

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## THE CRYING NEED FOR OUR UNDISTURBED AGE

We do not have to look very far today nor stretch our imagination to any great extent to know that all is not well in today's modern society. Seldom in the history of the world have men been as disturbed as they are today by what they hear, feel and fear, for the foundation upon which we built Western civilization is crumbling. The immediate past is disturbing, the present uncertain, and the future is dark with a darkness so deep that our wisest statesmen, educators, scientists and philosophers cannot penetrate it and give us an encouraging word of hope. When they speak, they contradict each other. Their only ground for agreement is uncertainty. In Jesus's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21:22-26, we can apply to this generation as well: "For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled...for there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath unto this people, and they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled...and upon the earth there shall be distress of nations in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows, men fainting for fear and for expectation of the things which are coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." The Apostle Paul warned Timothy that "in the last days (of the Jewish system, his words also describe our days) perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (II Tim. 3:1-5).

At a time when men have achieved their greatest progress, they seem helpless to find the means to save it. We have been drawn closer to each other by modern means of communication and transportation which have broken down the walls of distance, but we are farther apart on spiritual matters. Spiritual progress has not kept pace with material progress. As space and time have diminished, religious suspicions and antagonisms have hardened, and our moral sense has been put into positions of grave compromise. The prospects of the future are alarming, not only because of the fact men have in their hands the power to destroy the world more rapidly than they can rebuild it, but because the church hesitates to meet the challenge of moral responsibility and the challenge of laying hold of the Christian faith which holds the only answer to our problems in these troubled times in which we live. It is time the church put away their efforts to reach the church shoppers by offering entertainment and easy religion that offends no one, but makes them comfortable in their pews, and start emphasizing the Christian faith, as brought to fruition by Jesus Christ and proclaimed by the apostles, as the answer to all of life's problems. The answer is not found in ourselves or in our society. Long ago the prophet Jeremiah stated that it is not in man to direct his own way (Jer. 10:23). The signs of decay are visible every day on every side and this decay is farther advanced than we are willing to admit. The modern church has no answer to this decay that has taken over our society. David Wells in his

book *God In The Wasteland* describes the modern church very well when he stated: "The fundamental problem in the church today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds. Their fundamental problem is that God rests too inconsequently upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel too easy, and his Christ too common." People join churches, but few read or study the Bible, much less see any basic change in their life. Christianity is reduced to a fetish to be trodden out in a crisis. Walter Horton in his book *Can Christianity Save Civilization* wrote: "Any culture disintegrates when its inner core of religious conviction gets too much out of harmony with its outer shell of material culture and technique. Advanced civilizations lose their heart when religion becomes a department of life, instead of being the center and source of life."

One of the most disturbing aspects of our way of life is the paralyzing unconcern in which we have become immersed. We are unconcerned about God, about Christ, about the church, even about ourselves. We have come to the place in our society, and even in the churches, where we have little need of God. God becomes optional in a society where man can do everything himself. Man has exchanged the pearl of great price for some costume jewelry. God is no longer the supreme fact in life. What this generation can buy and sell, eat and drink, own and use, wear and drive, these are their treasures. And Jesus said where your treasure is there will your heart be also. In this materialistic way of life the modern church has lost their sense of good and evil, they have mistaken success for righteousness and comfort for holiness. Isaiah said in Isaiah 5:20, 21 that his generation "called evil good and good evil, put darkness for light, and light for darkness, put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight." These are apt words describing this undisturbed age. The Apostle John stated: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). Our sense of wrong is dying out. We are losing the ability to see beneath the surface and discover the wrong, own up to it, confess and throw all our moral strength against it.

At this point it might be helpful in understanding this undisturbed age by noting some religious statistics by the secular press. Pat Buchanan, Creators Syndicate, wrote in his weekly column an article entitled *Post-Christian America*: "General Social Survey data revealed that Americans who profess to have 'no religion,' 23.1%, and the 'none's' have grown by 266% since 1991. As for the mainstream Protestant congregations, together, they are not half as numerous as those Americans who profess no religion." (Note: He is writing about those who claim to be church members, not necessarily Christians. Editor).

He continues: "We are fast becoming another people, and a post-Christian America appears to be our destiny well before the end

of this century. Consider what has changed already. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, blasphemy was a crime. In the Roaring '20s the 'vices' of booze and gambling were outlawed. Now they are major sources of state revenue. Divorce was a rarity. Now half of all marriages are dissolved. After the sexual revolution of the '60s births out of wedlock rocketed to where 40% of all children are born without a father in the home, as are half of Hispanics and 70% of all black children. Pornography, which used to bring a prison term, today dominates cable TV. Marijuana, once a social scourge, is the hot new product. And Sen. Kamala Harris wants prostitution legalized. In the lifetime of many Americans, homosexuality and abortion were still scandalous crimes now cherished constitutional rights...Post-Christian America, in many ways, is beginning to mirror what we were once taught the pre-Christian Roman Empire looked like."

