

# TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO CHRIST, A CHRISTIAN MUST KEEP INFORMED ABOUT CHURCH HISTORY, CURRENT EVENTS IN THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL, AND WORLD EVENTS IMPACTING THE CHURCH

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## Introduction

Seven hundred fifty years before Jesus' birth, Hosea, on behalf of God, denounced Israel's ignorance and its consequence: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children" (4:6). Ignorance of God's law was **their** downfall, and it will cause the same consequence for any present-day saint or congregation of them if they persist in it. Moreover, one is greatly advantaged who has some knowledge concerning matters related to God's Word, besides that Word itself.

It will be impossible to do justice in one chapter to the three subjects included in its title (in truth, they each deserve a chapter—or perhaps a book—of their own). One must be either a spiritual babe and/or grossly misguided to believe that knowledge of these areas of information is unimportant to one's faithfulness to the Christ. Undeniably, a major factor in the extensive apostasy the church has suffered over the past six decades has been that so many brethren have failed to inform themselves in one or more of these areas.

Since knowledge of these facts (and their implications and correct applications) is necessary to attaining and maintaining good spiritual health, we do well to briefly consider why ignorance of them is so pervasive.

- **Ignorance:** It "has not dawned" on some how harmful and handicapping ignorance of these matters is—they are ignorant of the curse of ignorance, at least as it applies to such information. They have never grasped the importance of the perspective that knowledge of history and of current events (both in and out of the kingdom) brings.
- **Apathy:** The question, "Do you know the meaning of *apathy*?" to which the unconcerned hearer replies, "No. I don't know, and I don't care," well defines the term. Such statements as "I'm not interested in history; its boring," "I don't care about the news or politics," "It's none of my business what so-and-so congregation is doing or what so-and-so a thousand miles away is teaching," evince the insular *I-live-now* and *I-live-for-me* attitude that grips many in the church. They have no appetite for anything beyond a very narrow circle of selfish interests.
- **Laziness:** Some are cognizant that knowledge of these matters is significant for their spiritual well being. They are not apathetic in the sense of not knowing and not caring. They are simply

intellectually lazy. They depend entirely on others to inform them, rather than possessing any ambition to seek and learn from sources of such information on their own. They are mental couch potatoes when it comes to spiritual issues.

- **Naiveté:** Some brethren who know the Truth are nonchalant about the cancerous and potentially fatal effect of false teachers and their error. They see no value in learning anything about the battles faithful saints in previous eras have fought (some won, some lost) with error. They are blasé concerning the devastation error can wreak when it prevails. They do not want to hear any warnings about false doctrines because “we don’t have any who teach those things here.”
- **Aversion to controversy:** Some brethren despise any sort of controversy. They not only avoid personal involvement in it; they cannot even bear hearing it discussed—whether it occurred twenty or two centuries ago or is presently taking place. Some believe that unity is the apex of attainments and that any sort of controversy or disharmony is sinful. The “Rodney King philosophy”—*Why can’t we all just get along?*—adopted by so many of our fellow-citizens, has greatly affected more than a few brethren. Many universities (including those operated by brethren) have adopted the fairly recent fad of offering studies and/or degrees in “conflict resolution”—otherwise known as “how to excel at compromise.” One would suspect that many brethren have earned such degrees.

In some cases, a combination of the foregoing factors may have contributed to the prevalent ignorance that has been—and continues to be—such a curse to the church of the Lord. Moses lamented in plaintive terms the apostasy of Israel he foresaw: “Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, That they would consider their latter end!” (Deu. 32:29). So we would wish concerning thousands of the Lord’s people. Let us now consider each of these areas of important information.

### **Keeping Informed About Church History**

Moses was born under the “executive order” of infanticide, enacted by a merciless and cruel pharaoh to control population growth of enslaved Israel. This order arose at least in part because he apparently failed Egyptian History 101:

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph.... And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah; and he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birth-stool; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, then she shall live (Exo. 1:8, 15–16).

Pharaoh's murderous edict graphically illustrates the sort of tragedy that can result because of ignorance of history in general. This potential for tragedy in the wake of ignorance also applies with no less force to God's people and their need to know and remember their history, both inspired and uninspired.

