

# Addressing Internal Issues

By John C. Robertson

During my Baptist days, I heard plenty about the church of Christ. The church of Christ had the reputation of exposing everyone's erroneous modes of worship and life. A popular phrase was, "members of the church of Christ believe they are the only ones going to heaven." I was convicted by said exposing; however, once I became a member of the church I found that there were internal problems. I began to see that it was very popular to preach about the errors of the Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, etc. as long as you did not preach on the errors of the church. When one names the Baptist church, its preachers, and its errors, all is well. On the other hand, when one names the church of Christ, its erroneous preachers by name, and all errors associated, problems surface. Said preaching hits too close to home.

Interestingly, the prophets of the Old Testament found themselves in hot water on many occasions because they exposed the sins of their own brethren as well as those of the world (cf. II Chronicles 36:15-16). When Jeremiah preached against the people of Judah, they rejected him (Jer. 12:6) and plotted against him (Jer. 18:18); he suffered for exposing their sins (Jer. 15:10-18; 20:1-2; 37:15); he was imprisoned and sentenced to death (Jer. 26:8ff; 32:1-5; 37:15); the princes of God's people sought to kill him (Jer. 38:4); and he was accused of teaching erroneous principles himself (Jer. 48:1ff). Ezekiel, too, exposed the sins of brethren even though he was hated for doing so (Ezek. 2:6-7). When the preachers of old exposed brethren's sins, the brethren did not like the sting of rebuke and often times retaliated with anger and violence. The ungodly response brought sorrow to the prophets and often times death (Jer. 23:9).

Why is it that some in the church are moved to righteous indignation when hearing about the sins of other people and churches, yet when their toes are stepped on, they are filled with self-imposed indignation against the speaker? Could it be that some in the church are as the people of sinful Judah whose hearts were harder than flint rock (Ezek. 3:7-9)? Could it be that some members of the church have too much of the world in them (Jn. 7:7)?

A preacher may stay a long time in one city if he preaches truth. Stability in life, however, for preachers today is often times contingent upon the subject matter of his lessons. If the preacher claims to preach the whole counsel of God, calling attention to the fact that he exposes the errors of denominationalism, institutionalism, musical instruments in the worship service, roles of men and women in the church, and so forth, he may feel justified. After all, these battles have long been fought, lines drawn, and the separations made in churches of Christ. One's perspective of waging spiritual warfare may be to hide behind the skirts of rigid preachers of days gone by who made the real sacrifices and waged real battles within the church. The fact of the matter is that there are real issues facing the church today. Preaching on institutionalism and the errors of musical instruments in the church may inform the younger generation of past issues, yet should we not face the current issues head on, too?

The church of Christ is facing another current splintering. The marriage, divorce, and remarriage (MDR) issue, whether or not we should label one a false teacher, naming false teachers from the pulpit, and fellowship, to name a few, are areas where lines are currently being drawn. Some are acting as though truth cannot be known in these areas and thereby we

ought to all respect each other's differences and come together in unity. Paul said on several occasions, however, that Christians are to be of one mind (I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1ff; Phil. 1:27; 2:2). The Bible clearly teaches that in matters of faith we have no liberty to differ!

The problem may lie in fear and apathy on the part of many. Preachers are too fearful to speak out and too apathetic about a particular issue to move to action. Ralph Chaplin is credited as having said, "Mourn not the dead that in the cool earth lie, but rather mourn the apathetic throng, the coward and the meek who see the world's great anguish and its wrong, and dare not speak." God has certainly not given us a spirit of fear and apathy (II Tim. 1:7). The fear and apathy must be a creation of our own. Let us seek and preach all truth for it is only therein that we will be saved from the awful consequence of sin (Acts 20:26-27).