

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

THE DEADLY RESULTS OF RELIGIOUS APATHY

Thomas B. Warren

Richard Helms was at one time the head of the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States. His adult life has been spent in studying various forces in the world which oppose the freedoms which we in America value so very highly. He has balanced that study with very strong opposition to the various forces which either oppose or have opposed those freedoms in many nations around the world (such as Nazi Germany and the Communist Soviet Union). There is strong evidence that during Helms' adult life he has consistently held to the view that conviction and strength—not indifference and weakness—are the attributes which bring peace and a thwarting of the aggressive efforts of wicked men to wound and enslave America.

Helms, while serving on a commission which had the task of designing "the free-world's nuclear deterrent for the rest of the century," became very alarmed at the number of people in the West (the United States and its allies) who saw no significant danger either in the constantly growing military power of (1) Nazi Germany or (2) the Communist nations around the world. For example, many Americans either (1) foolishly accepted the Soviet declaration of peaceful intentions, or (2) grew pale with fear of what they viewed as "undefeatable" Communist strength.

We can be deeply thankful for the leadership of America which, in both recognizing and preparing for the Communist strength, was able to blunt the Communist military might.

However, it must be noted that at the time of Hitler's rise to power as the head of the Nazi party in Germany, Helms was a UPI reporter in Germany. In the fall of 1935, he heard Hitler make the announcement: "At this moment German troops are crossing the Rhine bridges and occupying the Rhineland." Hitler's mesmerized audience in Germany cheered wildly for the German aggression. Helms, then only 23, was stunned. But the world—including the United States—merely shrugged.

The staggering truth was that Helms was only one of a small group of journalists and diplomats who understood the Nazi menace at a point when there was still time to stop Hitler's horrible aggression—an aggression that was to send most of the world into war and to initiate the imprisonment, wounding, and/or killing of millions of people.

Is there a similarity in those events to what is occurring in the Lord's church today? No careful observer of what has been happening in the Lord's church itself can merely "shrug off" the very disturbing trends which have been manifested in the church during—especially—the past 25 years. Some of us have seen it and have issued warning after warning about it. Yet—as did the world in regard to Hitler's initial moves which led to World War II—most members of the church have merely "shrugged" at Hitler's evil; the Lord's church is presently "shrugging" at the evil of theological liberalism. (continued on page 4)

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Contending FOR THE Faith™

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**Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
August 3, 1917–October 10, 2001**

WHAT IS WEAKENING THE CHURCH?

Luke Shira

In the mid-fifties, the church of Christ was the fastest growing religion in the world. If you were to see the religious census now, you would note the church is about eleven on the list of religions in the world today. As a preacher of more than sixty years, it makes for a head scratching. Where have we gone wrong? What has happened to the evangelistic thrust that was shown a decade ago? Why is the church struggling for recognition? What has happened to the distinctive marks the church used to have? The answer is right in front of our eyes if we will but look. (1) Compromise the truth with error. Peter said, **“We should obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29). The apostle Paul said, **“Preach the word”** (2 Tim. 4:1-5). To the church in Galatia Paul wrote, **“For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men, for if I yet pleased man I could not be a servant to Christ.”** I am convinced more than ever the stunting of the church’s growth is in large measure due to the desire of some to want to compromise the truth in regard to the important matters as the one church. Baptism is for remission of sins. It does not prevail without repentance which means leaving that which is not scriptural. If they have truly repented they will not return to sins of the past. Paul writes, **“For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you as it is written...”** (Rom. 2:24) (2) One reason the church grew in times past was the loyalty and steadfastness of the members (Acts 2:42, 46, 47). The church suffers today because of too many unconcerned members; (a) love of self—2 Timothy 3:2 (b) love of money—1 Timothy 6:10 (c) love of the world—1 John 2:15 (3) Too many unbent knees—the only way the church can survive and grow is through prayer and to stand united before God. (4) I believe the one stumbling block in church growth is all the un-confessed sins. David said, **“I acknowledge my sin to you and my iniquity I have not hidden. I will confess my transgression to the Lord.”** We are reminded, **“and be sure your sins will find you out”** (Num. 32:23) Jesus said, **“except ye repent ye shall likewise perish”** (Luke 13:3)

I believe the four things mentioned are the reasons the church is not the force in the world it once was. One true method or measure for each one is to ask, “If all members of the church were like me, how much would the church grow?” —Deceased

A MESSAGE OF WOE

W. Wayne Coats

Many of the inspired writers of the Bible penned messages of woe. This was especially true of those prophets who lived during distressing and turbulent times. When Israel had plunged into the quagmire of amoral living, faithful prophets risked their necks in an effort to stem the tide of digression and compromise. True prophets were often killed because of their love for truth (Mat. 23:37). Those were woeful days for faithful men.

ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL

Our Lord would sometimes intersperse His preaching with an entire series of “woes” (Mat. 23). As a result of His pronouncements, Jesus appeared much too negative for the upper scum of His day; consequently He was soon nailed to the cross.

