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EDITORIAL

The Wise Men

Whenever we think of the story of the birth of Christ we also think of the wise men who had travelled a great distance to see and worship King Jesus. When Jesus was born in the Bethlehem of Judea, presently known as Palestine, the Bible says that there were wise men who had come from the East, Perhaps from India, to see Jesus and to worship Him. First they went to Herod, the king, who was ruling there at that time, and asked him: "Where is He who is born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 1:1, 2). Since Jesus was born amongst the Jews, and the Romans were ruling over the Jews at that time, the wise men recognized Jesus to be the King of the Jews. That was certainly the most disturbing news for Herod, who tried his best to get Jesus killed by ordering the killing of all male babies in and around Jerusalem. But he was unable to get Jesus killed, because Jesus was the only begotten Son of God (Matthew 1:18-25). He was born for a special cause, He was born to reveal God to man and to reveal the grace and the truth of God for all men. He was going to be the King as the wise men had rightly recognized Him; as He was going to build His church which is His kingdom and over which He rules even now. (Matthew 16:18, 19; Colossians 1:18; Isaiah 9:6, 7).

The wise men from east were actually astrologers, who had seen a special star in the sky which was moving towards the place where King Jesus was born. Now we do not know how many wise men were there. Because the Bible does not speak of any specific number of

them. The conjecture that there were "three" wise men rose from the fact that three kinds of gifts are mentioned in the Bible which they had offered to the King after they had found Him.

Those men were surely wise, because as soon as they had learned about the new special star they lost no time but began to look for the King. They came all the way from the east, walking and riding on animals to find Christ. Even today, only the wise are seeking for Jesus, and those who are truly seeking Him to worship Him and to make Him the King of their lives are certainly wise. Indubitably, He is the way that leads men to God. He is the truth, and after finding Him men no longer walk in darkness and falsehood. And, He is the life because in Him we really find the eternal life of heaven. (John 3:16).

The wise men, in seeking King Jesus, were following the guide, the star, that God had provided. The Bible record says, ". . . the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." (Matthew 2:9, 10). Even today the wisest way of finding Christ and what He requires of men is to go directly to the New Testament of the Bible and read or hear from it. The wise men of the Bible fully depended on the star of God as their guide to find Christ. Likewise, the wise people today go directly to the Bible to learn about Christ and about things which belongs to Him, such as, His church, the salvation He offers, and the obedience he requires. To really find Christ and what He desires of us there is no better way than to read or hear directly from His New Testament. Certainly, there were many many stars up in the sky when Christ was born, but the wise men were not concerned about them. They gave all importance to the star of the King that was born. They said: ". . . For we have seen His star." (Matthew 2:2). Often people want to go to men and their books to learn about Christ and His teachings. But those who directly go to the real source, the Bible, to learn about Christ and about His teachings, are certainly wise.

In the story of the birth of Christ, we read, that when the star the wise men were following from the east came and stood over where Jesus the King was born, they went inside the place and saw baby Jesus with His mother, Mary, and they fell down and worshiped Him. (Matthew 2:9-11). Notice: they didn't worship Mary. Because the wise men knew that she was just another human being who was used by God to bring His only begotten Son into the world. No doubt, Mary was a God-fearing and God-loving person, that is why God could use her for such a wonderful work, but certainly she was not "the mother of God", or

holy and sinless as Christ was. The wise men, however, worshiped Jesus, God's Son. And then, when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Jesus, that is, frankincense, gold, and myrrh, the best and most expensive gifts that they could have offered.

In his epistle to the Romans, one of the apostles of Christ wrote: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1).

In His grand sermon on the mount as Christ was about to finish His discourse, He told His listeners, "Therefore whoever hear these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock." (Matthew 7:24, 25).

After one finds Christ one must hear what He says and must do what He says to be wise. As Christ has taught, one must believe in him with whole heart and repent of all sins, and be baptized (immersed in water) to be saved from sins (Mark 16:16; Luke 13:3; Luke 24:46, 47; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39). And then, to honor Christ in his life one must worship him with His people, His church, on every Lord's day, Sunday, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Hebrews 10:25); and must conduct his life in such a way that it becomes a living sacrifice, a holy and acceptable gift to God, as we read in Colossians 3:1-17.

Desire To Be A Leader

J.C. CHOATE

The church needs leadership just like a family, school, business, army, or country must have leadership. A multitude of people may roam aimlessly up and down the streets doing little more than taking up space, but with someone to organize them and lead them, they can be turned into a great power for good or bad.

Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). Since the church is represented throughout the world in the form of local congregations, and each congregation is made up of a number of members, then this means that each local congregation needs leadership. Even on the local level, Christ is its spiritual head, and through his word—the Bible—he leads and directs them to do his will.

But concerning day-to-day decisions, what about human or physical leadership? There must be humans to fill this role.

