



INHERITED FAITH

by Robert Turner

Brethren tell me they are not baptizing their young people -- or not as many of them as in the past. "Their" young people?? Of course they mean children of church members, who are in "Bible class" since infancy. This may be a good reason to examine teaching programs; or ponder the effect of working mothers and the break-up of home life. But first, consider what may be a fatal attitude. Have we relied on a sort of automatic baptizing of "our" youth (like father, like son) without having to convert each one? Do we treat them as individuals, each lost in sin, needing to make a decision independently that will affect the remainder of their life?? Do we count them as "ours" when in reality, as respects the gospel, each belongs to him or her self, until commitment is made to Christ?

Many young people are "on their own" for the first time when they go away to college. Here they begin true self-evaluation, and a "rap" session with them reveals what they find. We respect the confidential nature of such conversations, but I can tell back-home elders and preachers that "their" young people, though home-loving and "loyal to the church", are often unsure of what the latter means. Many have an inherited faith, not their own. So, they experiment with strange doctrines and new life styles.

Prejudicial studies of denominational error do little to prepare our youth to meet the real thing. Pushing baptism on youngsters before they are truly aware of sin and its consequences, send upper teenagers into the world with little reliance on or appreciation for a merciful God. Failure to explain "issues" scripturally and free of bias, convinces reflective young people that there were probably only personal differences.

We have some fine young Christians but we also have third-generation "Church-of-Christians". While the latter hungers for freedom from home restraints; a fellow-student, same age, who has but recently obeyed the gospel, is hungry for more truth and humbly thankful for salvation. It would shake you to hear these two in a heart-to-heart talk. Maybe we need a shaking to try and save our youth.

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Be careful of your thoughts. They may break into words at any time.

I LOVE, THEREFORE I HATE

"Therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold! Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way."-- Psalm 119:127,128

"What is the greatest need in the church today?" What good quality is most lacking among brethren?

Ask this question of brethren over the country and you will get a variety of answers. Usually you will get one word answers that express what the respondent feels is a badly needed quality. "Love", "zeal", "unity", "peace", "harmony", or some other good and pleasing quality would likely be among the top answers.

It hardly occurs to us that such qualities need to be qualified by other words, phrases or ideas. It would be considered near blasphemy to suggest that a church or a brother might have too much love, too much zeal, or that one might be too peaceable.

The fact of the business is that we have held these qualities up in our preaching, teaching, and thinking without proper qualification or modification until they have become virtues within themselves. We have come to admire zeal, love and peacefulness FOR THEIR OWN SAKE with little or no regard for the objects of zeal, love and peacefulness. We often provoke brethren unto more zeal, more love, more unity - without defining the proper channels needed for the proper flow of these powerful qualities. It is entirely possible for one to be so filled with these until there is simply no room left for ANY degree of their opposites. This often happens when one allows these things to become virtues independent of qualification.

One may be so full of love that he cannot bring himself to hate ANYTHING - not even sin and error. He can be so enthusiastic (zealous) that he proceeds "full steam ahead" with little regard for the prudence of wisdom and knowledge - he wants to see things happen, thing to be done, period. He can be so desirous of peace that he cannot bring himself to enter into any kind of controversy with anyone (especially his brethren) on any subject.

The cause of Christ has suffered as much from the hands of zealous, loving, peace-seeking brethren as it has from lazy, hateful and factious men - because that love, that zeal or that unity was not properly bridled and directed.

Yes, we need more love for God, His church, His truth; more zeal for souls and the right way, more unity in Christ in many places. But there are brethren who need less love for the world, money, false doctrine, ease, comfort and every false way.

There are brethren who need less zeal for their pet theories, personal causes, growth just for growth's sake, etc.

There are brethren who need to be less peaceful toward those who persist in sin, who are false brethren, who corrupt the Cause of Christ. (cf. Gal. 2:1-6; 11-21).

The "love the sinner but hate the sin" distinction is valid. But, unfortunately sin is not found suspended in the air - it is in people. Sin, independent of the sinner, is not a threat to the cause of Christ. False doctrine does not exist independent of the false teacher. Compromise does not run around free of the compromiser. Faction does not survive apart from factious men. While I may love all such men - have active good will toward them - I must hate their evil deeds. I will do all I can to separate them from those deeds which I, as a Christian, must hate. But, until they are willing to rid themselves from those things -- then I cannot allow love for them, my desire for peace with them, or my zeal for their welfare and fellowship to cause me to act as though they were faithful brethren. It would be unfair to them, to the Lord and to the church.