God manifestly knew that Israel needed to maintain knowledge of their history if they would be faithful to Him. The ceremony and ritual involved in the initial Passover spared the Hebrews from the God-dispatched destroyer who "passed over" their houses without harming them. God decreed the Passover observance for the Jews in perpetuity as a memorial of His deliverance of them from their bondage (Exo. 12:24). This event of Israel's history was to be so retained in their knowledge that generations later, when their children asked them, "What mean ye by this service?" they could recite this historic deliverance (vv. 25–27). When Ahaz, one of the worst of the wicked kings of Judah, thrust the nation into idolatry and apostasy, he apparently canceled the Passover observance (2 Chr. 28:1–4, 22–25). He doubtless understood the threat its recollection of history would be to his wicked designs. Righteous Hezekiah followed Ahaz, both destroying his idolatry and reinstating the Passover (2 Chr. 30:5). Judah's faithfulness was generally parallel to her faithful Passover observance with its crucial remembrance of history.

Jehovah again emphasized the significance of Israel's knowledge of its history. When Israel crossed the Jordan by God's miraculous provision, he commanded Joshua to erect a twelve-stone monument to be a "conversation starter" for future generations. As the children would ask their parents, "What meaneth these stones?" they were to rehearse the history of the way God rolled back the Jordan for them to enter Canaan (Jos. 4:1–8). Both this monument and the Passover observance imply the necessity of knowing the history to which they were tied and from which they had emerged. More than this, the very purpose of knowing and relating this history was to engender trust in and faithfulness to God, Who had so richly blessed them. When they forgot their history, they forgot God, for He was intimately and inseparably bound up in it.

The New Testament would contain considerably fewer pages if we stripped it of its quotations from Old Testament passages, not to mention the almost countless additional references to historical persons and events besides. Bible students can call to mind numerous instances in which the Lord or an inspired New Testament penman issued a warning rooted in Old Testament history. Jesus condemned Capernaum for its unbelief, reminding them of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mat. 11:23–24). He referenced such historical personages as Solomon (Mat.

6:29), Jonah (12:40–41), Moses (19:8), and Noah (24:37) and made application of their experiences and/or accomplishments.

Paul clearly expected those to whom he wrote and preached to profit from history: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The Hebrews writer based stern warnings about apostasy on God’s judgment upon Old Testament apostates (Heb. 2:1–3; 10:28–31). He also issued great encouragement by listing several historical spiritual heroes and heroines, depicting them as cheering us on in the Christian race (Heb. 11:1–12:1). Moreover, there appears to have been a rather large reservoir of historical knowledge in the Jews contemporary with the Lord and the apostles. One gets the impression that they expected those who heard and read their inspired words to be conversant with the historical events, persons, and places to which they referred. Obviously, inspired men understood the need to know spiritual history. “Church history” specifically spans from Pentecost to five minutes ago and involves both inspired and uninspired history. Further, in a general sense, this history can hardly ignore the Old Testament prophecies, types, and shadows that foretell the Messiah and His kingdom.

The general level of ignorance of inspired history—including both portions of the Bible—is appalling among the Lord’s people. Our spiritual forbears of only a three or four generations ago were generally characterized by a hunger and thirst for knowledge of God’s Word, born of an unquenchable faith in and love for it. This spiritual appetite drove them to study their Bibles daily, and the preachers they heard gave them good, solid spiritual food—laden with “book, chapter, and verse.” Succeeding generations lost that desire to study and learn what God would have us do and be, satisfied to be spoon-fed by a preacher once or twice a week, with little or no study on their own through the week. Add to this lack of appetite the fact that on Sundays they may only get 15–20-minute “talks” designed to make them feel good—and that may make little reference to Scripture. Such ignorance has left thousands of saints and hundreds of congregations practically defenseless before any and every “wind of doctrine.”

God’s lament through Hosea over Israel’s gross ignorance of His Word could as well be said of His spiritual “Israel” over the past five or six decades. As old Israel’s ignorance proved destructive to her, so ignorance of the Bible has all but invited error in doctrine and practice, as well as immorality, to flourish among the people of God. Moreover, mere “head knowledge” of God’s Word is insufficient if there is no reverence for it as Holy Writ and if there is no desire or feeling of obligation to obey what one learns. Many who teach in theological schools have a

thorough knowledge of the New Testament, but they deny its inspiration and have no intention of practicing any of it.

