

IGNORING THE WARNING SIGNS

by Bobby Key

Have you ever known a person to be pronounced healthy at a medical checkup only to be dead of a heart attack within 24 hours? Death comes upon some of us quite suddenly, and with little apparent warning, and yet with others the tell-tale signs are there sometimes months or years before the departure comes.

God has been generous to His people in that He has always given ample warning. Before destroying the world by water, he gave notice 120 years in advance. The Jews were adequately warned before they were taken into captivity and finally destroyed as a nation; however they paid no heed to God's prophets and went right on sinning.

The wise king said, "Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). The people of God have never been faithful to the old paths for very long.

Too many today are wanting something new and different. The errors that are being propagated by

some and innovations that are being urged by others, as bad as they are, are not nearly as disturbing as the apathy of the brotherhood in general toward such things. We are in great danger of losing our identity as the New Testament church and most don't even know it. Perhaps some of our people are like Samson; the Lord departed from him and he knew it not! (Judges 16:20).

Some of our people are openly declaring the church to be just another denomination; they say that it doesn't matter what a Christian believes or teaches about premillennialism, instrumental music, fellowship or even baptism for remission of sins. And all the while, many others see no problem, no dangers, and no warning signals, seeming to say, "We hear no evil, we see no evil, why bother? Let's just love everybody, criticize nobody, and live in peace."

Ephraim ignored the gray hairs. Hosea said, "Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it; yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it" (Hosea

7:9). Because of neglect and evil associations, the once proud nation had its strength sapped. Without realizing it, Ephraim had become like the heathen about him. Israel had grown old in iniquity and the time of captivity was at hand, yet they were aware of no danger. They were in the state of a silly old man, who through age and infirmity had become nearly bald, and with the few remaining hairs of the head turning quite gray, yet not realizing or acknowledging the situation. How pathetic.

"Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?" (Mark 8:18). (1929-2018)

THE CHURCH: GOD'S CALLED OUT GROUP

by Milton Smith

Ekklesia is the Greek word that is translated into our English word church. It is derived from the very ekkaleo which carries the meaning "to call out." The word, in its simplest form, refers to any "group" of people who might be called forth or assembled together for any particular purpose. Thus, as one reads through the New Testament he will notice that Ekklesia is used in more than one sense.

First, this word is used to refer to an assembly of people in a most general way. For example, we find ekklesia being used to refer to a gathered assembly of citizens (Acts 19:39), Israel as a group of people who were called out of Egypt into the wilderness (Acts 7:38), and, of course, people gathered together for religious worship (Hebrews 2:12). Thus, we find that this word is used in the New Testament in a general sense of a group of people gathered together for any special purpose. But we quickly notice that this word is used to refer to an assembly of Christians in a local area. Thus, we read of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (Acts 11:26), the church

in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1), and the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2).

But we notice that this same word is used in the plural to refer to congregations that assembled at different locations. When Paul addressed "the churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:2), he was referring to congregations that assembled in different areas of Galatia. Likewise, the apostle John was instructed to write to "the seven churches of Asia" in Revelation 1:4; a reference to seven churches located in the region of Asia Minor. But this same word is also used to refer to the collective body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18). In other words, every Christian in the world belongs to the spiritual body of our Lord. No greater honor can be bestowed upon a person than to belong to this particular body. All Christians should rejoice every day that our Lord has given to us the privilege of belonging to His body as His special "called out group."

— Tulsa, OK

"And He put all things under His feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22,23).

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

MIRACLES JESUS DID NOT PERFORM

by Randy Vaughn

Jesus' four biographies tell of thirty-seven specific miracles He performed during His earthly ministry. He fed thousands with a few morsels. He stilled a tempest and walked on water. He healed the deaf, blind, and the lame. He even raised the dead.

There is much to gain from a study of the miracles Jesus performed, but let us examine some miracles Jesus did not do. There were miracles which were suggested, which He could have done, but which He refused to perform.

After fasting in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by Satan who said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." That would have abused His power so He refused, saying, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:3-4).

In Samaria, a village did not receive Him. James and John asked, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" Jesus had more power than Elijah; He could have called down fire. But he rebuked them, saying, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:51-56).

When the mob came to Gethsemane, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he will provide me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:51-54). Here was another miracle Jesus did not perform.

