:20). The only way God's people can know they are pleasing in His sight is to go "to the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). Let us now notice some dangers that bring departures from the faith.

### **THE DANGER OF THE CHURCH NOT BEING CHRIST-CENTERED**

The church of the first century gave Christ the preeminence in all things ( Col. 1: 18). Paul said to the Corinthians, "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (I Cor. 2:2) Philip went down to the city of Samaria and "preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch ( Acts 8:35). Jesus said in Matthew 10:37 that men must make Him the center of their love. We, as Christians, must keep Christ uppermost in our hearts at all times, realizing that He must be pleased with our service! Peter said, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:" (I Pet. 3:15). When our lives are Christ-centered we will ask, in whatever we do, "Did Christ authorize this?" (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1: 22 - 23); or "Will this be pleasing in His sight?" (Heb.4:13). The church must ever remember that Christ said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). John said that Christ was in the midst of the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:13). Christ is in the midst of His churches today.

The only way the church can be Christ-centered and show its love for Him is to be loyal to His word (John 14: 15). Many local congregations have "driven Christ out" and "barred Him from the pulpit", because Christ said in Matthew 25:40, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me". Paul persecuted the disciples of Christ (Acts 9:1) and Christ said that Paul persecuted Him (Acts 9:4). So many churches have driven disciples from their midst who only wanted to be Christ-centered in all that they did in work and worship! They simply wanted to be loyal to His word in all things! Many preachers have been fired because their preaching was Christ-centered -- they gave book, chapter and verse! How is it where you worship? Is Christ given preeminence in all things? (Col. 1: 18). Does the church where you worship abide in the doctrine of Christ? (II John 9). Is the church where you worship "men-centered"? Are men thought of "above that which is written?" ( I Cor. 4:6). Does the church where you worship support human institutions such as schools and benevolent societies? If so, how can it be Christ-centered when Christ never mentioned at any time during His personal ministry on earth anything concerning the building of such? His apostles never "bound" one (Matt. 18:18), and there is no record of any apostolic church ever contributing to one!

## **THE DANGER OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM BEING GIVEN SECOND PLACE IN THE LIVES, TIME AND IMPORTANCE OF MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH.**

Christ and His kingdom will accept no place but first place in our lives. Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). He also said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10: 37). Christ and His kingdom will not take second place to pleasure, to the "cares of this world", to the striving for riches, to holidays, or to anything else! One of the signs in the church today that Christ and His kingdom are being given second place in the lives of Christians is the way they attend the services of the church. One of the purposes of our coming together is to be edified that we might have strength to meet the problems and temptations of life (Heb. 10: 24 - 25; Eph. 4:16), but when only fifty or sixty percent of the members come back for Sunday evening services, something is wrong spiritually! When you have less in attendance for Sunday morning Bible study than the membership of the congregation, it is a further indication that the Lord and His kingdom are being given second place. A church has a series of gospel meetings to preach the gospel to the lost and edify the church, and more than half of the membership of the congregation do not attend and support the gospel that is being preached! This half-hearted devotion to duty is just further evidence that Christ and His kingdom are being given second place in the lives of Christians! The "disease" among us that is causing all this absenteeism is unbelief, selfishness, worldliness, lust and a lack of love! When you have this situation in a congregation, you have a fertile breeding-ground for many other spiritual problems!

## **THE DANGER THAT MATERIAL AND SECULAR THINGS WILL BE PUT AHEAD OF THE SPIRITUAL**

By "material" I mean an emphasis upon passing material things. The people in the United States are "mad" in their search after and dependence upon the "things" of this world! The chief conversation (most of the time) is on material things -- clothes, cars, homes, money, fun, food, and etc.! Jesus warned us about the poison of mammon in Matthew 6:24 when He said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other, ye cannot serve God and mammon!"

Many members of the church have become so involved with material things and having their every fleshly desire satisfied that they have turned the church into an institution to satisfy the flesh! (Phil. 3: 18 - 19). This is seen by looking at their meetinghouses and reading their bulletins. They build places in (or onto) their meetinghouses to satisfy the flesh -- places to cook and eat and places to "play". They put vast amounts of money in material buildings. This tendency toward unnecessarily showy buildings reflects man's weakness to think of a spiritual undertaking in physical terms! These great showy buildings only become a symbol of man's reliance on material things -- a monument to personal pride! These buildings are reminders of that which deterred the congregation (most of the time) rather than assisted it in spiritual growth. Brethren, read your New Testament of apostolic days and be reminded that the church of the first century did not evangelize the Roman world through the instrumentality of fine meetinghouses! The place of meeting (which is authorized) is not the subject of emphasis in the New Testament! The subject of emphasis in the New Testament is the salvation of lost mankind (Luke 19:10).

Let us determine that nothing detract from our purpose on earth -- to honor and serve God ourselves, and to teach and encourage others to serve Him as He has directed in His word! Material things will pass away, but "the word of the Lord endureth forever" (I Pet. 1:25).

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