Saul was honest, sincere and zealous toward God - but he made havoc of the church. (Acts 8:1-3). The church at Thyatira was loving, faithful, and patient - but did not hate as it should have. It allowed "that woman Jezebel" to do her thing without restraint. (Rev. 2:19-20,) A similar condition existed at Pergamos (Rev. 2:14,15). Ephesus went to the other extreme - she hated as she should, but needed more love (Eph. 2:6).

Love, zeal and peacefulness are powerful traits in men and are commended in the Scriptures - but one had just as well head a locomotive into a city without a track for it to run on or brakes to stop it as to urge these qualities upon brethren without first laying a track.

"AN ASTONISHING AND HORRIBLE THING"

"An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?" - Jeremiah 5:30,31 NKJB

God's people were on the brink of a "great destruction" from the north (6:1) brought upon them because of their spiritual decay. God, being a righteous God, said, "Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?" (5:29). Judah was so corrupt that God could not any longer tolerate her. God, through Jeremiah, reminds her of her corruption and warns of its consequences in the first few chapters of this book.

God will not indefinitely tolerate corruption among his chosen people. The fleshly Israelites are no more God's chosen people - but Christians are. His nation is no longer an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual nation - the church. Spiritual Israel can profit from God's dealing with fleshly Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-13).

Do you think that God would be any more tolerant of such corruption as described in Jeremiah if it is found in His church today?

Is it any less astonishing and horrible for the thing to be committed in the church than for it to be committed in the land?

What was this horrible thing? It was a two-fold problem:

POLITICAL PREACHERS

It was the duty of a prophet to bring God's revelations to the people. It was the duty of the priest to teach the people concerning God's will. They had other functions to be sure - these functions are emphasized by the text. They were the preachers in Israel.

Instead of telling the people what God had revealed, the prophets prophesied falsely. Instead of ruling (leading) by God's power or authority the priest ruled by their own power. Why? A strong hint is given in the statement, "My people love to have it so."

The priests and prophets were acting more like politicians than prophets and priests. They put their finger to wind to see which way it was blowing before speaking. They were more concerned with what the people thought and wanted than what God said and willed. Like good politicians they spoke the will of the people and acted in harmony with the desires of the people rather than the will of God.

I verily believe that this evil presents a grave threat to the people of God this very hour. How easy it is for those of us who preach to be more interested in pleasing or at least pacifying those who support us than declaring to them the whole counsel of God! How many of us formulate and express our convictions and/or govern our conduct by what the brethren will tolerate than what God will tolerate? It is much easier to privately tell brethren elsewhere of our disgust with corruption, ungodliness, worldliness, and general unfaithfulness among the brethren where we preach - much easier than "letting on" to the home brethren that we see any thing wrong. I have heard men privately label brethren as dangerous and unsound - but because of the popularity of these brethren, publicly act as if they were a rock of soundness. Why? They alone may know the answer. But, could it not be that "the people love to have it so". God's people are in trouble when public proclaimers of the word do not have the courage to form their convictions upon an investigation of God's Book and then have the courage to stand by those convictions -- regardless of

what the people want. They do themselves, their God and the people they are trying to serve and save a terrible injustice.

PAMPERED PEOPLE

The people "just loved" those prophets and priests. Why? Because they told them what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear. The prophets and priests were to be blamed for Judah's destruction because of their unfaithfulness - but the people were to be blamed because they wanted it that way. They should have demanded that prophets speak the truth without fear or favor - even if that truth hurts at times.

Brethren need to be careful and examine themselves to determine what they want in preaching. They need to try to bring their conduct into harmony with strong, sound, and scriptural preaching rather than demanding that the work of preachers be reduced to an effort to pet and pamper them by "ratifying" their cherished conduct. Our conduct may fall far short of the standard set by such preaching - but the goal is kept before us by such faithful teaching. We will be better for the striving. But, demand a toned down standard and no one is provoked to strive for a higher level of perfection.

Demand and support preachers who are committed to a study of the word of God and are committed to preaching the fruits of their study without fear or favor. Demand and support preachers who demonstrate that they are more interested in your eternal salvation than they are in courting your favor. Demand and support preachers who will not only exhort and comfort you, but will reprove and rebuke you when they feel you are out of line. They will make mistakes, so will you. They may at times misjudge a situation and rebuke when it is not needed - but at least you know they are trying to save you rather than pamper you to their own advantage. You and the church will be the better for it all.

"But what will you do in the end?"

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Edited by: Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Our Mailing address: 3004 Brakefield Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068

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