

THE 4 BIGGEST PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CHURCH TODAY

The Lord's people have always had to deal with problems -- problems from *within* as well as problems from *without*.

- a. The Lord's people in the 1st century had to deal with problems from *within*.
 - Example: *Ac 15:1* -- "And **certain men** came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"
 - + *Ac 15:24* -- ". . . we have heard that some who went out **from us** have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law' -- to whom we gave no such commandment . . ."
 - Example: *Ac 20:29-30* -- "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in **among you**, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."
- b. And the Lord's people in the 1st century had to deal with problems from *without*.
 - *Matt 10:18-22* -- "You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. . . . ²¹ Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² And you will be hated by all for My name's sake."

The Lord's people in the 20th century are having to deal with problems from *within* and from *without* too.

- a. But the problems from *within* have always been the most damaging to the Lord's cause.

For a little while this morning, I want to talk about what I consider to be the 4 biggest problems *within* the brotherhood today.

1. We have a problem with UNCERTAINTY.

An uncertain sound is being heard from too many pulpits and in too many Bible classes.

The idea that we cannot be sure what the truth is with regard to any number of Bible subjects is taking hold in the minds of too many people.

- a. That idea does not come from the pen of the inspired writers.
 - It comes from the pen of uninspired writers . . . and from the lips of those who have spent too much time reading from uninspired writers.
 - It comes from the lips of those who are "unskilled in the word of righteousness" (*Heb 5:13*).
 - And it comes from the lips of those who do not *want* to be sure of what the Bible says -- because they have an axe to grind . . . or because they do not have the courage to take a firm stand for the truth.

But listen to what the inspired writers say about the ability of honest, ordinary men to understand the truths in God's word.

- a. *Lk 1:1-4* -- "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may **know the certainty** of those things in which you were instructed."
- b. *Heb 11:1* -- "Now faith is being **sure** of what we hope for and **certain** of what we do not see."

- c. *2Pet 1:12* -- "For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you **know** and are **established** in the present truth."
- d. *1Cor 2:9 - 3:2* -- "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' ¹⁰ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **that we might know** the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."
- e. *2Tim 3:16-17* -- "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is **profitable** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- f. *Eph 3:1-5* -- "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles -- ² if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read, **you may understand** my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: . . ."

 - v4 ASV -- "when ye read, ye **can perceive** my understanding in the mystery of Christ"
 - v4 NIV -- "In reading this, then, you **will be able to understand** my insight into the mystery of Christ"
 - v4 NASB -- "And by referring to this, when you read you **can understand** my insight into the mystery of Christ"

- g. *2Cor 1:13* -- "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and **understand**, and I hope you will understand until the end; . . ." (NASB)
 - NRSV -- "For we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand"
 - NIV -- "For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand"
- h. *1Jn 2:20-21* -- "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you **know** all things. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you **know** it, and that no lie is of the truth."

Now, having said all that, I want to point out that . . .

- a. You cannot understand what God has not revealed.
 - *Deut 29:29* -- "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."
- b. You cannot understand if you do not study diligently.
 - *2Pet 3:15-16* -- "and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation -- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures."
- c. You cannot understand if you allow your emotions to rule over your reason.
 - That's what the Jewish religious leaders did in rejecting the evidence that so clearly proved Jesus to be the Christ.
 - + *Mk 15:10* -- "For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy."
- d. You cannot understand what you are not willing to understand.
 - *2Pet 3:5* -- "For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,"

- + KJV -- *"For this they willingly are ignorant of"*
- + NIV -- *"But they deliberately forget"*
- *Jn 7:17 -- "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority."*
- e. You cannot understand if you are a fool .
 - *Eph 5:17 -- "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."*
- f. You cannot understand if you are carnally minded.
 - *1Cor 3:1-2 -- "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able"*
- g. You cannot understand if you do not love the truth with all your heart.
 - *2Th 2:9-12 -- "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness"*

This idea (the idea that we really cannot be certain about a lot of things taught in the Bible) produces all kinds of problems.

- a. It produces **skepticism**.
 - It undermines confidence in the Scriptures and, ultimately, it undermines confidence in the God who gave the Scriptures.
- b. It produces **emotionalism**.
 - When we do not understand what we should or should not do, we are likely to decide on the basis of our emotions.
- c. It produces **subjectivism**.
 - If we cannot come to know the truth by an objective study of the Scriptures, then we have to go with what *feels right* to us.

2. We have a problem with IDENTITY.

We have lost our identity; we don't know who we are; and we don't know the difference between us and them.

- a. Of course, this is not true of all of us . . . and, hopefully, not most of us -- but it is true of many of us . . . and I fear their number is increasing.

We used to know who we are.

