

Overcoming the Present Apostasy (2)

How do we view the World?

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Introduction: At the heart of all our battles lies the struggle against worldliness.

- A. The strength of worldliness lies in the appeal of the physical. **(1 John 2:15-17)**
- B. While we have been blessed with physical possessions, these can lead to destruction.
 - 1. Look at the blessings God gave Israel and what ultimately Israel did with these blessings. **(Deut 8:11-20)**
 - 2. Has God blessed us with material things today?
 - 3. How far have we come in the last 30 years in our physical wealth?
 - 4. How far have we come in the last 30 years in our spiritual strength?
- C. We are bombarded like never before concerning the advocates of worldly based religion. However we can win the battle! **(1 John 5:3-5)**

I. Many are losing the battle with the world

- A. Jesus tried to prepare Peter for an upcoming dreadful battle.
(Lk 22:31-32; 1 Pt 5:8-9)
 - 1. Peter was overconfident and would not listen. He was turned upside down.
 - 2. He learned from this and gained a stronger faith.
- B. The initial compromises come within the heart. The easy way becomes the norm.
 - 1. Worldliness makes you a self-centered person protecting your rights.
(James 4:2-4)
 - 2. When I hear brethren talking about the “traditional position,” “right-wing brethren,” “legalist” and many other terms of intimidation, I am concerned.
- C. The power of worldliness is found in relationships.
 - 1. The world will receive its own and punish the outsiders.
(Jn 15:17-20; 1 Jn 5:5-6)
 - 2. The fear of losing relationships will enslave the worldly. **(Jn 9:19-23)**
 - 3. Brethren will sell you out and be cowardly when “crunch-time” comes.
- D. A snapshot of compromises in churches.
 - 1. Men who are cowards and will not stand.
 - 2. Compromises in dress among members (ex. Cheerleading and majorettes).
 - 3. Social drinking and proms becoming acceptable.
 - 4. Attendance at services (Ex. Sunday morning half-marathon).
 - 5. A refusal to deal with church problems.
- E. Local churches can become teaching grounds for worldly religion. **(Col 2:18-20)**
 - 1. Historically, in what churches does apostasy begin? It begins in large city churches with a higher education and wealth.
 - 2. Our failure to reach out children also leaves us ripe for departures when “another generation” arises. (Ex. The Third generation) **(Judges 2:7-12)**

II. The world view of what a local church should be

- A. Is the church a living body directed by a living Lord **(Eph 1:22-23)**, or is it rather a “community of people” with a common “heritage” following the direction of the

current culture?

1. The church of our Lord exists because of the purpose of Jesus to save all men. **(Luke 19:10)**
2. His message has always been “radical”, “counter-culture”, a message that will never be appealing to the world and its values! **(Lk 9:23-24; 1 Cor 2:14, 16)**
3. The issue always before us is: “Will we be conformed or transformed?” **(Rom 12:1-2)**

B. What are the standards of the world?

1. There are three basic “standards” of the morality of the world. (Note: when any of these are the goal you can lie, cheat, etc.. as long as you meet the goal!)
 - a. What will work? (Utilitarian practicality)
 - b. What do most people accept? (Majority rule)
 - c. Who has the strength to impose their will on everyone else? (Power Politics)

“The church which is married to the Spirit of its Age will be a widow in the next.”
—William Ralph Inge (The Cultural Church F. LaGard Smith p. 75)

2. The Bible views these standards as “carnal weapons” and they must be overthrown in the heart of every Christian. **(2 Cor 10:3-5)**

III. The roadmap for change in local churches

A. Drastic changes rarely occur in churches all at once, but rather they are gradual.

1. There is first a lowering of standards and a weakening of teaching. Normally this first begins in the home. **(2 Tim 4:3-4)**
2. Then there is a transfer of responsibility and an appeal to the flesh. Here is where changes occur that are not as obvious to the casual observer. During this period there will be a desire to hire men to serve the members while churches will seek centralized efforts to “do their duty”.
3. Next there will be a purging of those who would object to the minor changes. These are labeled and sent on their way.
4. Afterwards this cycle is repeated with ever increasing rapidity. When changes were once a crawl, they are now an avalanche.
5. The final end is “mainstream” denominationalism. (Example: The Disciples of Christ Denomination)

B. There is the danger of “reactionary apostasy.” **(Heb 12:15; Gal 5:15, James 3:16)**

1. Many times they can actually see problems that need attention among us.
2. Sadly their “cure” is worse than the disease.
3. Some put confidence in these men by their ability to **accurately** diagnose a problem and tell us what we should **become**. Sadly brethren do not ask if his “solutions” will get them there!
4. When we have needless bickering and worldliness in the church, we will see men weakened by this and thus he will be more likely to follow a man who appeals to the flesh.