Knowledge of uninspired church history can be very helpful in maintaining our faithfulness in the kingdom. Those do well who have a clear concept of inspired church history of the first century. Those also do well who have some knowledge of the major stages of apostasy of the succeeding nineteen centuries of uninspired history. Brethren need to have at least some acquaintance with the roots of hundreds of unauthorized doctrines and practices that eventuated in the monstrosity known as Roman Catholicism. The Roman Church held unchallengeable religious and civil power for centuries, at least in the Western World. Brethren also need to know that an effort to reform the Catholic Church began in the sixteenth century, resulting in no Catholic reforms, but in the beginning of the so-called “Protestant” Churches, that have, in turn, produced the thousands of denominations.

Moreover, brethren **particularly** need to know something of the efforts of the sacrificial and dedicated men, beginning in the late eighteenth century, who decided to forget the obviously failed efforts at reformation. Brethren need to be familiar with the thrilling account of the fact that these men saw in their study of the New Testament the imperative to maintain the church as it began under the inspired administration of the apostles. They pled with others to simply return to the New Testament and reproduce/restore the church as inspired men portrayed it.

The effect of familiarity with church history over the past twenty centuries will give one who would be faithful certain definable advantages toward being faithful:

- Knowledge of the first-century church will allow one to learn the only means of entering into it, along with its authorized work, worship, polity, designations, and daily behavior of its members. This history is the most important of all to learn and appreciate, for without being grounded in it (and being determined to be guided thereby), one will have no means of detecting—much less opposing—the errors later periods of history reveal.
- Familiarity with the departures that began in the second century and that continue until this moment will enable one to recognize such errors and both avoid and reprove them as “unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11).
- Knowledge of the efforts to restore the church of Christ, especially over the past two centuries, will permit one to see the way those restorers met and defeated such Calvinistic errors as inherited sin, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, and arbitrary “election.” They will see the way errors concerning worship (e.g., instrumental music, choirs, infrequent observance of the

Lord's supper, et al.), baptism, "faith-only" salvation, the "pastor" system, and a host of others were met and defeated. They will learn the way they can meet those same errors today, whether they encounter them in those in the denominations or in apostate brethren.

It is extremely disheartening that so few brethren know or even have any curiosity about those dedicated brethren who have gone before and who have made great sacrifices of time, talent, and what little treasure most of them had to advance the cause of primitive religion. Their lives and struggles are sources of great inspiration for true disciples. I strongly encourage the reading of any of the following one-volume summaries as a beginning point for a broad overview of church history:

- *The Church, the Falling Away, and the Restoration*, by J.W. Shepherd (Gospel Advocate Co., Nashville, TN)
- *Church History for Busy People*, by George A. Klingman (Gospel Advocate Co., Nashville, TN)
- *A Concise Account of Church History*, by John D. Cox (Dehoff Pub., Murfreesboro, TN)
- *The Eternal Kingdom*, by F.W. Mattox (Gospel Light Pub. Co., Delight, AR)

For a far more comprehensive history, particularly of the effort in our nation to restore the church, the four volumes of *The Search for the Ancient Order*, by Earl Irvin West, are unbeatable.

George Santayana, the American poet-philosopher of the previous century, may be best known for the following sage observation: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." We could well add, as a footnote to Santayana's statement: "Yes, and those who do not **know** anything about the past cannot very well remember it." So very many in the church of the Lord know nothing of the departures and apostasies of the past—and the Scriptural refutations of them—and have fallen prey to repeating those errors.

### **Keeping Informed About Current Events in the Church Universal**

The Lord's church today is by no means the same body it was fifty years ago. My grandfather (an elder for forty years in central Texas) or even my father (whose more than thirty years of preaching ended in 1966) would not believe their eyes and ears were they to be "beamed down" into many present-day assemblies that now masquerade under the designation, *Church of Christ*. They would surely believe that someone had placed a *Church of Christ* sign on these buildings by mistake or as a prank. They would be struck by the gross contradiction between the sign outside and the preaching and practice going on inside.