In the early days of the church the apostles were not only commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15, 16), but we are told that those who were converted continued in the apostles' doctrine or teaching. But the apostles couldn't do all the work that needed to be done, and they couldn't be at all the places at one time, so they were also given the power and the authority from the Lord to lay their hands on certain chosen men of the church to enable them also to do miraculous works, to enable the infant church to be soundly rooted in the true revelation from God.

As the work continued to grow and congregations were planted throughout the country, the apostles stipulated that elders were to be appointed over every congregation, as well as deacons who would assist them. (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). To avoid a dictatorship, such as having a local preacher or some other brother giving sole leadership, it was emphasized that there were to be elders (two or more) over each congregation. Until there were qualified men, the leadership had to be left to the combined men of the congregation in general to do the preaching, teaching, and all the other necessary work to keep the group functioning.

In the infancy of the church, the apostles had the power to lay their hands on certain men to give them miraculous power. This enabled them to provide leadership for the church and, no doubt, many of these men were appointed elders. In other words, through the special power of the Holy Spirit, their knowledge of God's word, wisdom, faith, ability to lead, and other necessary qualifications were reached more quickly. They still had to have but one wife, to have believing children, etc., but the power of the Holy Spirit could speed up their leadership abilities, thus enabling churches to have elders in a short period of time.

We do not have the apostles living in the world today. Neither do we have anyone who has the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or anyone who has received the power of the Holy Spirit through the "laying on of hands." Therefore there is no way to speed up a man's ability to qualify for being an elder. All must grow through the normal time and process required to meet those conditions.

While it is ideal for a congregation to have elders, because this is the way the Lord would have it to be, if there are not enough qualified men in a congregation so that two or more can be appointed, it is far

better to function under the leadership of all the men. As a group, they should see after the business of the local church, arrange for meeting for worship, doing the teaching, caring for the physical needs, etc. It would be far better to be without elders than to appoint men who are not qualified. The Lord had a reason for giving qualification, and for requiring men to meet those qualifications before they can be appointed. The shame would be for the men of the congregation not to grow and to develop so that elders can be appointed.

All of the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 (except for being the husband of one wife, having believing children, being apt to teach, and not being a novice), should be easily met by all Christians, both men and women. And after some time for maturing, most all of the men should be able to meet all of the qualifications. Even all the women, in time, should develop spiritually to that ideal, except for being the husband of one wife and being able to publicly teach both men and women. In most cases women should be able to teach other women and children.

Speaking of women, why didn't the Lord include them to be considered for the eldership? Was He discriminating against women or was he implying that women are not as important as men in the church? As you study the Bible, you will note that God has always had a place for man and a place for women, a work for man and a work for woman. He obviously had ample reasons for what He has legislated. All of us should admit that God knows best and we should accept His guidance without question. The important thing is for each of us to do the work God has given us to do, and in that way his will be done and all of us will be blessed accordingly.

Even concerning the men of the congregation, Paul says that we should desire the office of a bishop (an elder). He says that if we do, we desire responsibility, because it is, in truth, a big work, a great responsibility. No one should desire to be an elder because he wants honor and glory of men. Rather, that position requires work, service, giving of one's time and love to others. One must be able to work with people, and he must love souls and be willing to work for their salvation.

The elders are to give leadership to the local congregation. They are to see after the flock, to spiritually feed the members, to be an example to them, to discipline them, and to restore the weak. They are to see that the truth is preached, that error is condemned, and that the church does the work God has given it to do. With this kind of leadership, the church will be strong, will grow, and will go forward.

The local church needs elders, and congregations throughout the world should have training classes to provide this type of leadership needs. This is the Lord's plan for his people here and everywhere. It works better than any system of organization developed by man.

Especially For Women

To The Church

BETTY BUTTON CHOATE

There are various passages of Scripture which show further spiritual work of women in the early church. One of those was allowing the home to be used as a meeting place of the church. Philemon 1:1, 2 says. "To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house ..."

Colossians 4:15: "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house."

Romans 16:5: "Likewise greet the church that is in their house . . ."

Romans 16:23: "Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you . . ."

In various parts of the world today the church of Christ is newly established. Though the church itself was first begun by Christ with the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, Jesus promised that His church would continue to exist in the world until the end of time. (Daniel 2:44; Matthew 16:18) This means that in every part of the world, and in every generation, people are being newly taught the truth and congregations may be newly developed whenever a group of Christians gathers together for worship.

In the first century, though there were temples for pagan idolatrous worship, there were no public buildings constructed particularly as meeting places for Christians to worship God. Instead, small groups met in private homes. This necessitated a willingness in the hearts of the host family to give of themselves and of their possessions for the welfare of the church.

