

The Current Apostasy Is Wreaking Havoc Within The Lord's Church — Rubel Shelly Is A Clear Example Of Evil Leadership In This Tragedy

Not since a century ago has there been such a "falling away" from God's way as now. Rubel Shelly is only one of thousands who have given up the "Crown of Righteousness" which is laid up for the faithful.

Though some religious people erroneously believe that **Apostasy** is an impossibility, most understand what is meant by the word. The word **Apostasy** is not used in the New Testament but there are Greek words used which clearly mean the same thing. The Greek word APHISTEMI is translated "fell away" in Luke 8:13. In I Tim. 4:1 it is translated "depart" with reference to "the faith." In Heb. 3:12 the word is translated "departing" from the living God. The Greek word APOSTASIA is translated "forsake" in Acts 21:21. It is translated "falling away" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. There are other words which mean apostasy.

Falling away from God (apostasy) is not something new among God's people. Under the law of Patriarchy people fell away and they did so under the Law of Moses. Time after time the majority of the Israelites went into apostasy, with only a remnant remaining faithful.

In the New Testament, under the New Covenant, Christians fell away (apostatized). Paul tells us of Hymenaeus and Alexander who "made shipwreck" of the faith (I Tim. 1:19-20). He also tells us about Hymenaeus and Philetus, "Who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Demas forsook Paul for the love of the world (2 Tim. 4:10). The warnings against "falling away" are many in the New Testament.

That apostasy is not something new does not in any way lessen the terrible and eternal consequences which result therefrom. Somehow or other, when those we have known personally, who at one time stood fast in the faith, depart, it makes us even more aware that apostasy is a deadly danger that all must face. It is possible for a person to fall away. Paul warns us, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

The nature of apostasy varies. The harmful effects of it are more severe in some instances than in others. For example, some fall away and give up all or virtually all their religious convictions. This is tragic enough in that the soul of the individual will be lost and perhaps a bad influence upon others may

result. Others fall away from the faith but maintain their religious connection and thereby actually serve as "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18), as they fight against the Truth. Rubel Shelly is a case in point of this very thing. Not only does he uphold and promote man-made religion, he harshly criticizes the Lord's church. It would certainly be a blessing to the church if he would repent. But since those who go so far in repudiating the truth of God almost never repent, it would be a blessing to the church if he would just join up with his favorite denomination and disassociate himself from the Lord's church completely. We shall have more to say about Rubel Shelly later. But for now let us consider:

I. THE WARNINGS OF APOSTASY

The all-knowing God, to whom we owe our very existence, was able to look down the stream of time and foresee the departure of men from His way of Truth. For the benefit of those who would take heed, He set forth through inspired writers, warnings of the dangers of falling away, apostasy. As we consider some of those warnings and compare them with the present condition we are seeing within the church, our faith in God's word should be made even stronger. If apostasies had not occurred we might be inclined to question those warnings and predictive prophecies. But apostasies have occurred and are doing so at an alarming rate even now.

Even the Lord himself sounded a warning to "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15). To Timothy Paul wrote of forthcoming departures from the truth: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith..." (I Tim. 4:1). "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine....And they shall turn away their ears from the truth..." (2 Tim. 4:3-4). The writer of Hebrews sent up a danger signal when he said, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). The apostle John offers instructions on how to guard against false teachers when he wrote: "Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I Jno. 4:1). The warning of a danger which we are now seeing in frightening proportions is that sounded by Paul to the Ephesian elders, when he asks them to "Take heed." Then he says, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30). Scores of brethren, some of considerable influence, are doing the very thing of which Paul seriously warned.

II. RUBEL SHELLY AS AN EXAMPLE

We have called attention to Rubel Shelly because he stands out as a concrete example of one who at one time was one of the most capable and staunch defenders of the faith, yet he is now one of the greatest enemies of the faith. Whereas Paul began preaching the faith he once destroyed (Gal. 1:23), Rubel is now destroying the faith he once preached. This is not to suggest that he is the only one doing this, but his influence has been felt in this part of the country, more than some others who have fallen away.

I first knew Rubel Shelly in the 1960s when we were in school at Freed-Hardeman. He was recognized as an intelligent student, and if he held any questionable doctrinal ideas at that time I was not aware of it. Rather, he stood up in defense of the faith and our Lord's church.

In the early 1970s Rubel began to stand out as a defender of the faith and a strong and effective opponent of the liberalism which was then beginning to take root and grow. I have in my files many writings wherein Rubel makes some of the strongest of arguments in defense of the faith. God's word is upheld as the only valid authority in spiritual things. As to what Rubel actually believed back then I do

not know, but based on his writings and speaking it was clearly evident that he was a true defender of the faith. As to when the seeds of apostasy were first in his mind, I don't profess to know, but it would be, to my knowledge, some years before questionable signs of departure began to appear.

Beginning in 1990, I lived near Middleton, Tennessee, Rubel's hometown, about three years. Talking with a number of people who knew Rubel from an infant, it was learned that Rubel had an attitude problem from early on. This has certainly been reflected over the years. From my own observation I have noted that while the majority of our brethren were still quite conservative doctrinally in the 1970s, Rubel maintained a conservative stance. However, in the 1980s when the pendulum began to swing toward liberalism, so did Rubel.

Falling away from the truth seldom happens overnight. It is usually a gradual thing over a period of time, even some times several years. It is the first step taken away from the solid truth of God's word that should be of a most serious concern. One doesn't have to transgress "the doctrine of Christ" in a dozen areas at once to be on the road to apostasy. Like the soul-destroying problem of the drunkard had its beginning with the first drink, so the falling away of the apostate began with his first departure from the Truth. What some might consider a "small departure" should be a matter of concern since it may mark the beginning of greater departures.