What is the church's greatest need today? Its greatest need is, in the words of the Apostle Paul, "To take hold of eternal life" (I Tim. 6:12). We need to cling to the eternal God, for as the Old Testament states: "underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27). The Eternal alone is the basis for the standards by which we are to live. Can we say with Paul: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain?" (Phil.1:21), or "Nevertheless I do not live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20)? If we can't we have lost something. In the book of Proverbs, the Sage, with all the wisdom of his spirit, said: "He who finds Me finds life and attains favor from the Lord" (Prov. 8:35). Undisturbed people need, in all simplicity, to rebuild a spiritual core at the center of their life, a sense of the eternal.

Another great need is the fact that the church needs to extricate itself from the world. As Walfred Erickson described the modern church in *Is Worldliness Changing?* "The church is a victim of its own success. When it was a despised minority, it had less attraction for people. It drew only those who despaired the world. But once the church became respectable, then the worldly-minded became interested. The cross became a status symbol; worship became an opiate; the redemptive process became a haven for escapist and conformists; and the discipline and mission of the church were compromised. Worldliness is the idolatry of the worship of the creature more than the Creator." The New Testament concept of "the world" refers to the whole system of worldly values, the lust of the flesh the lust of the eye, the pride of life (I John 2:16). This speaks of fame, wealth and power. It consists of yielding in any degree to the system of values that are contrary to the will of God revealed in the Scriptures. Sometimes this is doing things simply because others or doing it. James states that "the friendship of the world is hostility toward God. And whosoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). The modern church, too often, lives side by side and in harmony with the world. Some churches count this as an accomplishment. The church lets the world define its program and techniques. Perhaps this is the reason why the church is so powerless.

This undisturbed and sophisticated age needs to learn something about humility. We are not humble, no matter what else we may be. Let us not fool ourselves about that. No one has the spirit of humility simply because he talks about it. There is a psychological hazard in talking about it. For example a person who says "I'm doing the best I can in my own weak way"...well it is just too weak. Some wise person has said that our modesty is a studied effort to conceal from others just how wonderful we are. When we speak of humility, we do not mean we are retiring, weak, nervous or lacking courage. When we speak of humility,

we are speaking of the quality of spirit that was in Gideon, who when the Lord sent an angel to tell him the great things he was to do, said: "no this is impossible," "I belong to the lowest tribe and the lowest family of the tribe" (Judges 6:12-15). We're speaking of the spirit of Moses who felt deeply unworthy of the task that was laid upon him and was conscious of his insufficiency and inadequacy (Exodus 3:11). We find it in David when he said, "Lord who am I that you have brought me this far?" (II Sam.7:18). And Isaiah in exactly the same way, having had a vision of the Lord, said "I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). Later Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 57:15: "For thus says the high and holy One who dwells in eternity, whose name is holy. 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" A person who has true humility is a person who is teachable. It is difficult to bring conviction of sin to people who feel they are getting along just as they are. How far we are from the kind of life described in the beatitude; "Blessed is he who hunger and thirsts after righteousness." It was James Hilton who said: "It is impossible for anyone to learn what he thinks he knows already." Our generation seems to be saying "we know all we need to know, we have all we need, what else is necessary?"

After laying hold of the Eternal God and realizing our own inadequacies, then it is time for religious people to turn with all their might to the real searching of the word of God for the many problems and perplexities of life. One of the greatest issues before the church today is that it no longer is ready to listen to the voice of the One living and eternal God, rather prefers the changing sands of human opinion for the foundation upon which to build his religious life. In the providence of God, the Reformation gave the world an open Bible. During the eighteenth century, however, men refused to take the Bible at face value, and rationalism came to the forefront. In the nineteenth century thinkers were greatly influenced by such men as Hegel and Darwin, and evolution undergirded the outlook of Biblical studies. From this background arose the phenomenon which was commonly called "modernism," which, although it does not occupy the forefront of modern thought and opinions as it once did, is by no means dead today, and has appeared in many forms throughout the twentieth and twentieth-first century in the modern church and has become the bases of thought that substitutes "self-improvement" and "social-improvement" for regeneration based upon the word of God. Christ did not die so that we might see the value of democracy, the evils of wealth, and the need to reform governmental systems of our nation, rather he died for our sins according to the Scripture. Let us get that phrase "according to the Scriptures!" Paul did not say "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power to abolish race prejudice, and attain a warless world," rather he said that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Have we become so modern, our faith so debased and so up to date that we have no need of the Bible? Does the world have anything to offer that is better than the word of God? It is time the modern church began to pay more attention to the Word of God than to the amassing of expensive structures, and trying to appeal to the world by offering them entertainment and nothing that offends them from the pulpit, if they still have a pulpit, and begin calling, both saint and sinner to listen to the great and final revelation of an all-powerful and all-loving God. J. B. Phillip's translation of Hebrews 4:12 says it very well: "For the word that God speaks is alive and active, it cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword, it strikes through to where the soul and spirit meet, to the inner most intimacies of man's being."