“Here is a situation that isn't hypothetical. It is common, thus Worthy of our attention. In

a local church where there is a history of objection to the sponsoring church arrangement and other unauthorized innovations, *war* breaks out. Brethren "bite and devour one another," and the ugly/ result is "envy and self-seeking . . . confusion and every evil thing" (Gal. 5:15; Jas. 3:16). There is a division, perhaps followed by another; snide, sarcastic remarks. Preachers are fired, elders resign, members are agitated and a cold sterile atmosphere takes hold.

In the midst of this turmoil, as impatience and disgust turns into bitterness there are some who just quit. They join a nearby liberal church, enter into the mainstream of Protestant denominationalism or entirely give up the matter of religion. Though I'm not altogether satisfied with this description, I'm going to call this: *reactionary apostasy*.

Reactionary apostasy is usually accompanied by a statement some thing like these: "I'm fed up with conservative churches of Christ," or "There has got to be something wrong with 'conservative church of Christ' religion." - Reactionary Apostasy, **Warren E.**

Berkley

IV. Do not underestimate the power of the world when Christian's fail to walk by faith

A. Jesus suggested a chilling possibility. **(Luke 18:8)**

1. The history of the church in Nebraska tells a somber story.
2. I want my children to be ready to stand alone if necessary. (Ex. Starting a local church in Virginia)

B. We need to keep ourselves in the love of God and strengthen brethren that will let us. **(Jude 20-21, Rev 3:15-21)**

1. It is important that we do not become cynics because of the weakness of others! Keep looking to God and the opportunities around you.
2. We must let our hearts be kept by God and always with optimism move ahead!

Conclusion: Do you know where to stand?

A. The world will laugh and howl and ridicule. Do not focus on them.

B. The Lord will lead you and one day praise you as you enter into the place where are you know the Truth will go. **(Jn 8:31-32)**

A Review of Reclaiming a Heritage

by John Waddey

Dr. Richard Hughes of Pepperdine University has given us, "Reclaiming a Heritage; Reflections on the Heart, Soul and Future of Churches of Christ. The book is published by Abilene Christian University Press. Bro. Hughes was raised in the Church of Christ and continues to claim membership in it (p. 118), but after reading his book one can't help but wonder, for how long?

From Bro. Hughes perspective, "Churches of Christ are suffering a severe identity crisis" (p. 121). Those acquainted with our brotherhood know it is not the conservative element among us, but the liberals of the change movement who suffer from this identity crisis. They don't know who they are or where they are going. They only know that they no longer wish to be part of "restoring the faith and practice of the early church."

He tells us, "It is time to admit that in our churches, a wide variety of people from all walks of life...simply do not find patternism and legalism to be meaningful themes" (p. 121). By patternism he means the conviction that we should be obedient to the commands, restrictions and regulations of the Bible. He along with all other change agents flatly rejects that concept. There is a legalism that is a perversion of

Christianity, but he has in mind the sense that man should be obedient to the written word of Christ! We freely admit that those of the change “fellowship” fit this category.

He suggests, “For many in our churches today, the restoration vision is a dead-end street, an essentially useless category” (p. 121). Understand this and you will understand what change agents are saying and why. This loss of faith in our restoration vision is clearly demonstrated in the flow of materials being issued by men associated with Abilene Christian and Pepperdine University.

He declares, “And so we are left with no useful past, no clear identity, and no meaningful legacy. Essentially we are spiritual orphans” (p. 122). This sad passage reveals the bankruptcy of the change movement. Those of us who look to Christ as the head and founder of the church; to his word as the divine standard of our faith, have no such disillusionment.

He asserts, “Many feel...that the restoration ideal has spawned arrogance and division and little else” (p. 67). Our movement spawned Abilene Christian University, Pepperdine University (where the professor has taught) and a dozen other schools. It spread the gospel message around the world into some 110 nations. It grew from 189,000 in 1906 to some 1,350,000 here at home and as many more overseas. Its members have established and sustained a dozen benevolent homes, scores of Christian primary and secondary schools. They have pumped millions of dollars into relief for the poor and victims of tragedies. They have established and sustained campus ministries on scores of college and university campuses. Her members have written and published hundreds of books and journals including quality commentaries and Bible Translations. Her ministers are generally well-educated and her members are generally middle class. On the whole, her meeting places are modern and comfortable although not usually lavish. She has carried on an extensive outreach by radio, television, newspaper and the Internet. This is the church that Hughes thinks has spawned little else than arrogance and division..

Professor Hughes’ problem is revealed on p. 59. “It was not until the late 1960s that I found myself disillusioned with certain aspects of my heritage.” Now he is disillusioned with most of it. But he finds much to admire in other religious bodies who hold more liberal views.