It was in March of 1983, at a Preacher's Forum in Centerville, TN, that Rubel dropped what some have called a "bombshell" on the brotherhood. That "bombshell" was Rubel's public declaration of his repudiation of "the faith" as revealed in God's word. From this point onward Rubel's plunge into apostasy picked up speed as a locomotive loosed down hill. Just when his departure from the faith began I don't know, but I think most would agree that it was before that infamous day.

We shall consider only a small portion of that Centerville speech, but this is sufficient to show that he at this point has given up the distinctive plea of New Testament Christianity.

"I am trying to think my way out of a sectarian attitude. I grew up in the context of one. I learned a sectarian spirit. I breathed a sectarian spirit. I exhibited a sectarian spirit and I taught a sectarian spirit. I am embarrassed. I am ashamed. I have repented."

There is indeed a place for repentance in God's will for man, but repenting for having declared God's truth is certainly not a place for it. To show just how far Rubel has gone, he says:

"There are sincere, knowledgeable, devout Christians scattered among all the various denominations."

Rubel goes on to say in that speech that doctrinal belief is "not a test of fellowship."

Today, Rubel has gone all the way in accepting, promoting, encouraging, and participating in denominational religion. A current example is his promotion and participation in the Billy Graham Crusade, which is to take place in Nashville in June of this year.

In order to show how one may be completely devoted to upholding the faith and then turn completely from it, we are quoting many things said by Rubel Shelly in a series of six bulletin articles, entitled, *What Is Happening In The Church*," the first of which is dated February 24, 1972. Though written by one who has now fallen away (apostatized), this material is indeed valuable when it comes to standing fast in the faith. I don't know who could have said it better.

"There is a rising tide of liberalism in the church today. Some liberals are very open...and are avowedly intent on 'restructuring the church...'"

"Under the guise of 'relevant preaching,' 'dialogue,' 'fellowship' and 'tolerance,' liberalism is sweeping the field!...." 'Dialogue' is giving equal time to false doctrine without showing its damaging nature. 'Fellowship' is the recognition of all so-called Christians as equals with those who have been obedient to the one faith. 'Tolerance' is the ignoring of doctrinal error and unwillingness to deal with sin in the manner the Bible prescribed... The liberal is careful to appear humble, pious and genuinely concerned for the welfare of the church.... He compromises the truth and undermines the strength of the gospel... "Beware of false prophets."

"It is time that Christians generally know what is going on in the church. It is time for the marks of apostasy to be pointed out so that false brethren can be recognized and dealt with according to Scripture."

"Liberal elements within the churches of Christ have made great strides toward turning the church into a denomination. Although not many brethren seem to realize it, we are being influenced to abandon our distinctiveness....I have recently encountered several individuals who are frankly urging that we admit to being a denomination."

"If we do not intend to maintain our distinctiveness, we have no right to exist. If we are not going to preach the truth boldly, let us not preach it at all. If we are unwilling to oppose false teachings and false practices, let us quit claiming to be the people of the holy God!....The church of Christ is not a denomination. But it will be soon be if some among us have their way! As soon as we cease preaching the distinctive message of the gospel, we cease being the true church of Christ and become something less!"

"Can we know what is right and wrong in religion? Though some would answer, 'No,' it is obvious that all men do judge some things right and others wrong....How can one tell who is right and who is wrong in religion? Not by human wisdom (I Cor. 1:21). Not by the number of people who believe and practice a certain thing. Not by our personal desires in the matter (Prov. 14:12). Only by the Word of God and it alone can we know who is right and who is wrong! The Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God which is the absolute standard in all spiritual matters (II Tim. 3:16-17)....If we cannot see the Bible alike, Christ was mistaken in John 8:31-32, Paul required an impossibility in I Corinthians 1:10 and John postulated sheer foolishness in II John 9-11."

"The word 'love' is a perfectly good word if it is defined properly and directed toward the proper subject....Such genuine love is directed first toward God (including his word and his church) and then to men (both brethren and unbelievers). (cf. Matt. 22:37-38)."

"But the word 'love' has been prostituted in modern religious thinking to mask a lack of respect for God and his authority. You cannot 'overlook doctrine' and show Biblical love. Biblical love is devotion to God and doctrine is simply the revelation of the will of God. How, then can one show love for God and, at the same time, disregard doctrine? It is an utter impossibility!....But I love people too much to tell a man he is wrong in his sincere convictions and under divine condemnation,' objects one. No, you do not love that person enough to care for his soul's salvation! You do not love him enough to do the courageous thing by showing him the truth!....No man becomes unloving or another's enemy by speaking the truth! (cf. Gal. 4:16)....Love is not cowardice. It is not an excuse for the compromise of truth....It was because of real love that Jesus rebuked the false teachers of his day and cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. It was real love that caused Paul to debate in the synagogues and to withstand his brother Peter to the face at Antioch....A man does not love God in any real and full sense if he is soft and compromising with the gospel. He does not love his fellowmen if he allows them to go on believing, teaching and practicing error without calling that error to their attention....Why have we allowed ourselves to be deceived into thinking there is something unChristian about opposing error?....Some seek out congregations where the pulpit is 'purely positive' and where they will never be called on to go out on a limb for the truth's sake!....May God help us to learn the meaning of real love!"

"In order for men to be faithful to God, they must speak out boldly to challenge every false way. Keeping silence with the truth is sin!....Those who believe and know the truth cannot be in spiritual fellowship with error. We must be willing to practice truth as the people of God even if to do so is costly. Even if it sets one against family, old friends or once-faithful brethren....Liberal brethren are talking about possible grounds of fellowship with sectarians....With so many warnings being sounded against liberalism by faithful brethren, one wonders whether some brethren do not announce their false positions so as to call attention to themselves, but they can be recognized — frequently by what they do not say. They will not oppose denominationalism, instrumental music, etc....But perhaps the primary problem in the church's struggle with liberalism is that of a

half-converted and half-taught membership which does not love the Lord and his church enough....I seriously wonder how many of us love the Lord and the church enough that we would be willing to risk ourselves for them. If there is anything in the world to which a child of God ought to feel such strong devotion, it should be Christ and his body! (Matt. 6:33)."