At the trial, His enemies tried to make Him perform miracles, but He would not. His power was not intended to satisfy their wicked curiosity (Matthew 26:67-68; Luke 23:8-9).

Finally, while crucified on the cross, Christ's enemies taunted, "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40). He was indeed the Son of God; and He had the power, but He chose to die that others might live.

A study of all the miracles of the New Testament validates the claims of Christ and His apostles (John 20:30-31). His works showed that He was God's Son (Hebrews 2:1-4). The miracles that He did not do also show much of His compassion.

— Hinesville, GA

DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO BE FIRST?

by Richard Dent

"Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men" (Proverbs 25:6).

A conductor for an orchestra was once asked what the hardest position was to fill. His answer was "second fiddle." It is not a position where one is exalted by self or by others. It serves to assist the first chair fiddler.

Do you know any second fiddle people?

The Bible tells us about a fellow who was content to play the role of second fiddle. His name was Andrew. He was a follower of John the Baptist, but when John said, "Look, behold the Lamb of God," off went Andrew in search of Him. There are three stories where we see Andrew playing second fiddle. Here they are:

1. John 1:35-42 shows us that Andrew was so excited about finding Jesus that he ran to tell someone. That person was his brother, Peter.

2. In the second story, Jesus was preaching to about 5,000 men. Jesus wanted to feed them when they got hungry. Philip complained that there was no food available to feed such a crowd. Someone found a boy with five loaves of bread and two fishes. Guess who that person was? It was Andrew (John 6:5-13).

3. In the third story, some Greeks (Gentiles) came to see Jesus. We don't know why they came to see him nor did his disciples know either. When they asked to see Jesus, Philip didn't know what to do. He went to Andrew and said, "These Gentiles want to see Jesus." Andrew did not have to wonder what to do. He and Philip brought the matter to Jesus (John 12:20-22).

In all three of these stories Andrew did something important — he took people to meet Jesus. First, he took his brother; next, he took a young boy; and lastly, he took some strangers.

You know what is interesting about all of this? Andrew never became one of the prominent apostles. He didn't seem to care about that! He didn't have to be first. He was willing to play "second fiddle."

— Liberal, KS

"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'" (Matthew 20:25-28).

A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

by Dalton Key

When nothing makes sense,
when days become bleak,
When fear like a fog blocks the sun,
If I stop my mad dash, and still my hurt heart,
And focus my gaze on the One
Who has promised to help,
Who has promised me hope,
Who has promised His strength in my pain,
Through faith I can see what my eyes never could -
My loss as the gateway to gain!

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways . . . Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:2-8, 12).

EDITORIAL . . .

**WHEN YOU’VE STOPPED LEARNING,
YOU’VE STOPPED GROWING**

By Dalton Key

Mark Twain may have been short on grammar, but he was long on wisdom when he quipped, “It ain’t so much the things that people don’t know that makes trouble in this world, as it is the things that people know that ain’t so.”

How true! And many of these self-professed experts know just enough to be dangerous! Their lack of understanding is only surpassed by their unbridled confidence.

Alexander Pope once wrote, “A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring; there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again.” Solomon highlighted this very danger: “A wise man will hear and increase learning.” And Peter likewise admonishes us to abound and grow in knowledge (2 Peter 1:5,8; 3:18).

The following tale is much older than I am yet still continues to make the point. A small boy was once asked by his Bible School teacher to tell, in his own words, the parable of the Good Samaritan. He answered, “There was this good Samaritan going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among thorns they sprang up and choked him and left him half dead. And he said, ‘I will arise,’ and he arose and came to a tree and he got hung on the limb and he hung there for forty days and forty nights, and the ravens did feed him. Delilah came along with a pair of scissors and cut off his hair and he fell on stony ground. He said, ‘I will arise,’ and he came to a wall and Jezebel was sitting on the wall and she mocked him and he said, ‘Throw her down,’ and they threw her down. He said, ‘Throw her down seventy times seven,’ and they threw her down seventy times seven and great was the fall thereof and of the fragments that remained they picked up twelve baskets full. And whose wife will she be in the resurrection!”

Too many half-hearted students of Scripture are almost as confused with their smattering of Bible knowledge as was this misguided boy! They claim to know their Bible, but much of what they “know” just isn’t true.