Even into the early 1960s, traveling Christians could stop on a Lord's day at almost any building bearing a sign *Church of Christ*, confident that they would find brethren engaging in Scriptural worship and teaching God's Word faithfully in classroom and pulpit (with notable exceptions in some Midwest and Northwest states where the Christian Church has deceptively retained the *Church of Christ* designation since 1906). Those whose adult Christian lives have spanned a half-century or more are well aware of the changes—radical changes—the church of the Lord has undergone. In no corner of the world has the church escaped them.

I have many times been asked **why** and **how** this metamorphosis has happened to a people whose very reason for existence characteristically has been merely to be the New Testament church by adhering to the scriptural pattern for it. These are significant questions that deserve answers. Many who have lived through these changes are still perplexed by and about them. Some brethren admit being “uncomfortable” with what they see and hear in their congregations, but they cannot quite “put their finger” on just what makes them thus feel. Especially do those generations that are too young to “bridge back” fifty years in their experience need to know (1) that a grievous evolution has occurred and (2) what at least some of the factors are that have produced it.

### ***Major Elements of the Evolution***

Every movement of apostasy, digression, and departure from the Truth since Pentecost has involved either liberalism or anti-ism.

**Liberalism's** advocates take liberties with God's Word. Cain was the first liberal, substituting his chosen offering for that which God authorized. If they are consistent, liberals of our time, in despising the Lord's pattern for His church, must sympathize with Cain's behavior and with of such other noted liberals as Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1–2), King Saul (1 Sam. 15:13–23), and King Uzziah (2 Chr. 26:16–18), all of whom decided the limitations of God's Word were too stringent.

**Anti-ism's** advocates, contrariwise, restrict liberties and allowances granted by God's Word, binding their personal scruples as laws for all. The Pharisees of Jesus' day are exemplars, binding such things as various sabbath day restrictions and the washing of hands and dishes (Mat. 12:10–12; Mat. 15:2; Mark 7:2–4; et al.). If anti brethren are consistent, they must not only applaud the Pharisees of old, but also the baptized Jews after Pentecost who sought to bind circumcision upon Gentile converts (Acts 15:1–2) and the Judaizers who forbade Christian Jews from eating with Gentile saints (Gal. 2:11–14). Paul warned of “the doctrines of demons,” which would **forbid** marriage and the eating of meat, both of which **God allows** (1

Tim. 4:1–4; 1 Cor. 7:2, 9, 36; Heb. 13:4)—anti-ism, pure and simple. Roman Catholicism demonstrates the effects of mixing both of these elements of apostasy to the ultimate, with its mass of restrictions that God never decreed (anti-ism) and its contempt for most of the ones He decreed for His church (liberalism).

The Lord’s church has doubtless had some of both brands of apostates almost from Pentecost. The two hundred-year history of the restored church in our nation includes the rise of various antis and liberals. It took a few decades for the fruits of some of these men to mature into “movements” with widespread effects (the devil is content to take small steps). Liberalism resulted in the American Christian Missionary Society, soon followed by introduction of instrumental music in worship by the mid-nineteenth century. Anti-ism resulted in such things as opposition to Bible colleges, individual communion cups, and “located” preachers.

While both strains of divergent theology are equally repugnant to our Savior, liberalism seems always to prove the more devastating of the two in the long run. It required half a century from the time men began pleading for a return to the old Jerusalem Gospel for the influence of the missionary society and instrumental music liberals to reach fruition. It produced a devastating division in 1906 that took about eighty-six percent of the church at that time with it, thereafter becoming the two-pronged “Christian Church,” both branches of which have become increasingly permissive over the century of their existence. Between the two World Wars, the liberal and speculative views of prophetic fulfillment (i.e., premillennialism) posed a major threat to the faithful remnant left after the great division of 1906. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., led the exposure and refutation of this threat to the faith, which, by 1950, had isolated and all but decimated its influence except in a few congregations.