"...The clear teaching of the Bible is that the work of God is to be done exclusively by his saved and faithful people and that modernists are to be regarded as heretics and enemies of the truth! (II John 9-11). They ought to be separated from, rebuked and warned against openly! (II Thess. 3:6; Rom. 16:17)....Let liberalism be called what it really is, i.e., damnable heresy designed to overthrow the faith. Let those who have come to champion its falsehoods be challenged, rebuked and called to repentance. If they persist in their liberalism, let them come under discipline."

From the 1972, F-HC Lectureship book we add the following statement by Rubel:

"But if we compromise with the liberal heresy may our mouths refuse to speak and may all men turn their backs on us with contempt and disdain. For in such a day as liberalism is allowed to infiltrate our ranks, God will surely abandon us to our own devices and destruction."

We wonder if Rubel ever reads or thinks about the things said above, and other similar things. For years after he left the faith he claimed he had not changed. Honest ? ?

From the above it is clear to see that Rubel Shelly once stood boldly for the truth. But when the floodgates of error were opened in his mind, his falling away picked up speed. We shall give a few examples of the progression of his departure, which happens in a like manner with others. This should serve as a warning that once error has been accepted there is hardly an end.

March 1983. Rubel drops his bombshell, that there are sincere, knowledgeable, devout Christians scattered among all the various denominations. (Rubel has now denied the essentiality of the distinctive blood-bought church of our Lord).

October 1983. A man with whom Rubel was talking said of his mother: "I don't know whether she was immersed or not. Are you saying my mother will go to hell if she wasn't baptized?" Rubel's response: "God forbid that any human being presume to sit in judgment of another!... My response to the man's question was to the effect that I had no judgment to make about his mother, him, or any other person." (Essentiality of baptism denied).

August 1984. At the Restoration Summit Rubel said: "Yet the instrument question is not fundamental. The basic issue at stake is how to interpret Scripture." ... "It is simply incorrect to say (as I have) that the use of instrumental music among them [Christian Church] stems from a lack of respect for the authority of Scripture." (Rubel has now placed instrumental music in area of opinion).

February 1988. In the Sermon On The Mount #1, Rubel says the following: "...The kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is neither the church nor the future state of the saved....The sermon that he [Christ] must have preached many, many times. The sermon that Matthew from memory, maybe from some notes he jotted down, hearing Jesus preach at various times, maybe written forms of this same sermon that others had pieced together and were circulating in written form...".... "I'm not sure there is any sense in which the law of Moses is abrogated...only certain ceremonial aspects relevant to his worship under the old and new covenant have been changed..." (Rubel doubts the source from which Christ preached and is not convinced the law of Moses has been set aside, as per Col. 2:14).

April 1990. During a meeting at the Missouri Street congregation in West Memphis Rubel ridiculed the idea of "the old paths" and that we have a pattern to follow in the New Testament. It was in that meeting that Rubel said: "My children will not stay with the church I grew up in. They will not be a part of an irrelevance." (Rubel exudes lack of love and respect for the Lord's church and boldly shows his disrespect for the authority of His word).

October 1990. In the Oct. 31, 1990, issue of *Love Lines*, Rubel writes: "It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation." (Rubel has now accepted the false doctrine of "Salvation by grace alone").

July 1991. In Rubel's Jubilee speech he continues his opposition to Christ's church and the Word by which it is to

function. Note the following:

"People, the reason I feel good is not because I figured out the essentials and the non-essentials, and I'm sure I've got the essentials and all this, and I understood enough when I was baptized, I go to church enough, and I give enough, and I do evangelism – the reason I'm saved is, I understand grace!...My salvation is on grace alone, not by anything I've added to that. He didn't do 98% of it and I have added my 2%. I'm not saved because I believed, or because I repented, or because I was baptized, or because I go to church, or because I eat the Lord's supper, or because I give money, or because I go to Jubilee." (Rubel is being consistent in his error. If people are saved by "grace alone" as he claims, and "the grace of God... hath appeared to all men" (Tit. 2:11), then there is no need to do anything which God says we must do).

April 1994. The Woodmont Hills church, where Rubel Shelly preaches, had a joint worship service with six denominational groups. (Rubel is now in full fellowship with those whom God does not fellowship, and never will in their error.

November 1998. "The family of God at Woodmont Hills," where Rubel preaches, hosted a Community Thanksgiving Service, in which at least four denominational churches participated. (Rubel's full fellowship with denominations grows).

February 1999. In a letter by Eddie Plemons, "Children's Minister" invites "you and everyone in your church" to attend "the 1999 Children's Ministry Workshop," hosted by "Woodmont Hills Church of Christ." The workshop was scheduled for March 20th. An interesting note about this workshop is the religious affiliation of those in charge. Keith Johnson is "Director of International Children's Ministries" for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Craig Jutlia, Dave Thornton, Susan Grover and Deneise Muir Kjesbo are all denominational people. (Rubel now shows a preference for those of denominations, man-made churches. Such an affront to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!).

February 2000. The following, from Rubel Shelly's weekly newsletter, *Love Lines*, Feb. 23, 2000, shows clearly that from the early 1980s until the year 2000 Rubel Shelly has "fallen away" (apostatized) from the faith and traveled the road to complete apostasy.

"God willing, Billy Graham will be preaching four nights at Adelphia Coliseum this spring. I hope you have marked June 14 on your calendar....I hope you are praying over your 'Operation Andrew' list of people you plan to invite to the crusade. The likelihood that you know an unsaved person who would attend one or more nights of the Graham Crusade is very high. For one thing, curiosity alone might be enough to motivate that person. Hearing Dr. Graham speak in one of the final crusades his age and health will allow him to conduct could get someone there – and the Spirit of God can handle things from there. The preached Word of God can be his instrument to touch that person's heart."

