

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## PLUNDERED AND LAID WASTE

We begin this article by quoting an unknown source: "In 1861 a famous European scholar, Thomas Babington Macaulay shortly before his death, wrote to a friend in America, 'Your Republic will be fearfully plundered and laid waste by Barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth, with this difference; the Huns and Vandals will have been engendered within your own country, by your own institutions.'" This did not completely happen in the twentieth century but came close. Perhaps what we are witnessing in the twenty-first century will fulfill this prophesy of Thomas Macaulay. Another pertinent quote is from Jim Nelson Black's book: *When Nations Die* where he quotes Alexander Tocqueville: "Because Roman civilization perished through barbarian invasions, we are perhaps too much inclined to think that is the only way a civilization can die. If the lights that guide us ever go out, they will fade little by little, as if on their own accord. We therefore should not console ourselves by thinking that the barbarians are still a long way off. Some peoples may let the torch be snatched from their hands, while others stamp it out themselves."

The danger of the church being fearfully plundered, and laid waste does not come from the barbarians without, but from the barbarians within. It is amazing to see how quickly and easily so many religious people can be drawn away after those who are speaking perverse things. But more amazing is the fact that we have so many in the church that have been engendered within the religious system itself. The Apostle Paul in his parting speech to the Ephesian Elders warned "from among yourselves men will arise speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). Peter, John and Jude warn the church of danger, not from without but from within. It was in the context of the religious system of the day, a system that claimed to represent God and His people, that Jesus warns against false prophets and false teaching.

**PLUNDERED AND LAID WASTE BY THE WORLDS MODERN RELIGIOUS MACHINE.** The church today, it is sad to see, is being plundered and laid waste by those who are committed to the modern religious machine so caught up in what A. W. Tozer describes as "monstrous heresy that noise, size, activity, and bluster make men dear to God." This was the problem with the Jewish religion which God rejected. The modern religious machine with all its committees, boards, councils, administrators, directors and a host of professionals with various titles, that is passed off as the Lord's church, has made the same fatal mistake the Jews made. The modern up to date churches are being plundered and laid waste by allowing the secular world to set the agenda for their modern trendy organizations they call church. As believers the church has tended to measure success by the same standard as the world. Rather than living out the gospel before the world, most church members have patterned their lives after the world. We have forgotten the words of the Apostle Paul written to the church in Corinth: "God has chosen the foolish things of the world...the weak things of the world...the base things of the world and the despised things of the world, that He might nullify the things that are... (I Cor. 1:27, 28). We see ourselves as both the repre-

ntatives of the wisdom of our age and the wisdom of God. Far from being despised by our culture, we expect and often receive the praise of the culture. Paul's instruction to them was to uphold the truth of God in every domain of life: marriage, money, the spiritual gifts, attitude toward unbelievers, harmony between believers, worship and discipline. The modern church should take a look at the Jewish religion in the time of Christ. When it came to organized religion, none could hold a candle to the Jews. Ephesus had Diana, Samaria had Simon the Sorcerer, Paphas had Elymas the magician, Athens had its unknown god, Corinth had its temple prostitutes, Rome had its Emperor Caesar...but Jerusalem, the city of God, had the temple, the priesthood, the law, the law's ritual and sacrifices, and could boast of 4000 years of being the people of God. They had the best, most elaborate, best located, most magnificent building in town. Their priesthood surpassed the Roman Catholics, their ritual and pageantry would have made Episcopalians take a back seat, they were more organized than the Baptist, more reformed than the Presbyterians, more traditional than the Methodists, and more refined than the Lutherans. They were about as legal concerning the law as the church of Christ is about the New Testament and as independent as the Christian church. They kept the Sabbath better than the Seventh Day Adventists, and their worship would have made Charismatics jealous. They sang psalms and chanted and praised and prayed, they raised their hands and clapped and danced. They offered sacrifices and burnt incense. About any practice found in organized religion today finds its roots in O.T Judaism, yet it was worthless! Not that God established something of no value, but that the intent of God had been lost for centuries. Christ and the Apostles stood against such a system.

Isn't it strange with churches showing the greatest membership and financial growth in history, we now have the worst crime record in the world? It is strange also, that in a day when architecture and sculpture were at their best, the Apostles and the early Christians had no use for them as a means of "attraction" to the church. Instead they used the truth. The power of salvation is in the gospel, not being professional in the eyes of the world.

**PLUNDERED AND LAID WASTE BY MONEY.** The way the modern church receives and spends money is a subject no one seems to deal with today. In the New Testament there are only two reasons for the giving of money: (1) *For caring for the poor and needy:* In I Corinthians 16:1-3 Paul instructed the Corinthians to "lay aside on the first day of the week (and save money) so there would be no collections made when he came." He was receiving from the churches money for the Saints in Jerusalem who were experiencing famine. This text has been used to justify the weekly collection every Sunday, but it was especially collected for the needy in Jerusalem. Paul wanted them to have their offering ready, so when he got there they would not have to take up a collection. This passage has nothing to do with the Sunday morning collection in churches today. Paul writes about this collection in II Cor. 9:1-13 and calls it "a ministry to the saints." I Tim. 5:3-16 shows the early church had a definite program for care of needy widows (Gal. 2:10). Paul says the Jerusalem church "only asked us to remember the poor, the very

thing I also was eager to do” and James 1:22 states: “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God our Father is this: to visit the orphans and widows in their distress and keep oneself unspotted from the world” And (2) *for the preaching of the gospel*: I Cor. 9:6-11 Paul argues that he and Barnabas had the right to be supported financially because “They who preach the gospel get their living from the gospel,” but they had not used this privilege. Notice, he says *get their living from the gospel* not support a lucrative lifestyle many modern preachers experience today. Philippians 4:5-18 is a commentary on this subject, stating: “I have received everything in full...having received what you sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” I Tim. 5:17, 18 shows Elders who work hard at preaching and teaching were “worthy of wages.”