The peerless apostle to the Gentiles was persecuted severely because his love for truth exceeded that of love for his own life. Paul had to escape from Damascus in order to avoid being killed (Acts 9:23). He was expelled from Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:50). At Iconium he was persecuted (Acts 14:1-6). At Lystra he was stoned (Acts 14:19). He was beaten and thrust into the prison at Philippi (Acts 16:19-34). He was persecuted in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4). When he sought to preach in Berea, persecution was immediate (Acts 17:10-12). The same treatment was accorded Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:12-18). Ephesus paid Paul with persecution for his preaching (Acts 19:23-42). A military guard had to protect him from being murdered in Jerusalem (Acts 23:12-33). Finally, he went to Rome to be tried before the mighty Caesar.

THE ABANDONMENT OF CHRIST BY SOME

Why did Paul not succumb to the spirit of compromise and thus circumvent the inconvenience and persecution which was heaped upon him? Did he not face those who desired to have their ears scratched? Were there none who wanted the preacher to please them? The inspired apostle answered the foregoing questions by saying, **“For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel”** (1 Cor. 9:16).

Paul did not run around whining, “Woe is me.” I have known brethren who have acted foolishly and subsequently spend much time suffering the pangs of remorse. Preachers do not need to play the part of fools. When difficulties arise, problems develop and troubles occur, some tender-footed preachers solemnly announce, “Woe is me.” Where did the notion arise that we could go

sailing through the skies on flowery beds of ease? Our blessed Lord stated that we would have tribulation in the world (John 16:33).

Whereas some weak and discouraged brethren refuse to keep rank, we are positively certain that there are a great host of faithful brethren who are ready to declare, **“For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea woe is unto me if I preach not...”** God’s preachers look upon their work as a necessity rather than a nuisance. Faithful preachers are concerned about the woes of God rather than being a “Wonder Boy” in the community.

We love, admire and esteem those brethren who humbly proclaim, “Yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel.” The very thing Jesus commanded us to preach is that which some are determined not to preach (Mark 16:15-16).

PUT A FIRM HAND UPON THE GOSPEL PLOW!

We do not know if Judas Iscariot ever preached, but if he did, he retired at an early age. He was a poor excuse to be going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Judas was a traitor, but he was equally as fine a fellow as the modern traitors who throw an occasional kiss in the direction of my Lord. Compromise, fear, apologies, weakness and fermented ignorance of the Bible sounds forth from far too many pulpits today. A man is a fool who forgets or denies that the power is in the word (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12). Chaff is a poor substitute for the Christ of the Cross.

ETERNITY’S PAYDAY

“...Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.” This related to one’s deep desire to please God. He promises an eternal mansion for our faithfulness. What a difficult task for some people to decide! Judas got thirty pieces of silver and apparently a broken neck for trying to please others, whereas Paul received severe persecution here, but he also received a home in heaven—in prospect—for refusing to be swayed by the compromising crowd.

We really wonder if it has actually occurred to many brethren that God will condemn us for being unstable, unsound, and refusing to suffer as good soldiers for Christ. We can make a strong case for being sound in the faith. Can any man make any sort of sound argument for being unsound and compromising with the word of God?

“...If I preach not the gospel...WOE IS ME!”

—Deceased

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As a result of this complacency, the very faithfulness of the Lord's church is being challenged. There can no longer be any doubt that a "drifting away" from a strong proclamation of the truth and a strong defense against doctrinal error has occurred among God's people.

At present, most of us who are basically on the right track are merely "shrugging" at matters which are—according to plain Bible teaching—absolutely obligatory (things which God demands that we do in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ). No doubt, it is the case that many (perhaps even a majority) of the members of the Lord's church today are, I repeat, merely "shrugging" at the enormous growth of liberalism among the people in the Lord's church.

Since what I have said in the immediately preceding paragraph is true, it is evident that we are living in a time of disdain for what the Bible actually does teach.

What must we do in order to be faithful to God in the face of this situation? First of all, I suggest that faithful brethren must face up to the fact that the situation in the Lord's church is as it has been described in this article.

Second, brethren must realize that the problem will not be solved by merely shrugging and, in effect, saying,

"So what? There are not many falling away!"

Let me (as one who constantly strives to "keep his finger on the pulse" of both the world and the Lord's church) assure you that the problem is not merely going to "dry up and blow away" (as some farmers say). Let us all face up to the fact that we must "**contend earnestly for the faith**" (Jude 3) and "**fight the good fight of the faith**" (1 Tim. 6:11-12; 2 Tim 4:7). Truly faithful preachers and elders will not sit idly by while the church is swept into apostasy. We—not the "liberals" among us—have the truth! This is surely the reason why the "liberals" have—at least so far—refused to try to defend in public debate their various doctrinal positions (e.g., that sinners are saved by grace only "without one whit of human activity").

May I urge all of us to remember that God will be with those who are faithful to Him by being faithful to His word (Heb. 5:8-9; cf. Phi. 2:8). We can all be assure that God acquires all of us to be faithful. If we are faithful, then we can be certain that the results will be in harmony with the will of the Almighty God!

Beloved brethren, think about these things!

—Deceased