In such a situation today, the woman of the house would do special cleaning each week in preparation for the gathering. She would prepare the emblems for the congregation to partake of the Lord's Supper: the unleavened bread in remembrance of His body, and the

juice of grapes for the memorial of His blood which was shed for us. (Matthew 26:26-28) Bibles and song books would be laid out for use in study and worship.

As Christians arrive, the woman of the household would be ready, along with her husband, to greet their spiritual brothers and sisters. They have probably moved furniture around and have set up extra chairs to make room for everybody. Of course, after the worship period when everyone is gone, additional cleaning will be needed, putting everything back in order.

Usually, people who serve as host for the church also find themselves being called on to help the individual members in various ways throughout the week. Maybe encouragement or counselling is needed, or some type of help in time of sickness or some other emergency. These works require dedication and a willingness to serve in the Lord's Family. How wonderful it is when Christians today desire to open their homes as gathering places for the church to worship God!

As the church grows in size, it may be necessary to rent or buy or build a building to be used exclusively for worship assemblies. Even then, there will be maintenance work with which Christian women can help. Sweeping, dusting, polishing in the building, and the care of any garden area and growing plants can be shared by individual Christians. Volunteers can take turns in the privilege of preparing the Lord's Supper and washing the utensils afterwards.

Since onlookers can judge to some extent our respect for God by the appearance of the place where we meet to worship Him, special care should be taken to keep everything clean and neat and in a good state of repair.

Women can do a great work in teaching their children from an early age to respect the place of worship. They should be taught to avoid putting their hands and feet on the walls, throwing papers on the floor, and marking or tearing the books. Children as well as adults need to practice taking proper care of all facilities used in serving God.

God Is Awaiting Your Decision!

DILLARD THURMAN

Success in life depends upon the ability to make decisions. Many

times life and death hang in the balance, and indecision is fatal! A driver fails to decide on a course of action, and death litters the highway! A cry for help, a moment of indecision, and a life is lost! Doctors confer, but can't reach a decision, and a patient dies on the operating table! God has given man that power of decision, and as "free moral agent" man can choose a plan for the moment, the day or life! Man picks his path, charts his course, and is captain of his soul! But he must yet face the day of reckoning and judgment. Each pinnacle of glorious achievement must come as the result of decisive action; but failure and loss results from choosing wrong, or languishing in indecision!

Yet the greatest decisions facing man are those dealing with spiritual matters. The way-ward son's decision is memorable: "*I will arise and go to my father.*" (Lk. 15:18). This decision must be faced also by a wayward, sinful world! The whole pendulum of action hinges on the determined decision, "I will." The Wise Man said, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*" (Eccl. 12:13). How many souls flounder in indecision before this foremost obligation to their God?

MULTITUDES IN THE VALLEY OF DECISION!

Long ago a prophet of God looked through the telescope of inspiration, saw the climatic day of Jerusalem's dilemma, and penned: "*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.*" (Joel 3:14). Joel viewed the indecision of Israel as their Messiah awaited their judgment! Multitudes confronted the matter then, but Jesus is still weighed in the balance to this day! Pilate asked a sobering question: "*What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?*" (Mt. 27:22). Throngs had dogged His steps, and they were all taking sides! There was no middle ground: there was no neutral ground! Jesus Himself said, "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*" (Mt. 12:30). Even so today, each must make a decision, there is no "no-man's-land."

GOD DEMANDS YOU MAKE A DECISION!

After God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, He challenged them through Moses' words: "*I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and cursings; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.*" (Deut. 30:19). It was their decision to make! Before this, He had stated it

was a choice for *"life and good, and death and evil."* (v. 15). This challenge Joshua gave as Israel faced their valley of decision: *"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* (Josh. 24:15). Thus Joshua set forth a definite, clear-cut decision that allowed no mis-understanding and no mis-application! Joshua was a practical man of faith who knew the right decision, and he made it! His passionate, yet reasonable, plea turned Israel from idolatry to serve Jehovah, their God!

VALLEY OF DECISION ON MOUNT CARMEL!

It was on Mount Carmel that Elijah challenged Israel with a valley of decision! While they lingered between the *"true and living God"* and heathen gods among them, Elijah cried out, *"How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."* (1 Kgs. 18:21). After this challenge God demonstrated His acceptance of Elijah, and 450 false prophets were slain with the sword! Elijah allowed no half-way allegiance and service; it was all, or nothing at all! Here was a challenge to follow God completely without reservations! There are many people today who are nominal believers and worshippers, yet have not made the definite decision to trust and obey Him implicitly! There are multitudes who are yet "half in—half out" in their loyalty, service and devotion! God gave the test long ago: *"What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul."* (Deut. 10:12). How does your life measure up? How do you face your valley of decision? It confronts us all!