The above activity of blatant error is supported by Woodmont Hills. Rubel Shelly is serving as a General Committee Member on behalf of this effort. "Several of our shepherds wrote letters of invitation to Dr. Graham to encourage him to come to our city." What a shame and disgrace to the cause of Christ! Now, who says people can't apostatize?

I'm now even hearing that some of our brethren are contending that faithful brethren can't withdraw from a congregation which is in error. This would mean that we could not withdraw our fellowship from Woodmont Hills! This would imply that we could not withdraw our fellowship from a modern day Laodicea. If Christ would "spew out" [vomit] the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:16), would He not also "spew out" Woodmont Hills"? I, for one, cannot fellowship such a congregation as Woodmont Hills, some of my brethren notwithstanding!

Just a word about Rubel's asserting, "the Spirit of God can handle things from there." If the "Spirit of God" was handling things, would he use a false teacher like Billy Graham? Or, for that matter, a Rubel Shelly who now belittles the Lord's church and encourages people to follow men?

From the above we have shown Rubel's falling away from a point of strong faith to a denial of the faith, a state of apostasy. We have noted only a very few of the acts of error in which he has been engaged. There are many, many more, but these should be sufficient to show a case of apostasy. In addition to the above examples, we note a few other examples of Rubel upholding or engaging in error:

Wineskins. In early 1992, an announcement was made of the beginning of this periodical of error, edited by Rubel Shelly and Mike Cope.

The Second Incarnation. Several years ago Rubel and Randy Harris came out with this error-filled book, in which the

Lord's church is criticized and the words of "theologians" are held high.

Adultery not a sexual word. Rubel says adultery is not a sexual word, that it is "covenant breaking."

Nashville Jubilee. Rubel has had a very active part in this cavalcade of our most liberal brethren.

Choruses and drama. Rubel has spoken highly of their chorus at Woodmont Hills. He believes we should make more use of "drama."

Promise Keepers. Rubel speaks favorably of this conglomeration of denominations.

Priestly Absolution. Rubel maintains that when Christians sin, he, by God's authority can say "I absolve you." With all the other error he upholds, is it any wonder that he upholds one of the chief errors of Catholicism?

Over the past several years sound brethren have written reams of material with regard to the errors of Rubel Shelly. Yet, many brethren are followers of him, as members of cults follow their leader.

As I see it, the fact that Rubel Shelly has apostatized needs to be acknowledged. If all that he now stands for is not sufficient proof, there couldn't be such. We need not be surprised at anything Rubel now does. Already he has accepted a great portion of what many denominations stand for. By implication he is saying that Christ is all wrong in establishing the distinctiveness of the church for which he gave his blood. He is implying that the churches established by men are just as good, or even superior to the Lord's church. If Rubel is not now an "enemy of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18), how could one be such?

Again, as I see it, there is not a need to continue spending a lot of time writing about Rubel Shelly. We should pray that he will repent of his error and stop the hurt that he is causing for the cause of Christ. We do need, however, to be concerned about the efforts of Rubel and the members of the Woodmont Hills congregation to recruit people of a like mind. For example, Rochester College has scheduled a "Zoe Worship Conference" to be held on the college campus, August 11-13, 2000. In a letter from Rochester College to the elders of the Riverview church of Christ, in Riverview, MI, the participants in the Zoe Worship Conference are named:

"...Primary participants in the conference will be Mr. Larry Bridgesmith and Mr. Randy Gill, both alumni of Rochester College, who plan and lead worship at Woodmont Hills Church of Christ in Nashville, TN, and Jeff Walling, a well-known brotherhood speaker."

Brethren, apostasy is spreading! Rubel Shelly and the people at Woodmont Hills is just one example, of which there are many within our used-to-be-sound brotherhood. Bear in mind that those who uphold such men as Rubel Shelly and a great many of the same mind, are guilty participants in apostasy. Without the backing of brethren, these brethren who have become traitors to the cause of Christ would fade from view virtually overnight.

III. THE CAUSES OF APOSTASY

It is not unusual to hear someone say: "How can a person with so much knowledge of the truth depart from it?" While we cannot know with certainty what is in the heart (mind) of man, other than by the fruit one bears, there are some things which we know can be a factor in apostasy. An example is that of Demas. Paul said that Demas had forsaken him, "having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). There is a great and powerful warning against this very thing, love of the world, in I John 2:15-17. "Love of the world" covers a rather wide area of factors in apostasy. We'll consider a few:

The Love Of Money. Paul said: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:12 ASV). We are all aware of the religious charlatans who use TV and other means to make themselves rich by making merchandise of the gospel. It appears to me that we have some brethren who are motivated by the "money trail." Even some of the error which gullible people are being fed comes at no small price. If people like Max Lucado, Rubel Shelly and Gwen Shamblin wrote books which upheld God's truth without compromise, would their sales be as great? I am not saying I know their motive is money, but I am saying it could be. One may also wonder about some of these organizations which are under no elders, but are supplanting the work of the church.

Pleasure and Works of the Flesh. Paul speaks of the "perilous times" that would come, when people would be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-4). To the Galatian brethren Paul wrote about the "works of the flesh"

which would keep them from "inherit[ing] the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). There is an appeal in liberalism for those who want to indulge in pleasure and the works of the flesh. Liberalism does not include the many restrictions which are clearly set forth in God's word. Therefore, if one adopts the error of liberalism, he is more free to indulge in those things which are desired. Liberalism is the point at which one gets on the road to apostasy. When one begins to indulge in that which God's word disallows, there is often no stopping place before a complete falling away. Many have followed this course.

Reliance Upon Human Wisdom. Paul said "the world by wisdom knew not God" (I Cor. 1:21). By the same token, men do not please God when they resort to reliance upon human wisdom in our day rather than upon God's inspired instructions.

