**In a country that has seen less and less acknowledgement (reverence) for God and his Holy Bible, how do we optimize our opportunities to reverse the trend*?***

Brethren, in recent years we have seen a rapid change in nearly every avenue of life, from the rapid population explosion, and massive movements and migrations of people around the globe, to lightning fast inventions and increases in technologies. At the same time we have been seeing a visible decline in church attendance, and increasing lack of respect for the Christian faith and growing numbers of people who question the relevance of the Bible.

Scripture indicates that the end time will be ushered in with a great falling away. It is unclear if this is the time specifically referred to, but we must certainly consider the possibility that the time now present is fulfilling this prophetic statement. We are hopeful in the knowledge that in other countries there is a serious interest in the Christian faith and that many are receptive to the Gospel and coming to Christ in larger numbers that here in the U.S.

An alarming new trend in Christianity is the rise of non-denominationalism and an abandonment of traditional worship. With the rise in non-denominationalism, there is also an increasing number of Baptist Churches dropping their Baptist name and heritage for the sake of appealing to a wider scope of worshipers. While we recognize that forms of worship are largely traditional, we fear that this new trend masks the more serious turning away from sound Biblical doctrine.

This new development in Christianity is at first glance exciting and appealing, especially to young adults and teenagers. Their worship is described as contemporary and is infused with up-tempo music and sermons that are encouraging and appealing to the large crowds who attend. The primary focus is preaching Jesus with little attention given to doctrine. Our concern with this growing trend is the spread of superficial Christianity that results in a people who are doing great works in Jesus’ name but to whom the Lord will say in the end, “Depart from me ye workers of iniquity, I never knew you.”

The Apostle Paul cautions us in II Timothy 4:3-4 that the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine. He said they would turn away from the truth to teachers who would tell them what they want to hear. Paul’s words are prophetic and are being fulfilled in our time. The question before us is, how do we optimize our opportunities to reverse the trend? We must first consider what opportunities we have, and then consider how we can take advantage of the opportunities.

The opportunities we have are the times we spend in our homes and in our churches. It is sadly too often the case that the only religious instruction our children receive is what they receive in church. Added together, our traditional time of worship in church amounts to only four to five hours a week. This time is grossly insufficient to the task. It simply isn’t possible to train up our children in the way they should go with this short time frame. As parents and grandparents we must consider the serious importance of the home as an institution of education, particularly of spiritual education, and to employ every means possible to religiously educate our children.

As church leaders, we must recognize our responsibility to study, to show ourselves approved of god, rightly dividing the word of truth. We must also optimize the time we spend in church. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation and God has ordained by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. But the salvation of the souls is merely the first step toward discipleship. In the great commission we are commanded to go and make disciples by teaching them all things that Jesus commanded us to do. This demands systematic instruction in Sunday school and in mid-week Bible study. Sunday night and midweek services are vitally important to the spiritual well-being of our churches and should be encouraged and continued at all cost.

Finally, significant to the growth and health of our churches and individual members is to emphasize the importance of private prayer. Before we shall ever be effective in our pews and pulpits, we must earnestly seek the aid of Almighty God in prayer. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. The feeblest preachers and the weakest of sermons are transformed by prayer into the most powerful weapons against an ungodly world, even to the pulling down of stronghold of Satan. Satan trembles, demons flee, and the vilest of sinners are saved through the Gospel message bathed in prayer. And so it is that opportunities to enrich the minds of the unlearned and ignorant are made more effective through the prayers of the saints.

It is our concern and conclusion that the Church of Jesus Christ is in need of revival. A revival of spiritual worship. A revival of Bible study and knowledge. A revival of religious education and growth among God’s people. And, a revival of earnest heartfelt prayer. II Chronicles 7:14 says, “If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

Bro. Lynn Stapleton

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