JESUS AND THE VALLEY OF DECISION

Jesus placed a matter of decision squarely before us. 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."* (Mt. 6:24). Mammon is the personification of riches, or great wealth. Which is your choice? You can't love both; nor can you hold on to both! It is "either—or," but not the two! You can't have God and the god of materialism! You can't serve both masters! What is your decision? The Christian is warned, *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful*

lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Tim. 6:9-10). Your decision is either for the Lord, or for riches and ruin! Untold numbers have chosen worldly riches, and became spiritual paupers! Is this your valley of decision?

VALLEY OF DECISION REGARDING SERVICE

The valley of decision confronts each one who would become a servant of Christ! Paul spelled it out clearly: *"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."* (Rom. 6:16-18). Here is a definite decision made by one who becomes the servant of the Lord! Blessed is he who can turn from the lure of Satan to render true obedience to Jesus Christ! How sweet it is to turn from Satan's snare to the refuge our Lord offers! Yet it all hinges on the decision to truly serve Him! One who will trust and obey turns from the glitter of the world to the true riches which God alone can give!

THE DECISION TO SERVE JESUS CHRIST

The decision to serve the Lord Jesus Christ must be made on the basis of what He has said: *"If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."* (Jno. 12:26). This specifies that one who serves Christ must also follow Him, and frequent no places where Jesus cannot go! To serve Jesus means that Jesus and His servant will be together, always! His promise is: *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* (Jno. 14:3). For what else can we ask? Even as we leave this earth, *"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (1 Thes. 4:17). The definite decision to serve the Lord assures us eternal blessings!

WHAT IS YOUR DECISION?

What will YOUR answer be regarding that question: *"What shall I*

do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" (Mt. 27:22). Pilate said, "I'll wash my hands." The Jews cried out, "Crucify Him." Judas said, "I will betray Him." Simon of Cyrene said, "I'll bear His cross." But, friend, what is your decision in this grave matter? Heaven or hell swings on the pendulum of your answer! What is your decision? Why not decisively state, "I will accept Him as my Lord and Saviour by obeying His gospel." Heaven awaits your answer!

Take A Stand

BOBBY KEY

Jesus declared, "He that is not with me is against me." (Matthew 12:30) There is no neutral ground in this fight for truth and right. It is impossible to be for Christ and the devil at the same time. Too many people are trying to play both sides. A preacher was asked what he thought about a certain issue and he said, "Half of my friends are for it and half of my friends are against it, and I stand with all of my friends!" Of course he was joking: however, this expresses the position of far too many of us.

Could it be that we are afraid we will hurt the feelings of some of our friends? Diogenes said: "The truth is like the light to sore eyes. He who never offended anyone, never did anyone any good." It may be that there are times when we are too careful not to offend. John the baptizer fearlessly denounced evil wherever he found it. John never had to wonder which side he was on. He didn't beat around the bush when asked, about Herod's second wife. I believe occasions arise when smooth politeness is harmful, and blunt rebuke is necessary.

We need to make our positions clear. The late N.B. Hardeman once said that he could state his position on any given issue on the back of a postal card and still have enough room to tell how the folks were getting along. I stood on the floor of the U.S. Senate a few months ago and heard a famous Senator speak for thirty minutes, listening carefully to see which side he was on. I finally asked the Sergeant-at-Arms which position the man was taking. He replied that he had heard him speak all day and still didn't know!

Many preachers now-a-days are running around holding up a wet finger to see which way the wind is blowing before stating their conviction on a subject. Such is rather like the man who lived during the

Civil War on the border. He did not want to go against the North, so he wore a blue coat. He did not want to go against the South, so he wore gray pants. The only trouble was that the North shot him in the pants and South shot him in the coat! Those who will not take a stand deserve no better.

Five Plus Five Equals Five

EDDIE WHITTEN

"And five of them were wise, and five were foolish." Matthew 25:2

The parable of the ten virgins teaches a vital lesson concerning the need for preparation. The five foolish virgins failed to prepare adequately for the marriage, and when the bridegroom came they were excluded. Therefore, the five wise virgins were the only ones invited in with the bridegroom.

What was the difference between the wise and the foolish? Both groups had their lamps; both were anticipating the coming of the bridegroom; both were expecting to be a part of the marriage; both were sincere in their desire; both slumbered in confidence while awaiting the bridegroom's arrival; both heeded the arrival of the bridegroom, and both trimmed their lamps. So, what is the big deal? Just because one group failed to PREPARE for the bridegroom's coming they were excluded.

In the context of our text, this is a scene of the judgment. Many sincere, honest, spiritual people who are anxiously awaiting the judgment so they can be with the Lord are going to be devastated when the Lord responds "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23). The reason for their rejection will be because they were not doing the "will of the Father which is in heaven." (vs. 21).