It certainly appears that many of the innovations we are now seeing within the church can be explained only on the basis of "human wisdom." There is very strong evidence of this in that there is so little effort made by the innovators to show New Testament authority for the innovations. If a thing is not authorized by God's word and people do it anyway, it must be that men think it is the thing to do. The implications of such thinking are frightening! It could imply that men think God's way is not sufficient, and that it can be and needs to be improved upon. When men begin to think this way, there is no end to what may be done. The religions round about us are examples of this.

It must be the wisdom of men which accounts for the church in so many instances providing a wide variety of **entertainment** for the members. It is certainly not that God's word authorizes such that it is done. It must be the wisdom of men which causes brethren to involve the church in a number of things which never were God-ordained works of the church. The fellowshipping of denominations in direct opposition to God's will must have as its basis the wisdom of men. The support of denominational activities, including the Billy Graham Crusade, is a work of men, not God. The same could be said relative to a number of other things of error.

The evidence is abundant that some brethren must think they can improve upon God's way of doing things. Otherwise, how can the innovators account for a variety of unauthorized activities? Are men so naive as to think they can sort of help God out? It didn't work with Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1) and neither will it work for man today.

Lack of Discipline. One of God's ways of protecting the church against apostasy is the exercise of church discipline. Though discipline includes more than just the withdrawing of fellowship from those who go into error and will not repent, withdrawing of fellowship is indeed a part of God's plan. Such passages as: Rom. 16:17-18; I Cor. 5; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6, speak so clearly that there can be no doubt. Yet, the practice of withdrawing fellowship is almost a completely forgotten command. When error is allowed to continue in a congregation without the use of God's plan to correct it, things can be expected only to worsen, not get better. Brethren who believe and practice God's law on church discipline can expect to receive criticism from liberal-minded brethren. It is not at all unusual for those who are in error to falsely charge those who stand for the truth, as if they were responsible for the problems which are caused when men "transgress and abide not in the doctrine of Christ."

Lording Elders. Though God's word clearly condemns elders when they become "lords over God's heritage" (I Pet. 5:3), word comes to me more frequently now of elders actually forcing error upon those of their flock who do not choose to leave the flock. In such cases it is the responsibility of the members to leave such a condition, but unfortunately many members will not do as they should. I do not know where people get the idea that they are to submit to elders (?) when they are in error. Those who stand up for truth in opposition to elders, preachers, teachers or whoever are to be highly commended. We aren't allowed to "go with the crowd" when the crowd is wrong.

Unscriptural Fellowship. The drift into error, even complete apostasy, often begins with some degree of fellowship which is a violation of God's law. This fellowship often begins with **friend** and **kin**. Brethren who try to be sound in the faith often have relatives who are a part of a congregation which is in error. The pressure is some times great to give in and visit with relatives in a congregation which is no longer upholding God's truth. The same is true with friends. It should be the practice of faithful brethren to never even visit an unsound congregation, kin or friend notwithstanding. To engage in unscriptural fellowship at the behest of those close to us may well be an encouragement to them to continue in error rather than come out.

We have not at all been exhaustive in noting some of the causes of apostasy. There are a great many others, but we believe the ones we have mentioned are among the more prominent ones. It will be to our benefit to be thoroughly informed.

IV. THE TRAGEDY OF APOSTASY

There is no question but that the greatest reward available to man during the course of life on earth is that of a spiritual

nature. That reward is realized in part here on earth by the Christian. There is the blessing of fellowship with God and His family the church. The faithful child of God has the only true basis for a living hope (Heb. 6:19). The greatest of all rewards is that which is yet in store, the eternal existence with God in the beautiful home of the soul (John 14:1-3). This is the only place where sorrow, pain and death will not exist (Rev. 21:4).

Whereas the faithful child of God need have no fear of God's vengeance which will come upon those who "obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:7-9), those who "fall away" (apostatize) have even more to fear. The apostle Peter speaks clearly and forcefully as to the tragedy of apostasy in 2 Peter 2:20-21.

"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

What can be more tragic than failing to obey the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and suffering the vengeance of the Lord when He comes "in flaming fire" to punish "with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:7-9)? The answer? To leave this world as an apostate from the cause of Christ.

The tragedy of apostasy is seen, not only in the loss of the eternal heavenly reward, represented by Paul as "a crown of righteousness" which is "laid up" for him and other faithful Christians (2 Tim. 4:7-8), but also in that horrifying state of punishment which awaits the apostate. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment..." (Matt. 25:46). "...shall have their part in the lake with burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). These words are easily understood.

Why people make choices in this life which will result in eternal punishment rather than the eternal joys of heaven is hard to understand. One possible answer is that those who make such choices no longer believe what God's word says. This a characteristic of the liberal-minded person. Such an individual does not take God at his word. If they did they would not be liberal minded. It is so sad to see those who at one time professed to believe in God and his word turn away into a state of unbelief. Yet, this is happening at a more rapid rate now than ever in the years that I have been around.

Another tragedy of the current apostasy is that so many young people are being affected. There is no more fertile field in which error can be planted, take root and grow than that of our youth. This is not true of all young people, but it is of a great many. False teachers, who are no longer young, often take advantage of the gatherings of young people to propagate and encourage their damnable error. "Winterfest" is a good example of that. The harm done to our young people will often not end with their individual spiritual destruction. The offspring of such people will most likely be led in a path of error rather than in the truth which makes men free. It is a matter of fact that once people go into error they seldom return to the truth.

The greatest tragedy which can befall the accountable person in this life is to obey the gospel of Christ and then go into apostasy and leave this world in that condition. Yet, many are doing so!

V. THE REMEDY FOR APOSTASY

To put it in a few words, the remedy is — Back to the Bible as God's inspired word and only source of authority for all that we believe and practice in the realm of spiritual things. As long as our brethren continue to adopt the denominational beliefs and practices as they are now doing, the speed of apostasy will only accelerate. As long as "our schools" continue to follow their present course of compromise of truth, the acceptance of man-made religion will be encouraged. Only the acceptance of the whole truth will end these trends to apostasy.