- a. We used to know that "we" are Christians only and the only Christians.
 - "We" being all those who are repentant, baptized, believers . . . living "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" . . . and committed to observing "all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded."
- b. We used to know that we are un-denominational, non-denominational, and anti-denominational.
- c. We used to know that we speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent . . . we call Bible things by Bible names . . . we give a "thus saith the Lord" [citing book, chapter, and verse] for everything we believe, teach, and practice . . . we do not fraternize . . . and, in matters of faith, we will not compromise.
 - We seek true unity among all believers -- the unity of the spirit . . . based upon *"one body (therefore, one church) and one Spirit, . . . one hope . . . ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all"*

The faithful children of God in Ezra's day knew who they were -- and we would do well to imitate them.

- a. *Ezr 5:11 -- "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are re-*

building the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed."

- b. And they would not compromise the truth or fraternize with the enemy.
- *Ezr 4:1-5 -- "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, ² they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." ³ But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." ⁴ Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, ⁵ and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia."*

3. We have a problem with PASSIVITY.

Too many Christians have lost their militancy -- they have stacked arms.

But every Christian is to "put on the whole armor of God" and wield "the sword of the Spirit" in defense of the truth and in opposition to error.

- a. *Eph 6:13-17 -- "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; . . ."*
- b. There is no place in the Lord's army for the pacifist or the conscientious objector -- every Christian must fight "the good fight" (2Tim 4:7).
- *Jude 3 -- "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to **contend** earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."*

Let me ask you a question in an effort to stimulate your thinking.

- a. Question: How would you react to someone advocating that one political system is just as good as another political system (communism is just as good as capitalism . . . a communist dictatorship is just as good as democracy . . . etc)?
- b. You know the blood that was spilled to win our freedom from tyranny and make democracy possible . . . and you know the blood that was spilled time and time again by brave young men in defense of freedom and democracy.
- Wouldn't you get stirred up? Wouldn't you get animated?
 - Wouldn't you stand up and speak out in passionate defense of liberty and democracy?
 - + Surely you would.
 - + Surely you wouldn't sit passively by and let the ignorant and the enemy assail the things we hold so dear.

Well, how do you feel, and how do you react when the truths of the New Covenant, ratified by the blood of God's own Son, is being assailed?

- a. How do you feel and how do you react when the truth that can free men from their sins is being misrepresented and perverted?
- Do you sit passively by and say nothing?
 - Do you weakly offer some "insights?"
 - Or do you unashamedly declare the whole counsel of God . . . and shut the mouths

of the ignorant and the gainsayers?

This passivity is a problem that leads to other problems.

- a. It leads to an insistence upon positive pablum from the pulpit.
- b. It leads to digression -- as brethren adopt denominational methods for accomplishing "church growth" . . . when they are no longer convicting men of their sins and exposing their false religious doctrines and practices and bringing them out of sin and denominationalism.

4. We have a problem with APATHY.

The Lord wants His people to be spiritually energetic, enthusiastic, involved, and diligent.

- a. *1Cor 15:58 -- "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always **abounding** in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*
- b. *2Pet 1:5-11 -- "But also for this very reason, giving **all diligence**, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸ For if these things are yours and **abound**, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brethren, be even **more diligent** to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ¹¹ for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*
- c. *Tit 2:14 -- Jesus "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."*

But words like *energetic, enthusiastic, involved*, and *diligent* just do not apply to a lot of people today who claim to be Christians -- and their number seems to be growing.

It seems to me that there is abundant evidence of a growing apathy among us.

- a. I see apathy toward our brethren in other congregations.
 - But that's not the way it was among 1st century Christians and 1st century churches.
 - Christians in the 1st century were very much concerned about their brethren in other places.
 - + Example 1: *Ac 11:19-23 -- "Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. ²⁰ But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. ²² Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. ²³ When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord."*
- b. I see apathy toward those who are lost in sin.
- c. I see apathy toward church discipline.
- d. I see apathy toward the problems confronting the brotherhood.
 - Evidenced by little or no interest in debates.
 - Evidenced by waning interest in gospel meetings.
- e. I see apathy toward the Scriptures.
 - It seems that very few Christians are seriously studying the Bible -- there is an appalling lack of knowledge.

Conclusion.

If the problems I have talked about this morning are not the biggest problems we face, they are problems . . . and they are serious problems.

The single most important part of the solution to these problems within the Lord's church is diligent, open-minded, honest-hearted study of the Bible.

- a. *2Tim 2:15 -- "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*
- b. *Prov 2:2-9 -- ". . . incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; ³ Yes, . . . cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, ⁴ . . . seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; ⁷ He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; ⁸ He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints. ⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity and every good path."*