All of us know many friends, family and other loved ones who fit the mold of the five foolish virgins. They possess every quality of loveliness and spirituality that one could desire. They are honest as the day is long. They are beneficent, loving, generous, gracious, hospitable and sacrificial. They want more than anything in life to get to heaven when they die. What, then is the concern? Because they have not made the preparation God requires! When the Bible says "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," it does not mean "He that believeth shall be saved." Like the foolish virgins, they have omitted that one little matter that stands between them and salvation!

Doesn't it make sense to do what the Lord commands? Why wait another day? Obey the gospel according to Romans 6:3-6 and be saved today, before the bridegroom comes again!

Leadership Selection

DAVID WADE

In each succeeding generation the Lord's church faces the continual challenge of preparing, selecting, and appointing qualified leadership. The task is not always easy nor the best way always apparent; nevertheless the church must band together and put forth her best efforts to appoint leaders.

Often, questions arise about procedures to be used in the selection process.

"Does the eldership of a local church possess the character of a self-perpetuating board? more specifically, does such an eldership have the exclusive power to select other men to be considered as elders, and to determine the validity of any scriptural objections raised by any member of the congregation?"

There are actually two questions involved here: (1) Is the eldership a self-perpetuating board? (2) When additional elders are being appointed does the eldership have the right to "determine the validity" of the objections offered to the men being considered? The answer to the first question is an unqualified "No!" The second question must be answered with a qualified "Yes."

While there is very definite and clear evidence of the appointment of elders in the apostolic church, details of procedure are not given. Paul and Barnabas "ordained" elders in the communities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Acts 14:21-23), and Titus was instructed to remain in Crete to ordain elders in all the cities of the island (Titus 1:5), but there is no prescribed rule for the accomplishment of this end in the instances given. It is far from correct to say, however, that we are without divine direction in this matter, on the contrary, there is clear and positive information touching the Spirit's will in this important aspect of church work. Once we learn what was the Lord's will in the matter of selecting any man, or group of men, in the performance of church functions, we may properly conclude that such is his will in other comparable areas, though no specific rule is provided.

Luke, historian of the early church, gives us a detailed description of the selection and appointment of deacons in the Jerusalem congregation. We direct special attention to the fact that there were two actions—not one—involved: the selection by the people preceded, and differed from, the appointment by the apostles. "In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, . . . Whom we may appoint over this business." (Acts 6:1-3) If ever a situation existed where it appeared proper for apostles arbitrarily to choose the men and appoint them, it would seem to be so here; the apostles were all present; their authority was unquestioned and their selection would have been infallible. Notwithstanding, the multitude of disciples made the selection, and this by divine decree. This, then, is the apostolic mode and must not be dispensed with. May we not thence conclude that the right of those to be overseen to select the men whom they believe to possess the necessary qualifications to be elders is inherent and that if the apostles were precluded from such, that an existing eldership would have reserved to it no such powers?

To the question, May an existing leadership determine the validity of any objections offered to additional men proposed for the eldership? the answer is a qualified "Yes." Because the elders watch for the souls of the saints (Hebrews 13:7, 17), and are over them in the Lord, it is quite obviously their responsibility to the congregation to examine with closest scrutiny those suggested. But, this responsibility is neither exclusive nor is it limited to the eldership; it is the responsibility of all knowledgeable members of the church, as individuals thus including the elders as such, to determine the fitness of those proposed to serve as overseers of the flock, such fitness is to be ascertained on the basis of the qualifications set out in detail in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Church Problems In The Twenty-First Century

W.A. HOLLEY

It is no sin to try to anticipate some of the problems and situations

which may arise. Business men endeavour to foresee any difficult trends that might arise. All colleges and universities are very interested in what the coming years may bring. National and local government would profit wonderfully from knowing of the changes which may occur. Such anticipation may spell the difference between success or failure.

Although this scribe does not claim to be a prophet, nor the son of a prophet (cf. Amos 7:14), it is possible, from past history and the teaching of God's holy word, to gain some insight into what the future holds in store for the years to come. We claim no psychic powers, nor do we possess a crystal ball which could declare a correct reading of the many problems that may arise in the years immediately ahead.

The church of Christ was established on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 16:18-19; Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 47; 11:15; Colossians 1:13-14). Shortly after its establishment it began to suffer from sundry persecutions, as the Book of Acts reveals. Read Acts, chapter 3 through 9, and you will see many efforts to banish the Lord's church from the face of the earth. Saul of Tarsus was one of its greatest enemies.

During the first century the church was warned of dangers to come. Paul spoke of attacks upon the divine government of the church (Acts 20:28-31). "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith . . ." (I Timothy 4:1-3). "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine . . ." (II Timothy 4:1-8). And false teachers would arise (I John 4:1-5). Thus, persecutions, apostasies, famines, and opposition from the Roman government, represent but a few of the obstacles which confronted the early Christians.