It is revealing to consider his view of Churches of Christ, of which is a part. His career has been spent teaching in schools founded and sustain by members of this church, hence from them he has drawn his sustenance. “Within a few short years, some had essentially abandoned the search for truth...They elevated their rejection of creeds to the status of a creedal statement...for all practical purpose, these people had turned their backs on the genius of their own tradition” (p. 34).

He paints an accurate picture of a contemporary “change congregation:” “restorationist churches constitute a perpetual feeder for the evangelical establishment. This is a way of saying that authentically restorationist churches are by definition sectarian. As they move toward denominational status, however, they almost invariably move into the orbit of evangelical Christianity” (p. 111). “There is, perhaps no better example of the transition from restorationist sect to evangelical denomination than the Churches of Christ...” (p.112). He should qualify this by saying, “Churches of Christ of the change movement!”

He identifies the belief that drives the change agents, it is a “newfound theology of grace” (p. 132).

This book is a vivid example of postmodern thinking. This worldly philosophy argues that truth is unattainable; that all things are relative and there are no moral and spiritual absolutes. He tells us, “Our fathers argued that no human being can capture the truth, possess the truth, codify the truth, preserve the truth, dispense the truth, or guard the truth.” “Instead, each of us much search for truth, and that search is a search that is never completely finished” (p. 30). Of course he offers no documentation for this outlandish assertion. It does however tell us much about the author.

He reasons that the goal of restoration is, “that every Christian must return to the biblical text time and time again, constantly rethinking his /her beliefs and opinions in the light of God’s holy word” (p. 34). What he wants to convey is that we cannot be certain of our understanding of baptism, the nature of the church, the role of women in leadership, the question of instrumental music in worship, etc. I would ask him if he is sure about such doctrines as monotheism, the deity of Christ, the reality of heaven, salvation by grace? How can he be sure of his faith? Does he have to keep searching?

He labors long and hard to convince us we cannot understand God’s revelation sufficiently to say, “this is that” which the prophets spoke (Acts 2:16). Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth” (John 8:32), but Dr. Hughes says we cannot know the truth. But then Jesus did not have his doctorate, did he? Hughes tell

us that God “refuses to be confined by words, even biblical words; and therefore shatters every formula, every definition, every pattern, every plan, every form of orthodoxy...” (p. 46). By his doctrine, he has no pattern, no standard, no sure way of knowing God’s will for how to serve him; only a blind leap of subjective “faith” and the wistful hope that God will have mercy on him! He assures us, “As envisioned by the founders of our movement, this ecumenical thrust never depended on the ability of human beings to arrive at the truth or to agree on a set of theological propositions...” (p. 31). Thus I suppose we should embrace in fellowship everyone who claims to be a Christian, all of whom are hopelessly searching for illusive truth.

He repeatedly implies that members of Churches of Christ, other than his circle of change agents, pretend to be infallible and absolute masters of all of God’s truth. Yet in 47 years of preaching among our people I have yet to encounter even one who so claimed.

The author tells us “the dominant theme of Churches of Christ in our early years was our commitment to the conviction, that ‘God is God and all human beings are fallible.’” (p. 35). He oft repeats this profound theological and philosophical truth but he offers no documentation to sustain it. Can he find anywhere, at any time a leader among our brethren who did not in fact recognize God alone as God and all human beings as fallible? Just one! He finally gets around to saying, “Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone seldom made direct and explicit statements to that effect, but they pointed unmistakably to their convictions in that regard...” (p. 53). Where? This airy statement bears the musty smell of the seminary and most likely had its origin in the lectures or writings of some denominational professor. It is profound but meaningless for the discussion at hand.

Change agents like Hughes delight in finding some ill-conceived, ill- stated line by a brother and then asserting that such dribble is representative of all conservative men...those not of his tribe. He delights in setting the extreme views of prominent men against the general consensus of other mature brethren. This he does with David Lipscomb’s views on Civil Government and Barton Stone’s views on Premillennialism. He fails to note that David Lipscomb fought the change agents of his generation hook and claw until he grew too old to do so.

Dr. Hughes goals are easily identified.

He wants to convince us that we are in fact a denomination and should not claim otherwise (p.51-52).

He wants to convince us that Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone were the “founders of our tradition” (p. 48).

That the founding generation expressed no interest in restoring the “true Church of Christ” (p. 37). It is too bad that those first generation restoration preachers did not understand this. They would not have worked so hard to win members of sectarian bodies to the church they served.