The Potential of Elders. The elders in the Lord's church could do more toward stopping the terrible apostasy than anyone else. They could do this **if they would**. History reveals the fact that it was through the eldership that the great apostasy began early on in the history of the Lord's church. It is through the eldership in our day that great things **could be done** to prevent apostasy.

Thank God there are some elderships which are now standing "fast in the faith," unwilling to compromise truth by falling for the "devices" and "wiles" of the devil. These faithful brethren have been mindful of the warning give to the Ephesian elders by Paul (Acts 20:28-31). Faithful elders are to be highly commended and sound brethren should stand with them and encourage them in their stand.

A heart-breaking fact is that many, many elders have turned against our Lord and his church, and are actually in the

forefront on the road to apostasy. The devil already has in his domain the non-religious and all those in religions other than that of our Lord. The devil's area of conquest is not just outside the church but within. The reports of elders which are acting (or failing to act) in ways to encourage "falling away" from the Lord's way of truth are widespread. The extent of the apostasy encouraged is from complete, as in the case of Woodmont Hills, to various stages of progression, such as we see right here in the "Bible Belt."

Having lived here in the Murray, KY, area for almost half the past thirty years, I have seen how error creeps into congregations. There is valid evidence that many areas across our country are very much like this area. Elders have allowed error to come in, and members often seem to love to have it so. At least, few of them come out from it.

As examples of the above I mention three of the largest congregations in our immediate area: Benton church of Christ, Glendale Road church of Christ, and University church of Christ. Thirty years ago these churches were considered sound. All three have had rank false teachers come in to teach the flocks. Benton, with their new family life center, does not try to hide the fact that they provide **entertainment** for the congregation. Their latest innovation is what they call their "After School Ministry." In their bulletin, Feb. 10, 2000, they announce the coming of "Pied Pipers from Harding," to "perform" [entertain] for the above age group. More than once I have written the Benton elders, inquiring as to what authority they have for some of their practices, as per Col. 3:17. Not one word has been received. Do they care about authority for what they do? The same question needs to be addressed to the other two congregations.

Glendale Road, the largest congregation in Kentucky, has a policy of announcing the activities of other congregations in the area, regardless of who the speaker may be. Since they have also had false teachers speak to the flock, they are at least being consistent in announcing false teachers at other places. Brother John Dale has publicly urged people to hear F. LaGard Smith and other false teachers at Lipscomb. Glendale supported the false teacher, Randy Harris, when he spoke at the University congregation. The elders of these congregations could stop the support of false teachers, **if they would**. Some who would claim to be sound brethren are a part of the above congregations, including the University congregation. Why such error is allowed to continue, I must admit that I don't know. But it appears that it is what they want. A well known brother from Nashville, said to me of a former preacher at University, "I don't know why they had such a man." My response to him was that this is what they wanted. This is the sad fact so often.

As stated earlier, the above is just an example of what is happening in many places. Since starting this discussion about two weeks ago, several very distressing things have come to my attention. A bulletin from a church in Indiana (which claims to be a church of Christ) was received, in which "Good Friday services at Linton First Baptist Church" were announced. The elders or men in charge could have prevented this bidding "God speed" to a man-made religion. Within the past two weeks I have received phone calls from at least three people who were very disturbed because the elders of the respective congregations were upholding rank error and would not consider going back to the truth.

With reference to apostasy, some elders do not openly bid "God speed" to false teachers. Yet, neither will they speak out openly in warning the flock against the dangers of the false teachers. Silence can some times be a great source of encouragement to error. These elders must lack the courage and conviction which will result in a strong stand for the truth. In some instances members of the elders' flock fellowship congregations which are in error and receive no advice or rebuke from those who "watch for their souls" (Heb. 13:17). It seems that some elderships have a greater concern about saying or doing something which might displease some members than they have for doing their duty as elders as ordained by God. Just think what elders could do by standing solidly for God's truth.

In addition to elderships and their potential for opposing apostasy and that which leads to it, others within the congregation also have a serious responsibility. The preacher, teachers, and individual members must, if they would please God, stand up for the truth without compromise. No preacher has a right to teach error, nor does any teacher have such a right. Members who hear a preacher or a teacher set forth error have a serious responsibility to "contend for the faith" in opposing that error. Those who remain silent are not without guilt. Years ago I received a bulletin from a preacher, and included in it was an article from some denominational preacher. When I asked him about running such an article his response was that the elders told him to do it. Brethren, no elder, preacher, teacher, or anyone else has a right or the authority to tell us to do something which is opposed to God's word. Members in congregations which are liberal, and I have known several over the years, cannot "go along" with any error without becoming guilty of contributing to that error. I can see a member of the church continuing for a while with a congregation in error, if that person is doing everything within his or her power to oppose the error. But when one falls in line with the congregation, even for years, I have yet to see such justified by the New Testament.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

Never in the forty-seven years that I have been a member of the Lord's church have I been so saddened with regard to

what is now happening within the church as at the present time. It is so distressing to see the direction an increasing number of our brethren are going. Beginning in the early 1800s a number of sincere people who wanted to conform to God's will began a serious search for the simple truth as revealed in the New Testament. Some of those brethren labored for many years to extricate themselves from the bonds of denominationalism. The efforts of those men have been of such great value in that multiplied thousands, even millions, came to know the truth and became New Testament Christians. Many owe appreciation to those "pioneer preachers" for their work, which can still be of great value to those who want it to be so.

It is now so distressing to see brethren doing all within their power to take men back into the man-made religion which has captured multiplied millions, giving them nothing but a false hope. Those in the higher places within our brotherhood are in many instances in the forefront of this tragedy.