What are some of the problems which may confront the Lord's church in the years bringing us into the twenty-first century?? For your consideration, we suggest the following thoughts.

(1) There will be much stiffer competition from the powers of entertainment. These powers are almost unyielding and unalterable as they attempt to sway the average person. Television, satellites, fishing trips, and vacations of all sorts now keep countless thousands away from the house of the Lord (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 5:19; I Corinthians 16:1-2; Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10). There must be a renewed dedication to serve the Lord without compromise of truth (Ecclesiastes 9:10; I Corinthians 16:13-14).

(2) Vast propaganda machines will be unleashed in an all-out effort to popularize the church of Christ. In fact, these voices are now being heard in many circles. These voices tend to drown out the voice of

truth. Even now, the Lord's church must take advantage of every legitimate means by which it can keep itself in the public eye. The "gates of hell" cannot destroy the church of God (Matthew 16:18-19). "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31; cf. Numbers 14:9; Psalms 118:6). Denominationalism and Roman Catholicism may spend millions, but they cannot destroy that church build by the Lord Jesus Christ!!

(3) As the years come, we shall need better educated preachers, more efficient elders, more effective teachers, and a better disciplined membership. Whether we like or not, the general public is going to be more highly educated. Those who visit the services of the local church of Christ will not be satisfied to hear some illiterate make a fool of himself. It may be, in the years to come, we shall be forced to truly educate our own in the things of the Lord, rather than depend upon the public schools to do it for us.

(4) As we approach the twenty-first century, greater and greater sums of money, time, and effort, are being spent in promotional programs, in support of religious projects. The church of the Lord will need to command the greatest vision possible, if it hopes to grow and prosper. That church with no vision can hardly succeed! We should, as Jesus said: "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:34-35). We shall need better-equipped buildings, in better locations, where the people can assemble for worship, vacation Bible schools, singing schools, and the like. Winston Churchill said. "The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see." (cf. Philippians 3:12-14).

(5) We will need to overcome our fears, anxieties, worries, and must add to our efforts courage, boldness, and zeal for the work of the Lord (Titus 2:14; Revelation 3:19). It is past time for us to launch out into the deep, overcome our reticence, and march onward toward victory.

(6) Greater efforts will be made to blur that line that separates truth from error. Even now many within our ranks are ready to tolerate almost anything! In the minds of thousands there is no such thing as truth: Every thing and every body is right! (cf. Romans 3:3-4). Some think that others' views should not be criticized. Jesus contended that "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17; cf. 8:30-32). Jesus and other inspired men condemned the views of false teachers (Matthew 15:10-14; Mark 7:1-13; Acts 13:4-12). Can faithful followers of the Lord afford to do less? (Philippians 1:17; Jude 3).

(7) As we approach the twenty-first century, there will be greater

efforts to obtain public funds for religious purposes. Many are deeply interested in removing any boundary between separation of church and state. Efforts in that direction are now being pushed in United State Congress. Do you want a state-run and state-operated religion? The Constitution now prohibits such; but many want that changed (Mark 12:13-17; cf. Luke 20:19-26). A slight crack can result in a flood!

(8) As greater numbers are brought into the church, we must make certain of their indoctrination. We must teach . . . teach, and teach them again—and again (Matthew 28:18-20). Many church problems stem from a lack of teaching (Hebrews 5:11-14; I Peter 2:2). Christian examples are always needed (Matthew 5:16).

The Things We Give Away

When we give away a flower
It's fragrance stays behind
Like a special little "Thank You"
For doing something kind.

When we give away a pleasant word
To cheer someone's distress,
The glow of it remains with us
To bring us happiness.

When we give away a loving smile
To lighten someone's heart,
Our own is always lightened
By the love we impart.

In fact, the sweetest things of all
That bring us joy each day
Are not the ones we try to keep
But those we give away.

—Selected

Commending Ourselves

JOHN GIPSON

There is an old saying which runs, "He that tooteth not his own

horn, the same shall not be tooted." So when others fail to boast of our accomplishments we are tempted to stand up and shout, "I'm the greatest." But, of course, that's not considered very good form. Even when others praise us it can be a dangerous thing. In the words of Homer.

Praise me not too much,
Nor blame me, for thou speakest to the Greeks
Who know me.

The apostle Paul did not hesitate to commend himself, but he did it in a most unusual way. He permitted the grace of God to be displayed in his life through the things that happened to him. He endured afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching and hunger (II Corinthians 6:4, 5). These were conditions that couldn't be sidestepped. They had to be borne patiently, and Paul, through endurance, commended himself.

What about the conditions which we must bear patiently? Maybe it has to do with physical suffering. Maybe there is a desperate need and you do not know how to meet it. What about a work load which seems too great? What about opponents who seek your injury? Will your conduct commend you?