The golden text that describes a Christian is I Peter 2:9: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” In his second letter Peter says that “His divine power has granted us all things pertaining to life and godliness...He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them we may become partakers of the divine nature...” (II Pet. 1:3, 4). Paul states “He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph.1:3).

All this being true, considering who we are and what is ours, and what our mission and purpose is, why has the modern church become an organization of beggars? A cadre of fundraisers? Jesus Christ does not beg. Why, then, does his body, his representatives beg? Preachers spend much time begging for “free will offerings.” The church does not need free will offerings, it needs “predestined giving.” It is an accepted custom for congregations to make down payments on buildings, then struggle for thirty years making mortgage payments to the world’s banks, calling it “supporting the work of the Lord” (the Lord that dwells not in temples made by men’s hands). No wonder the theory of an imminent rapture is so popular...the rapture would relieve God’s people from the pressure of paying off heavy debts.

Beggars are a pathetic sight to see. The American church has no power and little influence because they are beggars. No one pays a great deal of attention to organizations that have so little discipline in their members that the preacher must preach more on giving money than preaching the gospel. The most popular justification for our modern way of begging is seen in the idea that “we can’t get people to attend services (and get them saved) if we don’t have a decent building in a respectable section of town. If we don’t conform to what people expect, the church cannot grow.” We wonder sometimes why God is more interested in saving the souls of people who live in high-cost urban areas than people in areas where real estate is less expensive. The modern phenomenon that has dominated the religious scene the last half of the twentieth century and continues today is the parachurch ministries. These ministries have become experts in raising money and expanding their ministries. Our mail boxes are filled with appeals for money to support everything from “keeping this ministry afloat to feeding starving children some where in the world, or electing a ‘born-again’ candidate to some political office”

We have come a long way from the days when “we do not have silver and gold but what we do have we have give you...”

**PLUNDERED AND LAID WASTE BY IGNORANCE:** How many times have we heard that “ignorance is bliss” or “what you don’t know won’t hurt you?” This is a dangerous attitude when applied to Scriptures. We can understand the world’s ignorance of the things of God because they are “darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart and have become callous...” (Eph. 4:19). However, ignorance among the people of God is without excuse. Ignorance is disobedience (Rom. 10: 3) and sins committed in ignorance in Israel had to be dealt with, demanding sacrifice (Heb. 9:7). Even worship can be “worship in ignorance” (Acts 17:23). It was a lack of knowledge that destroyed Israel and took them into captivity (Hos. 4:6, Isa. 5:13). One of the most appalling phenomena evident in the church today is the rampant ignorance and lack of understanding of the Scriptures. It is heartbreaking to see so many young men coming out of Bible colleges and Seminaries with only a scant understanding of the word of God.

By only a usual reading of Paul’s epistles we are struck with the frequency he emphasizes the importance of not only knowing, but understanding the will of God. Many times, he prays that his converts may have wisdom, knowledge and understanding and be enlightened about the things he is writing. He says that “the mystery of Christ in other generations was not made known...but now has been revealed...” (Eph. 3:5). He states even the “things which the eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him (a favorite funeral text and a passage used by those who insist that we cannot know these things until we die and go to heaven)...to us God has revealed them through the Spirit...” (1Cor. 2:9, 10). He then says the Spirit was given to us (not to make us feel good, give us a tingling feeling, slay us in the Spirit, or enable us to speak in tongues or have a secret prayer language), but that “we might know things freely given to us by God” (ver. 12). It is remarkable that many of those that claim to have an abundance of the Spirit (baptized, overwhelmed by, engulfed by the Spirit) know so little about God’s revelation in His word. He then says, “we have the mind of Christ.” How can anyone who has the mind of Christ remain ignorant of His word and will?

Some of the most controversial and argumentative passages of Scripture are the very ones the Apostle says he would “not have you ignorant about” or about that which he asks, “do you not know?” He says we are not to be ignorant about those who have died, that now they are asleep and in the same way He brought Christ from the dead, even so he will bring them from the dead (I Thess. 4:13 ff), yet due to emotionalism, sensational preaching and prophesy experts, this is one of the most misunderstood subjects in the Bible. He said he would not have us ignorant about spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:1), yet this too is on the front burner of ignorance. Six times in I Corinthians 6 he asks, “do you not know?” Twice concerning the fact that Christians will judge the world and will also judge angels (a subject most Christians do not want to hear...it will interfere with their walking on the streets of gold and singing in the angel band. He asks if they do not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom, and many are unaware that Christians will inherit it. So why, he asks, are they appealing to people of the world to settle their problems. He then asks if they do not know their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and they should not be using them for immoral purposes. When we see as many divorces among church members today as the world, the church doesn’t know this either. Ignorance is no excuse.