The early aforementioned *anti* issues never gained major traction, and only a very few small groups of these folk can be found. However, about the time the battle had been won over premillennialism, a few brethren began trumpeting the twin issues of (1) opposition to church support of children’s homes operated by brethren and (2) of one church’s sending funds to another one to assist with support for its work (i.e., “anti-church cooperation”). By the mid-1960s these brethren created sufficient confusion to attract perhaps ten percent of the brotherhood to their anti views. They have made few if any inroads since that time.

A new strain of liberalism began to gain traction in the mid-1960s that has proved to be a malignant force of greater proportions than the one that began a century earlier. In perhaps half the time it took its predecessor, it has done as much or more damage. Rather than distilling their efforts to only two major thrusts as did their nineteenth-century forebears, liberals in this latest

assault from within have determined to reform, restructure, and reshape every facet of the restored church that distinguishes it from every other religious organization. Nothing is sacred to its appetite for change. It calls in question the restored worship, work, and organization of the church. Even the plan of salvation the apostles declared and implemented on Pentecost is elective. Such restructuring has blurred the line of fellowship, resulting in “open membership” that adds unsaved people to their church rolls.

To this cadre of dedicated liberals the denominations are “sister churches,” which is consistent with their view of the restored church itself as merely another denomination. Summarized, the liberal onslaught of the past half century has been characterized by one great principle: abandonment of the need for Scriptural authority concerning every doctrine and practice that make the church of the Lord unique among the thousands of counterfeit religious institutions men have built. To a lesser degree, a “new breed” of liberal has arisen since 2005. These are men who had a record of soundness and faithfulness in the kingdom over many years, but who, for a variety of motivations, turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to a prominent brother’s impenitent errors regarding the eldership and marriage, divorce, and remarriage. This denial of reality caused them to make fellowship compromises, plainly forbidden by the Lord’s inspired spokesmen (Rom. 17:17–18; Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9–11; et al.).

Paul’s familiar statement of the authority obligation is both concise and clear: “And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17). This multi-faceted malignancy has captured hundreds if not thousands of churches and tens of thousands of saints to one degree or another.

### ***Some Factors Behind the Evolution***

Those bent on provoking such changes in recent years have been eager to spread their influence far and wide. All of the factors discussed in the Introduction to this chapter (i.e., ignorance, apathy, naiveté, et al.) have contributed significantly to this disastrous evolution. Other elements that have enabled these forces to ravage and savage the bride of Christ so completely in a relatively short span are the following:

- **Determined change agents:** As a few began revealing their liberalism in the 1960s—and were allowed to remain in pulpits and/or classrooms—others who were in places of leadership were encouraged to use their influence for the change agenda. During the 1970s and into the following decade, the number of those dedicated to turning the church upside down and inside out increased greatly. Preachers such as Lynn Anderson, Rubel Shelly, and Marvin Phillips abandoned the faith they once preached. They attracted followers with their “smooth and fair

speech,” whereby “they beguile[d] the hearts of the innocent” (Rom 16:18). Theirs was an iconoclastic “gospel” of church overhaul. These leaders eventually also included writers, editors, publishers, elders, and particularly those involved in higher education (board members, administrators, and instructors).

- **Technological factors:** By mid-twentieth century, America was become increasingly mobile. People were on the move because of such circumstances as job changes and college. Military service moved folks about both in our nation and abroad. Brethren were among those thus moving about, and some of those moving about were liberals who took their liberalism with them, infecting the church wherever they took up residence. Reliable mail service, economical and rapid publication, first by modern presses, followed by copy machines and on-demand publishing all fueled the unprecedented rapid dissemination of information. The dawn of the age of personal computers and the World Wide Web to interconnect them all has brought previously unimaginable increases in the availability of information and its instantaneous delivery. These are marvelous tools for preaching and teaching the gospel. Unfortunately, they work just as well for the worst heretic and his heresies. I have been privileged to preach the Gospel in a few nations beyond our shores, and liberalism has been exported to every one of them. Wherever the church exists, Satan will see that the message of change will find its way there to infect as many as possible.
- **Church growth mania:** In the few years immediately following World War II, the Lord’s church grew numerically so rapidly that it was the fastest growing religious body in the nation for two or three years running. This growth came largely through personal evangelism and Gospel meeting efforts with no thought of any sort of gimmickry to attract people for “growth’s” sake. As it became more difficult to find those who were interested in Bible study and as Gospel meetings ceased to attract crowds, the growth rate naturally declined. To address this trend, church growth “experts” sprang up and began making the rounds with their seminars on “How to Grow a Church,” many of whose suggested methods were denominational warmed-overs. Some churches adopted what appeared to be an almost whatever-it-takes approach, making them susceptible to various kinds of promotions, building gymnasiums, and circus-type performances (e.g., “Magic for the Master,” “Juggling for Jesus,” and “Gymnastics to the Glory of God”). Those who offered free hamburgers failed to realize that those drawn to them by free supper on Wednesdays before the meeting could as easily be drawn away when the denomination down the street offered a bigger burger.