Along with other change agents he wants us to “treat the Bible as a narrative that tells the story of God’s mighty deeds on behalf of the world which he created, which he seeks to redeem and over which he someday will triumph when his rule is complete” (p. 186). He should tell us if there are any commandments to be obeyed? If so, which? Perhaps he would explain those two reference which speak of God’s word as a pattern and tell us why they do not mean what they say (II Tim. 1:13; Heb. 8:5).

To Dr. Hughes the defeat of premillennialism in our ranks was unfortunate.

“The destruction of the apocalyptic vision (includes premillennialism) severely weakened both the restoration vision and the counter cultural dimensions of Churches of Christ ...” (p. 116). If he feels that a belief in premillennialism is so important, he could find it by transferring his membership to the Independent Baptists.

He wants us to accept women in leadership roles in the church. He describes God’s limitation on women in church leadership as “subjugation of women” (p. 89). He would negate the plainly stated restrictions on women (I Cor. 14:33-34; I Tim. 2:11-12) by citing Paul’s words, “There is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ” (Gal. 3:26-29). The fact is that God did not in some other verse place limitation on people regarding ethnicity or social status as he did on gender!

He labors hard to convince his readers that the best minds among us have always believed that one could be a faithful Christian while an active member of a human denomination. No doubt a few exceptions could be found, but the overwhelming majority of our brethren have not thought or said such. Only with the advent of the change movement has such become widespread.

Like other liberals in the social, political and religious realm, Dr. Hughes wants the church to involve itself in their social agenda. He frequently mentions our failure to respond to the issues of poverty, racism and war (p. 87), and “the subjugation of women” (p. 89). “Why Churches of Christ took so little interest in social ethics. Why, for example were we so reluctant to see the implications the gospel holds for large-scale issues of peace and justice? (The anti-war movement of the 60’s and the Civil Rights Movement, JHW). Why were we so reluctant to confront the issue of racial segregation...why did Churches of Christ take so little interest in the great moral issues that convulsed the country during the turbulent years of the 1960s?” (p. 58). He faults brethren because “they sometimes cast their lot with the forces of law and order that sought to subdue the voices of dissent” (p. 61). “Almost never did white, mainstream Churches of Christ support the great swelling movement on behalf of peace and justice that captured the minds of so many Americans...” (p. 61). As a true liberal he cannot imagine an intelligent person not agreeing with his agenda. He cannot understand that many of us preferred law and order to those motley crowds of anarchists rioting in our cities. Nor can he understand how Christians could work within the church to change sinful attitudes about race without joining the Civil Rights political movement. Dr. Hughes faults today’s church for the failures of past generation in dealing with slavery (1810-1865) and segregation. In this he follows the example of the social and political liberals. They cannot concede the progress made because they spend their time dwelling on the failures of the past. We do not deny the failures of past generations, but we recognize the great progress that has occurred. He constantly labors to paint “white mainstream” churches of Christ as molded and shaped by their culture. I would ask him if black Christians and churches are shaped by their culture? Are the academic communities at ACU and Pepperdine U molded and shaped by their culture?

One of the few useful things in this book is Dr. Hughes portrait of the liberal change element that has arisen to prominence among us. Note the characteristics of these people:

They worked to “enhance their colleges by appealing to the budgets of local congregations through a variety of promotional strategies, through increasingly complex institutional structures, and through a vast building campaign, aimed at giving Churches of Christ more viability in the affluent and ‘respectable parts of town.’”

“Following the 1960s, other developments suggested the Churches of Christ

(make that liberal congregations and preachers) were rapidly turning their backs on their Restorationist heritage and moving into the evangelical orbit.”

The distinctly evangelical theme of justification by grace through faith” became the norm in their preaching.

“A therapeutic gospel, coupled with an emphasis on ‘family values’...dominated many Church of Christ pulpits.”

“Worship sometimes verged on entertainment.”

“And many urban Churches adopted ‘church growth’ strategies that had more in common with the Willow Creek Church (Independent Protestant Denomination in Illinois JHW) than with that traditional heritage” (p. 117).

Change agents like Dr. Hughes like to talk about radical faith, discipleship and commitment, but observation reveals it is radical liberalism, not God’s ways they are calling us to. Bro. Hughes is a man he describes as “swallowed by one strain...of the popular religious culture that dominates much of American Christianity today” (p. 133). He is immersed in postmodernism, a thorough going liberal, who is trying to reshape our people after his own philosophical image. I feel sorry for this brother. His much learning and his academic environment have poisoned his heart against the church of his parents and his early life. They have filled him with a spiteful arrogance towards it and his fellow-Christians. He really needs to break out of this church which he holds in such low esteem and migrate to one whose social agenda is more attuned to his; perhaps the United Methodist or the Episcopal church. His book is pure poison, it would have been far better had it been stillborn.