

The Clarity Trumpet

a publication of
CLARITY MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL
Post Office Box 2472 • Douglas, GA 31534

For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.
I Corinthians 14:8, 9

Key Issues of the Day

I was recently asked to share with the pastoral/ministry staff of a large church what I see as key issues facing Bible believing churches today. There are basically five areas which I have regularly observed as being crucial. By *crucial* I mean areas in which churches are struggling and over which they are sometimes battling. I will address three in this issue and cover the other two in the next *Trumpet*.

The first key issue is --

The Gospel

The first official church council debate, called The Jerusalem Council, centered on the question of what one had to do to be saved. Even though the Council, which was composed of elders and apostles, was very clear on its decision, the debate still rages. The apostle Peter stated the view as clearly as it could be said: *Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they* (Acts 15:10,11).

Twenty centuries later the content of the Gospel message is still being hotly debated. Why it is still being debated is a puzzlement. If we would simply follow the admonition of the apostle Paul "*not to think beyond what is written*" we would avoid the battles that result from the manmade additions and changes to the Gospel as given in Scripture. Paul goes on to warn that when we do think beyond what is written, it leads to some being "puffed up" (I Corinthians 4:6).

When we begin adding our own "two cents worth" to the Gospel pride enters in, a sectarian spirit prevails, and -- predictably -- sides are drawn based, not on a clear Scripture, but upon whose human opinion we believe. It may be Paul, Apollos, Arminius, Luther, or Calvin of a former time, or a Graham, Sproul, MacArthur, or Hinn of our day. It doesn't matter. When we add to, subtract from, or change any element of the Gospel of Christ we are perverting it, and to the degree we have changed the message to that degree we have contaminated it.

The Gospel message focuses upon the Lord Jesus Christ -- who He is and what He accomplished through His death and resurrection. In His death, He paid the complete penalty for all sin of all people, saved and unsaved alike. Through His resurrection, Christ validated His character and work, proving He is whom He claimed to be -- the Messiah, God in the flesh, and that He truly was the one and only satisfactory sacrifice for sin.

Most Bible believers would agree with this. The rub comes when we seek to answer the question, "What must one do to be saved, to have eternal life?" The Bible answer is clear: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30, 31). That "belief in Christ" is the *only* factor which determines one's eternal destiny is beyond debate -- *if* the Bible really is our *only* rule for faith and practice. Consider John 3:18: *He who believes in Him (Christ) is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, BECAUSE he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* Then, consider these salvation verses that are amazing in their straightforward simplicity:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

But to him who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (Rom. 4:5).

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38, 39).

It is sad how few believers there are who are clear on the salvation issue, even those from

good churches and Christian colleges. We as Christian communicators have failed to instill in those we instruct the basic precepts of the Gospel. If the Church is not clear on the Gospel the world will certainly continue to be confused.

A second area of concern is --

Personal Holiness

Until believers begin living above reproach in *all* areas of life there will be little lasting impact made upon a world that is skeptical and unbelieving .

We all want to know God's will, don't we? Well, dear child of God, here it is: *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality. . . . For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit* (I Thessalonians 4:3-8).

Just this past week I heard of two more dynamic Christian leaders who have fallen, either into the throes of divorce and/or into immorality. How do such things happen? And why does it so often happen to those who are in the limelight? Well, normally such things do not "just happen." There are definite causes.

Psalm 19:12-14 provides some tremendous insight into this problem. David, who had his share of major moral failings, wrote: *Who can understand his errors? [He then pauses to pray] Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous (deliberate, willful) sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great [much] transgression. [He prays again] Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.*

Several observations: first, the *control* of secret faults, such as allowing my thoughts to dwell on ungodly things, will keep me from deliberate, willful sins. Secondly, if I do not habitually sin willfully; that is, if I am not *dominated* by such sins, I will be *blameless* before God, and I will not commit greater or more sins, including major outward sins such as immoral behavior.

Scripture adds: *For those who live according to* (in keeping with) *the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who*

live according to the Spirit, (set their minds on the things of the Spirit) (Romans 8:5). Therefore, it is imperative that our thought life be under the control of the Holy Spirit. We must saturate our minds with His Word and then apply it to every trial and temptation of life. See also, Proverbs 4:20-27 - a dynamite passage!

A third major area of concern is --

The Family

In many ways the sad state of the Christian family goes back to the lack of personal holiness on the part of Moms and Dads. If Christian husbands and wives were walking with the Lord as they should the divorce rate among believers would not be on a par with the world. Teenage pregnancies among Christians, teens on drugs, emotional and psychological problems, child and spouse abuse, and a host of other sins and "social ills" could be virtually eliminated among believers if each spouse, each Christian parent, walked in humble dependence upon their God.

I say, "*virtually* eliminated" because I realize there are exceptions. Example: not all sons of godly kings in Israel walked in their father's footsteps. However, today most of the kids in Christian homes *do* seem to be following the examples set by their parents, and the results are devastating. When George Barna, church consultant and trend forecaster, surveyed the evangelical community a few years ago he found that there was *no difference* between the kinds of entertainment evangelicals enjoyed and that which the nonchristian world enjoyed.

If the children in today's Christian homes are raised in an atmosphere where R rated movies and videos are acceptable to Mom and Dad then it shouldn't surprise anyone that we are raising a whole generation of carnal, immoral, undiscerning children. The parents set the pace. As long as Christian parents are not fervently in earnest about living *lives above reproach* we have no reason to hold out any hope for the future of the family.

But because God is God there is always hope. We must turn back to Him in the totality of our being or we shall certainly reap the full force of God's judgment upon our pleasure-filled lives. If you doubt it, prayerfully and carefully read I Cor. 3:15-17, II Cor. 5:10, and I Peter 4:17, 18 and let God's Spirit speak to you. ∞

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