Let me plead with our readers to "contend for the faith" as never before! Don't be afraid to stand alone for truth when others will not. Have the courage to challenge teachers of error, from the elders down to the individual members. There is no cause which is so worthy to fight for as is the cause of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Don't be intimidated by the criticism one is likely to receive when standing boldly for the truth. Those in error often try to make those who stand for truth feel guilty for doing so. With the many warnings of falling away from the truth set forth in the New Testament, the present condition of the church should not be a surprise to us, as sad as it is.

With the help of the Lord, one can remain faithful to Him who died for us. Heaven will surely be worth it all. A goal for which we would do well to strive is to be able to say, along with the apostle Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Hence forth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Through "our faith" we can be victorious (1 John 5:4).

-- Walter W. Pigg



END, MEANS, and ACTS 4:18-20

By David Lemmons

In Acts 4:18-20, we find a situation in which the apostles have been warned not to teach in the name of Christ. We also have the reaction of the apostles to that ungodly charge. Their reaction was that they would obey God rather than man. Listen to Luke's words:

" And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. "

We have used this account often to emphasize that even though in normal situations we should submit to the civil government (cf., Romans 13), there would be occasions in which it would not be possible so to do. If a government enacts laws that cause us to disobey God, then "we ought to obey God rather than men."

I have recently read an account in the newspaper in which I honestly feel this principle has been violated. Contrary to the ideas of some of my brethren, I do not scour the newspapers feverishly searching for indication of the compromising ways of my brethren. However, when something pops into my view that is so blatantly contrary to my understanding of what the church of my Lord is all about, I conscientiously have no other option but to speak out against it. I am a gospel preacher and when something is represented in a public forum which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, which causes people to have a perverted view of the church, I must speak out!

Perhaps many of you have read in Friday's *Paducah Sun*, March 17, 2000, the article with the headline: "Globetrotting Grand Rivers Pastor Enjoyed Vietnam Trip." I have not the space to comment on the unscriptural use of the words "pastor" and "Reverend," in this article, but there was something in that report of an interview with brother Ken Wilson that I

must address.

First, I have nothing at all against Ken Wilson. He has not harmed me personally and I have considered him a friend for quite some time. I have attended special lectures on evidences and gospel meetings at the Grand Rivers church. Ken is one of very few preachers in the county who ever attended any of our Berean School in the fall. When I heard the TV account of him being missing, or at least no one having heard from him, I was concerned as others were about him. I am thankful he returned safely from his trip to Vietnam. I love Ken, but I believe that Ken has compromised the truth by the advice he has given brethren in Vietnam.

Second, I have contacted Ken about this article and he has confirmed the facts that were reported in the newspaper. To his credit, he did express displeasure with misuse of the words "pastor" and "reverend," and indicated he would be careful to insist upon proper usage in any succeeding interviews he grants. I know it is often the case that reporters outside the church misuse terms.

The problem part of the article is the advice Ken gave to brethren in Vietnam. The article points out that the Vietnamese government allows only one Protestant organization, "The Christian Missionary Alliance," to assemble legally and own property. Ken, himself, uses the term denomination to describe this group. He says that the government will allow you to meet and have Bible studies in your home if you are a "faithful" member of that denomination. Further he says, "We have advised Christians there to do that." His reasoning in the matter is also given: "You either do that or meet in your home and not be a member and be subject to arrest." That statement suggests to me a type of reasoning which is very dangerous. It suggests to me that if you have a good END (i.e., Bible study) that the MEANS (i.e., meeting with a denomination) are not significant. We still need the authority of Christ for all that we do (Col. 3:17).

By Email to me, Ken indicated that the definition of "faithful" by the government means assembling at least one time per month. Now I suppose if the government decides to revise its definition of faithfulness to weekly assembling that the same reasoning that justifies the monthly assembling would justify weekly assembling.

My problem is that there is no scriptural authority to assemble with a man-made denomination and be considered faithful to it. It is not possible to do that and at the same time be faithful to the Lord. God is a JEALOUS God and He demands our complete allegiance (Ex. 20:5). We are to be "faithful unto death" in the sense of giving our physical lives (Rev. 2:10). We are to rejoice in suffering (I Pet. 2:19-24). Who is to say that it is an impossibility for brethren to refuse this restriction of the Vietnam government and continue on faithfully to serve the Lord? I know of many parts of the world where it is not legal to assemble as Christians, yet small numbers continue to do so.

I fear that this principle of END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS will bring about much compromise with error and it is sad to me that our brethren are using this principle today.

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Editor's Note:

The above article is more proof of a drift toward denominational religion by our brethren. It is hard to understand why brethren are doing this, but if the present trend continues within another decade or so we will see a great many congregations walking hand in hand with the denominations. Another thing which is hard to understand is that so few of our brethren are really disturbed about this error.

It should be noted that brother Ken Wilson is associated with the Benton church of Christ which we have discussed briefly in another place, and receives funds through that liberal church. If I were a supporter of one who advocates what Ken Wilson has advocated, I could not with a good conscience continue to do so. Why not? I would be a partaker of that which is wrong (2 John 9-11) I am amazed that some continue to support an activity which used to be sound, but has now become a partaker of error. Once right doesn't mean always right.