Drink deeply from the well of God’s word. Humble yourself to the will of God as expressed in that word. Admit what you don’t know. And never forget: when you’ve stop learning, you’ve stopped growing.

**“WHATEVER HE SAYS TO YOU, DO IT”**

by Danny Tunnell

The word “miracle” has to do with power that makes things possible. With men a lot of things are impossible, but not with God (Matthew 19:26). Nothing is too difficult or impossible with God (Jeremiah 32:27; Luke 1:37). What is impossible for people is possible with God (Luke 18:27, NLT).

Jesus’ miracles began when he turned the water into wine (John 2:11). The key to the miracle happening is when His mother, Mary, said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:5). There are two components to that statement: “Whatever He says to you” and “do it.” It takes faith to trust God enough to do what He says. If you have to understand before you can trust, then you don’t have faith. Trust God even if it seems baffling to you. That’s how we should want to live, and how we should want to die. “You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Psalm 73:24).

We are not to doubt God or question Him. Our part is to take God at His word. His part is to bring His word to pass. Jesus said to them, “Fill the water pots with water” (John 2:7). And they did it. They put H2O in the pots and the water became wine.

Many people are in one of two ditches. One ditch is hearing and doing nothing. The other ditch is doing, but not hearing. Mary said, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” You don’t have to be very smart, but you just have to do what He says. You don’t even have to analyze, “Do I have enough faith?” The very fact that you acted on doing what God said proves you have faith.

But you have to do it His way. That’s not doing what you want to do. Frank Sinatra sang, “I did it my way!” I remember a funeral a number of years ago, and that song was played. It would have been better to sing and mean it, “I did it His way!”

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

If we try to exercise faith without hearing from God, we’re going to experience failure (Romans 10:17). The number one problem Israel had was they wouldn’t listen.

It’s true that faith without doing is dead (James 2:17). But doing without faith is folly. It’s going to result in failure.

In Hebrews 11:29, did Israel hear from God about going through

the Red Sea? Yes. Did they act upon what they heard? Yes. And they were safe and successful stepping out into the sea. The second part of the verse reads, “the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.” The Egyptians tried (attempted) the same thing and they drowned. Faith without action is lifeless, a dead faith. An action without hearing from God is attempting. The Egyptians attempted to do what Israel did, thinking, “If it worked for them, it will work for us.” The same day, the same place, they both did the same thing. One group had God’s blessing, while the other group had a catastrophe and all died.

Remember what Mary said at the wedding, “Whatever He says to you.” Why could the Israelites have faith to cross the Red Sea? God told them to Go. What did God tell the Egyptians? “Let My people go.” So the only thing the Egyptians could have faith in God for was in letting them go. That’s it.

You cannot have faith until you know the will of God from His word.

— Miami, OK

IMPROVING THE ASSEMBLY

by Joe Slater

We ought always to do our best for the Lord, including (but not limited to) the assembly. He is more than worthy of the finest service we can render. Here are a few suggestions for improving the assembly:

BE HERE! The Lord wants His house filled (Luke 14:23).

Wouldn’t it be grand if every member of the body were present? Sometimes half or more of those who attend on Sunday morning are absent that evening. Night driving is a legitimate concern for some, but what about the rest of us?

BE ON TIME! Generally, this is a matter of self-discipline. We strive to be on time for work, medical appointments, and other important matters. Are Bible class and the assembly less important?

BE PREPARED! Start on Saturday night (or before) preparing your mind and heart. Get a good night’s sleep. If

you are to teach or take some other leading role, of course you should prepare for that.

BE FOCUSED! In the assembly we are to worship God and build one another up. It’s not about me; it’s not about you.

It’s about God and other people. Emotional excitement can be a fringe benefit, but an assembly’s success should not be gauged by the level of excitement attained.

BE ACTIVE! You are a participant, not a spectator. Sing like you mean it! (You do mean it, don’t you?) In prayer, don’t just close your eyes and tune out! Make the prayer your very own. If you are scheduled to lead in one of the activities in the assembly, let an elder know if you cannot fulfill your assignment. Wouldn’t you notify your employer if you had to miss work? Is the assembly any less important?

God deserves our best. Let us

use these suggestions to improve our assembly!

— Springfield, OH

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