As you stand on the platform of life, can you commend yourself through purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God? (II Corinthians 6:6).

If you can commend yourself in such ways as these, you have not received the grace of God in vain.

Bring Those Babies To Church

MIKE SCHNEIDER

My heart goes out to the parents of small children. I know first hand the kind of problems they face (and my wife knows even better). Training up a toddler in the way he should go is a constant job, a continuous battle, a seven-day-a-week task, not to mention an awesome responsibility. After six days of their whining chorus at home and three hours of embarrassment while shopping, the last thing some

young mothers want to face is an hour of agony and humiliation at church.

Many a young mother has asked herself, "Why do I keep bringing them to church?" As she enters the auditorium she utters a silent prayer that the kids will be good and the sermon short. The service begins. While mother is picking up toys, drying eyes, wiping noses, swatting, scolding, going out, coming in, and trying to sing, listen, and pray, the toddler is pouring juice on her dress and pulling a button off of the man serving the communion. To the toddler, church is an exciting adventure. Song books are a challenge to tame, stuffed toys make great missiles to launch over four or five rows, and the collection plate would make a great hat!

Most young couples don't mind the distraction themselves nearly as much as they worry about the distraction to others. It seems that all around are the staring, critical eyes of those who raised "perfect" children. As they glare down their noses through pursed lips they seem to be thinking. "When my children were that age they sat still and quiet during church and allowed others to truly worship." At least, that is what it seems like they are thinking.

Young parents, take heart! Allow me to assure you of six things. (1) Your children do not disturb others nearly as much as you think they do. (2) If people without children are determined to sit at the back (where most small children sit) then they deserve any distraction they get. (3) Most people really do understand your plight and remember back to the days when their children were infants and toddlers. (4) Through proper discipline and early training your children will soon learn how to behave properly. When they do begin to show signs of improvement, move down closer to the front where you and your children will feel more a part of the worship. (5) remember that you are both wanted and needed in the worship service. (6) Have faith that the hand which now hurls the crayons will one day spread the seed of the Kingdom.

A Land With Many Things Missing

EDSEL BURLESON

Chapters twenty one and twenty-two of Revelation give a lengthy and beautiful description of heaven. The language is designed to stir our

hearts, arouse our interest and to cause us to desire to go there no matter what the cost. But in studying these two chapters it is evident that numerous things are missing in heaven and it is evident they are missing by God's design. God does not want them there and will not allow them there. It is their very nature that keeps them out.

John declares that death, mourning, crying, pain and curse will all be missing from heaven. "And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more; the first things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). "And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and his servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:3, 4).

The sun, night and artificial lights will all be missing. "And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

John also says hunger, thirst, loneliness and tears will be missing. "They shall hunger no more, neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:16, 17).

In spite of the absence of all of these undesirable in heaven, the greatest of all is actually living in the presence of God. All questions about God will be answered. We will dwell in his light forever and ever. "The tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them" (Revelation 21:3).

F.H. Lehman, in a song entitled "No Disappointment In Heaven" gives a significant picture of things God will not allow in heaven.

**"There's no disappointment in heaven,
No weariness, sorrow or pain;
No hearts that are bleeding and broken
No song with a minor refrain;**

**The clouds of our earthy horizon
Will never appear in the sky,
For all will be sunshine and gladness,
With never a sob nor a sigh.**

"We'll never pay rent for our mansion,
The taxes will never come due;
Our garments will never grow threadbare,
But always' be fadeless and new;

We'll never be hungry nor thirsty.
Nor languish in poverty there,
For all the rich bounties of heaven
His sanctified children will share.

"There'll never be crepe on the door knob,
No funeral train in the sky;
No graves on the hill-sides of glory,
For there we shall never more die;

The old will be young there forever,
Transformed in a moment of time;
Immortal we'll stand in his likeness,
The stars and the sun to out-shine."

The Whole Duty Of Man

BOBBY KEY

In the last lines of the last book written by the wise man, Solomon, these inspired words occur, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14). Man has no higher duty than his obedience to God. Everything else is second. He may have a duty toward his family, his fellow-man, his country; but his whole duty is to fear God and keep his commandments. No matter in which age man has lived, whether it be the Patriarchal, Mosaic, or Christian, God has always required obedience. God's attitude toward sin and righteousness, obedience and disobedience never changes. Man often changes but God never does change. "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shall endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end" (Psalm 102:25, 26). "For I am the Lord,

I change not" (Malachi 3:6). From the beginning God has demanded three things in order that man please Him: These three things are faith, repentance and obedience. God has always rewarded obedience and punished disobedience. There is no exception. Under the law of Moses "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward." How in the name of reason do we expect to escape if we neglect the great salvation in Christ? We must learn obedience or suffer the consequences.