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**READERS' RESPONSE**



"Enclosed is our check for support of B.O.T. or use as you see fit. Keep up the good work! It's a mess here in middle Tennessee. Most congregations want to play "church," entertain, and do their own thing — Everything is o.k. except what the Bible says! Hang-in-there - **Paul and Donna Curless.**" - **TN.** (*Remember the time when middle TN was noted for being one of the strongest areas for the church? Time often works on the side of the devil and what is happening in TN is an example - Ed.*)

"We receive BOT and would like to receive a bundle of 16 to pass out at Tynee Chapel where we attend. Please start with the March 2000 issue. Thanks for your concern in continuing the preaching of the pure gospel - **The Grace Family.**" - **KY.** (*Thank you for making BOT available to others. We've mailed March issue - Ed.*)

"We just wanted to let you know how much we appreciate Banner of Truth. Enclosed please find a check to help in your stand for the truth - **Ted & Vella Harshbarger.**" - **NM.** (*Thanks for being "fellowhelpers to the truth." Without people like you we couldn't carry on the work we are doing - Editor.*)

"I enjoy receiving and reading the Banner of Truth paper and do appreciate the work you and others do in upholding the truth. I am afraid the church of today is headed for a downfall....but as long as we as Christian brethren uphold the truth and keep false doctrine out of the church it will stand. Keep up the good work. Thank you so much - **Hardis W. Kyle.**" - **TN.** (*That the church is in trouble I would agree. Brethren like you, who are aware of the problems we face, can do much to stem the tide of the error which is overcoming many - Editor.*)

"My husband and I would like to be put on your mailing list for Banner of Truth. We have been members of the Lord's church for several years. In today's society if you stand for the truth the world ridicules you, and lots of our brethren change their teachings to appease people, not to be pleasing unto God. Unfortunately, there is no distinction in a lot of people's mind between the church, or a denomination, but I can honestly say that anyone who reads the B.O.T. can definitely see the difference. Thank you for loving the Lord enough to stand up and proclaim his Holy Word. May God keep, and bless you - **Carmichael & Sharon Crutchfield.**" - **TN.** (*Thanks so much for your kind remarks. You are exactly right with regard to people not knowing the difference between the Lord's church and denominations, and that some teach to appease people, not the Lord - Editor*)

"The Handwriting On The Wall" really rang true. This was my first introduction to B.O.T. I want to receive it. I also enjoyed the other articles. Until we wake up and start studying and warning our friends and family of false teachers nothing will change. I pray you will enjoy good health and prosperity in the 2000th year of our Lord - **Ed Armstrong.**" - **TX.** (*The lack of study is having a telling effect, and coupled with the lack of study is a strong indifference. Yes, we need to Wake UP - Ed.*)

"I was very cheerful to have the Banner of Truth from a brother in Christ. Now I earnestly request you to send me monthly issues of Banner of Truth....I hope and pray your effort is to help the evangelists correct and divide the word of Christ properly. I am an evangelist of church of Christ in Gambella, Ethiopia. A small congregation that's composed of Sudanese and Ethiopians too. So sending monthly issues will help enrich my knowledge of the words of Christ. Looking to hearing from your prompt response, And thanks - **Gatwech Ruot Nyoat.**" - **Ethiopia.** (*I'll be sending a bundle of back issues of B.O.T. since they are not time related, the content is generally of the same value regardless of the date - Editor.*)

"I obtained a copy of the April B.O.T. [1999] from the internet. It is one of the best articles I have seen on elders. Please keep up the good work in proclaiming the truth of God's word - **Don Shiflett.**" - **AL.** (*Thanks to concerned brethren like you, we are able to carry on. It is my hope that I'll be able to continue this work for a great many more years - Editor*)



## Forcing Our *Either/Ors* Into The Bible

*"I'd rather be righteous than right"*

By Alan Adams, Assistant Editor

The lengths to which some people are willing to go to find and say silly and self-defeating things seems to be without measure. Perhaps it is an irrepressible craving for *pedal* cuisine, a need to appear fresh and erudite, or lack of thought and care; at any rate, it happens with repeated regularity. None of us has been inoculated against this malady. It can only be avoided by good mental hygiene. A monthly magazine has a section in the back that I like to read first: Stupid Quotes of the Month. I think it would be helpful to maintain a journal of Dumb Things People Say. (Such a journal would, of course, have to contain a section under my own name.)

At any rate, one of the dumbest things I've heard of late is, "**I'd rather be righteous than right.**" At a mere glance, we see the kinship between these two words: *right*, *righteous*. Now, the author of the above quote must be under the impression that there is some kind of internal conflict between these two notions. Given the present climate of religious thought, both within and without the Lord's church, I suspect he is thinking of *righteousness* in terms of emotions, or perhaps, in Calvinistic terms of something that happens to us. Does the Bible uphold the notion that one can be righteous without being right? — No. Neither, can one be right (that is, *right*, *rightly* understood: right doctrine, right attitude, right motive, right actions, and so on) without being righteous.

Paul, having affirmed that "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16), goes on to say, "For **therein** [emphasis] is the righteousness of God revealed..." (v. 17). "Therein," that is, **in** "the gospel," a person learns just how it is that God enables a sinner to be "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

The "gospel" has many equivalent terms: "truth," "new testament," "the faith," "the word," "doctrine," "way," and so on. These, and others, refer to that **one** body of teaching or information which informs the sinner as to his status before God, and what he must do in order to the "remission" of sins (Cf. Acts 2:37-38).

A careful examination of these various terms and their usage in the New Testament will show that this one body of information is to be: 1, Propagated (by "preaching" or "teaching," Acts 5:42); 2, Learned by those who hear, or are taught (Jno. 6:44-45); and, 3, Taught and learned accurately (that is, it must be **right**.)

Preaching a "different," which is to say a *wrong*, "gospel" brings a curse upon the one so preaching (Gal. 1:6-9). People who hear and believe, however sincerely, information which is not right (Cf. Acts 18:26), stand in need of correction (Acts 19:1-5).

All "knowledge" is not equal. Paul speaks of "knowledge which is falsely so called, which some professing have error concerning the truth" (I Tim. 6:21). A passage that really brings this into perspective is Romans 10:1-3. Here, Paul speaks of people who had a "zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." These people, in their own way, believed in and loved God, but "they being ignorant of God's **righteousness** [emphasis], and going about to establish their own righteousness, [did] not submit... themselves unto the righteousness of God." To be "ignorant of God's righteousness" does not mean they didn't know that God Himself is "righteous," rather they were "ignorant" of God's plan to make sinners "righteous" (see again Rom. 1:16-17, "therein"). Such being the case, it is absurd to say, "I'd rather be righteous than right."

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