The foregoing points by no means exhaust the list of contributing factors. If space permitted, we could also include detailed discussion on the role of pride, monetary advantage, emotionalism, the fear of being called “narrow-minded,” and others.

***Some preventive and/or remedial measures for the evolution***

Let us now consider some of the measures that would have prevented much of the apostasy the church has suffered over the past half-century. Where apostasy has occurred, some may be reclaimed by these same measures.

- **Read, study, and learn:** Ignorance is the predominant cause that so many have fallen prey to error. First, those who were good students of God’s Word and whose only desire has been to serve Him have been the least likely to be deceived by the servants of Satan. Those who have never been real students of the Bible have always been fertile soil for seeds of error (to one who does not know and love the Truth, error sounds just as good). Second, those who are wise enough to keep up with the “winds of doctrine” that are ever blowing through the church can identify such errors immediately when they come in contact with them. Those who eschew such information are “sitting ducks” for errors from suave, “dynamic,” and personable preachers and writers. More than ample warnings concerning men, doctrines, publications, and schools that have erred from the Truth have been documented and issued for more than forty years. Truly, there is no dearth of information available, only a dearth of willingness and effort to read and study it. Among these sources are the following:
  - *Contending for the Faith*, begun by the late Ira Y. Rice, Jr., has been informing brethren of false teachers and their errors for forty-four years. Now edited by David P. Brown, it is available both in print and in electronic media. The electronic version is available at no charge from [www.cffpaper.com](http://www.cffpaper.com).
  - *Defender*, published by the Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, Florida, and edited by Michael Hatcher, is in its forty-second year of publication. It is also available both in print and electronically at no charge for either version by requesting it through the Bellview office.
  - When college and university lectureships ceased standing forthrightly for the Truth and against error, in about 1975 congregations began hosting lectureships that would deal with current errors and issues. Likely hundreds of books of these lectures have been published that document the history of the church in a unique way over almost a forty-year span. Many of these books are still in print or are available on electronic media. I especially recommend the volumes from the lectureships at Spring, Texas, Pensacola, Florida (Bellview church), and the Annual Denton Lectures, Denton, Texas.

The foregoing resources do not even take into account the inexhaustible supply of information available via the Internet.

- **Exercise local awareness:** Jesus made it clear that His people must concern themselves with others beyond their own respective locales. As with His charge to the apostles, so to us beginning at home, our concerns must include others, even “unto the uttermost part of the earth,” as we have ability and opportunity (Acts 1:8). Paul’s letters copiously refer to individuals and congregations in many places (Rom. 16:1-4, 16, 21–23; 1 Cor. 16:1–2, 19–20; 2 Cor. 8:1; 9:2; Gal. 1:2; et al.), exemplifying the interest we should have in the Lord’s people everywhere. These interests must include an awareness of the doctrine and practices of other congregations. Likely thousands of congregations have Websites, by which one can often learn very much relating to their respective doctrines and practices. Only with such information can one make “righteous judgment” (John 7:24) that is necessary for us to be able to make Scriptural fellowship decisions (Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9–11). This information will also enable us to warn others of these errors.