We often make a mistake in our writing and preaching. We take much time in trying to tell sinners what to do to be saved when they do not want to be saved. It really requires more teaching to get people in the notion of being saved, than it does to show them how to be saved. Telling men about hell, heaven, death, sin, and judgment does not show them how to be saved; but it causes them to want to be saved. When men want to be saved, they will do the commandments of God. When men realize they are lost they will see one to guide them. God through His Word is that perfect guide. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). We have been placed in life's way, and it is folly to trust ourselves for guidance. We are strangers to the road we travel. We have not passed this way before, and we need a guidance above our own, that we may keep our feet in the way everlasting. The great Guide has given me the Bible which "is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

There is a reason for fearing God and keeping his commandments. There will be a day of judgment and every soul shall stand before God to give an account of himself. God, the infinitely wise, the heart-searching creator, will be the judge and he will bring to light every secret thing—and that has been done since the creation, by all men, whether forgotten or registered; whether done in secret or in public. Every deed, whether good or evil, will have its own proper, eternal result. This should be reason enough for doing the will of God.

We don't want to live in this wicked, troubled world forever. It is a world of sickness, suffering, death and disappointment. It is a world of misunderstanding, remorse, storms, tempests, tears and woes. Paul said, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). Now, if you long for a land of unending delight; a place of rest, "where they count not time by years." you will want to do the Lord's will. One who really loves the Lord will gladly repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). May I remind you that the weary march of life will soon be over. All who are

prepared will soon be at home with the Lord. You are now living in a day of opportunity and hope. Today is the day of salvation. Do not let it pass. Hear, believe, and obey the gospel; so that when death comes, angels can bear your soul safely into the Everlasting arms of our God.

“The Truth, The Whole Truth, And Nothing But The Truth”

DALTON KEY

Nothing is so dangerous to truth as partial truth received and accepted as complete truth. Our courts, realizing this danger, require each witness to promise to tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” The church should be no less interested in the whole truth as well. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of how he had kept back nothing that was profitable unto them. He further stated, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:20, 27). Paul was concerned, as we all should be, with preaching the whole truth of God’s Counsel. He charged Timothy to “preach the word”—not a part or portion of the word to the neglect of the whole of scripture, but “the word” (II Timothy 4:2). We must not confuse partial truth with the whole truth.

We are beginning to hear distant rumblings of a distorted and partial truth concerning Jesus Christ. We are being urged by some among us to minimize doctrine, to speak less about the church, to lay less emphasis upon the plan of salvation, and “just preach Jesus. “Faithful preachers of yesteryear are chided for placing such importance on doctrine as the basis for religious unity. “Just stress the spirit of Christ,” we are told, “and accept the fact that religious unity must always be a ‘unity in diversity.’”

On the surface, this current thrust may seem plausible. Without a doubt, Christ is the very foundation undergirding the Christian system (I Corinthians 3:11). Our Lord is truly “before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). We must stress Jesus. We must emphasize the Lord. We must preach Christ!

And yet a Christ stripped of his doctrine, his church, and his plan of salvation is left with no voice, no authority, and no power to save. Christ and his word—his teaching—his gospel—must not be severed

one from the other. Jesus placed rejection of his word on the same plane as rejection of him: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Fellowship with the Father and the Son depends upon our abiding "in the doctrine of Christ" (II John 9). Moreover, Christ's doctrine is not limited to the red-lettered words in the four gospel accounts. Paul "certified" his gospel as having been received "by the revelation of Jesus Christ," and affirmed his writings to be "the commandments of the Lord" (Galatians 1:11-12; I Corinthians 14:37). We simply can not honestly preach a subjective, experiential Jesus void of voice. To stress Jesus while minimizing his doctrine is not to preach the whole truth!

Neither should Christ be separated from his church. Our Lord preached incessantly concerning the kingdom—the church (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 13; 16:18; John 18:36; Acts 1:3). The church is his spiritual body over which he rules as head (Colossians 1:24; Ephesians 1:22-23). The church of Christ is built upon the foundation of Christ's deity, has been purchased by Christ's blood, and is continually cleansed by Christ "with the washing of water by the word" (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:26). There is but one body—one church—and she belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ. We can not speak more about Christ and less about his church and still claim to preach the whole truth!

And what of Christ's plan of salvation? Is it not also inseparably linked to the Lord? When Philip preached to the Ethiopian from Isaiah 53, he "preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). And yet after hearing about Jesus, the nobleman knew HOW Jesus saves a man; for he asked, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). To speak of Christ while remaining silent concerning his plan for saving man is dishonest at best.

Yes, we must stress Christ. We must preach Jesus. But let us be completely honest in our presentation. May we never become content to publish a partial Lord void of voice, stripped of church, and with no power to save. Let us preach "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."