The congregation that is not being bothered with the change-agent agenda today may find it on its doorstep tomorrow. The individual Christian (particularly if he is an elder, Acts 20:28–31) who has no interest in such matters is grossly negligent. As with all other potential threats, so with these threats to the body of Christ: To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

### **Keeping Informed About World Events Impacting the Church**

Some brethren give little or no attention whatsoever to any world events (e.g., world rulers and their policies and legislation). Others seem almost to be slaves to news media for the latest reports of events of every sort, both at home and broad. Between these extremes lies the middle ground of a healthy interest in and concern relating to developments in the world about us that can—and sometimes do—affect the Lord’s people. Scriptural precedent for such awareness and interest abounds. The Lord and the penmen of the New Testament acknowledge that His disciples live in both a material and a spiritual realm. Jesus called attention to this fact when He said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God that which is God’s” (Mat. 22:21). As Jesus schooled Pontius Pilate about Who was really in power and the existence of a kingdom superior to that of Rome, He made it clear to the governor that He was well aware of the events, laws, and governmental systems of this world:

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.... Pilate therefore saith unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou

not that I have power to release thee, and have power to crucify thee? Jesus answered him, Thou wouldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath greater sin (John 18:36; 19:10–11).

One cannot read Luke's portions of the New Testament without noting his great familiarity with events in the world that related to His principal readers—the church of the Lord. He dates John's birth in the "days of Herod, king of Judaea" (Luke 1:5). He tied the time of Jesus' birth to the rule of Caesar Augustus and particularly to "when Quirinius was governor of Syria" and specified that the circumstance that brought Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem was an edict (i.e., civil law) of a world ruler (Luke 2:1–2). Luke several times mentions the names of various soldiers, proconsuls, and governors as he records his inspired church history (Acts 10:1; 12:1; 13:7; 18:12; 23:25–26; 24:27; 25:13).

Paul valued his Hebrew heritage (Phi. 3:5–6), but he also was fully aware of his Roman citizenship and the rights and privileges that Roman law granted (Acts 16:35–39; 22:25–29; 25:10–12). The book of Revelation is a book written in the "code" of signs and symbols (Rev. 1:1). Its primary purpose was to reveal to the saints living at the close of the first century the way world rulers, laws, and events were going to affect them. Obviously, the Lord knew they needed to be aware of these matters.

We live in a world in which everything associated with the Bible and Christians is increasingly under assault worldwide. Our nation, though founded by men who accepted the Bible as God's Word and incorporated various Bible principles into our founding documents, is no exception to this assault, for example:

- A steady march toward absolute secularism has been occurring for half a century, often encouraged as much by our nation's Supreme Court as by the American Civil Liberties Union, the legal arm of Atheism and Humanism. The Supreme Court legalized the murder of infants in 1973 and sodomy in 2003.
- We are presently cursed with a president who is leading an administration that is decidedly anti-Bible and anti-Christian, while sympathizing with all things Muslim. Various "executive orders" he has issued (e.g., refusal to defend the Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as between a man and a woman) effectually overturn the biblical definition of marriage.
- Stipulations in the "Obamacare" monstrosity will use money Christians have paid in taxes to fund the murderous practice of abortion.

- Pressure is intensifying on those who dare to continue preaching Bible doctrine against such abominations as abortion and homosexual behavior.

The foregoing are but samples of worldly issues that are already affecting Christians and thus the church.

It is the height of folly to wrap oneself in a cocoon of deliberate ignorance of such matters as if they have no bearing on one's life. The Lord did not do so, and neither did His apostles or other New Testament writers. While we must never forget that we are not **of** the world, we are nevertheless **in** the world and cannot avoid feeling its impact.

### **Conclusion**

The supreme aim of every Christian must be to live so as to remain faithful to Christ and join Him in Heaven at last. We must be so dedicated to this aim that even the threat of imprisonment or death will not deter us from it (Mat. 10:18–33; Rev. 2:10). This aim will motivate those who are sober-minded to be perpetual students, applying the Bible so as to walk ever more fully “in the light, as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7). It will also motivate us to learn something of church history, to keep abreast of the doctrines that circulate among brethren all over the world, and to stay informed about events in the world that might or will prove meaningful to our service in the Master's Cause.

**[Note:** I wrote this MS for and I presented a digest of it orally at the Contending for the Faith Lectures, hosted by the Spring, TX, Church of Christ, February 19–23, 2014. It was published in the book of the lectures, *What Must a Christian Do To Remain Faithful To Christ?* ed. David P. Brown (Spring, TX: Contending for the Faith.)].