

Where Are We Headed? (3)

Where are we now?

In the previous studies we tried to make spiritual application of the same basic questions one would ask if he or she were traveling on a highway: (1) What road should be on?, (2) Where have we been?, (3) Where are we now?, and (4) Where are we headed if we continue on the same path?

Our focus has been on our attitude toward the word of God. We have established what our attitude should be, the fact that we have been on that road and the fact that we seem to be drifting from that path. It is obvious that some among God's people are losing respect for the word of God. Now, Our question is: Where will this attitude carry us?

But, first someone may ask how do I know what the future holds for God's people. I once preached on this in a meeting where someone invited an elder from another congregation telling him that I would be talking about where God's people are headed. His response was, "How does he know? Does he have a crystal ball or something?" No I don't. However, I can know a little of where lack of respect for authority will carry us by looking back through history and asking where it led others with the same attitudes. The things listed below are matters that have developed among the denominations and our liberal minded brethren. If a lack of respect for the Bible led to this among them who can deny that it will lead us to the same place? Our lack of respect for the word of God will lead us:

1. To a greater departure among us. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus that apostasy would develop among them (Acts 20:28f). Often, when we think of "liberal" thinking and lack of respect for the Bible we think about what goes on in the denominational churches. It is true that they are liberal minded. But, when we focus our "watchfulness for danger" toward those groups we often turn our backs on the dangers among us. When we lose respect for the Bible we cannot help but go further and further away.

2. To be liberal in a lot of areas. Why not? If we lose respect for the word in one area, why should we respect it in another? It is only a matter of time until our respect in other areas will diminish. Hasn't that happen to others?

On September 19, 1990 I walked into the Gospel Advocate office and sat down with brother Guy N. Woods and talked for a while. During our discussion I asked him what he thought the biggest problem we would face in the future among our brethren (both those in fellowship with him and me). Without a second thought he responded, "a lack of respect for authority of the Bible. All else is merely a symptom of the problem." He added, "Brother Rader, I am ask that question all over the country. And people expect me to say that the biggest problem is divorce and remarriage or social drinking or apathy or whatever. These are mere symptoms of the real problem. "Brother Woods went on to explain the change in attitude he had seen develop among the brethren. He said, "When I began preaching (which had to 50 to 60 years before-DVR) I never heard a Christian say ' I know the Bible says that, but...' and then he gives his defense for doing otherwise. But I hear that all the time now." I hung my head and added, " I hear that all the time too, brother Woods."

Brother Woods was right. Our problem of a lack of respect will lead to being liberal in a lot of areas. When a man begins to leave the truth there is nothing to keep him from continually rejecting more and more. The only thing that may hold him back is "traditional" thinking. And that's not holding too well in some areas. Liberal thinking has no limits. It just keeps caring men further and further away from the truth.

We can use our own "liberal" (institutional) brethren as a gauge to see where we might go. They are just fifteen to twenty-five ahead of us, if that much. There are attitudes among us now that were practically non-existent twenty-five years ago. We accept things now that thirty years ago would have been rejected.

3. To turning from the strong and turning to the moderates. When men and women lose respect for God's word they also lose respect for those who take a solid stand upon God's word. Their appreciation is shifted toward more moderate thinkers. Brother Yater Tant and other writers in the Gospel Guardian warned our institutional brethren in the fifties that if they continued with liberal thought, their

own brethren would no longer accept them. The warning suggest that those who listened to them would go even further into liberalism and no longer have any use for those who were strong. Many in the liberal camp lived long enough to see that prophecy come true. Brethren, it can happen among us as well.

4. To women taking a greater role in the church. This has already happen among denominationalist. They have women leaders and women preachers for years. The same is developing among our institutional brethren. We hear reports of women serving as deacons, leading singing, serving at the Lord's table and even preaching.

Brother Alan E. Highers, in *The Spiritual Sword* (January 1991),cites four instances of the feminist movement working among churches of Christ. (1) The Bering Drive church in Huston, TX issued a "report on Woman's Participation In Public Worship" dated March 5,1989 in which they stated that they believed it to be scriptural for women as well as men to "serve in Sunday morning worship roles of ushering, greeting visitors, receiving the offering, reading Scripture, leading prayers, leading singing, and serving communion." (2) The Cahaba Valley church Birmingham, AL announced January 1990 that they would appoint women as deacons that year and would have women in the pulpit by 1994. (3) The Nashville Jubilee, an annual cooperative event led by Rubel Shelly and others, has featured women teaching over men in some of their meetings. (4) At the 1990 "Preachers' and Church Worker" forum at Freed-Hardeman University, Robert Randolph, pulpit minister for the church at Brookline, MA, said, "I have no problem with women serving as elders today..."

Wayne Jackson quotes Fred Bailey, history teacher at Abiline Christian University, in a Bible class at Hillcrest Church of Christ in Abiline, "The churches of Christ still adamantly oppose women preaching. And I personally have not decided whether or not it would be acceptable for women to preach. Because quite frankly, I've decided that because I don't want to get in the middle of anything" (*The Spiritual Sword*, January 1991, p.42)

Robert H. Rowland's book "I permit not a women..." **TO REMAIN SHACKLED** (1991) loosens the restrictions on women so that they are permitted to do about anything a man can in the church. He says, "We have made the pulpit area sacred ground, reserved only for men. The New Testament nowhere mentions a pulpit area where men in authority alone may operate" (v.42). Again he says, "We can't conclude that women couldn't preach and teach publicly because 1 Corinthians 14

forbids it" (pp.68-69). Rowland served for several years on the faculty at Oklahoma Christian College as well as an elder of the Quail Springs church of Christ in Oklahoma City.

When the institutional battle was going strong in the 1950's and 1960's, who would have thought that someday among churches of Christ there would be women elders, deacons, and preachers? Whether anticipated or not, it did happen.

Could the same thing happen among us--the "conservative" (non-institutional) element of the church? Already we are hearing of cases where women have taught classes with men present. We hear of more and more women attending business meetings, even participating in some cases. I heard of a woman asking what would be wrong with a woman waiting on the table. I Have even heard (yes, among us) of discussion in Bible class that suggested that a woman would not be out of place to preach if the elders ask her to. That way she would not be usurping authority. We hear reports of those trying to take any authority out of the term "head" in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Need we say more to get the picture of where we are headed?

5. To the role of preacher's work and message changing. Just look at the denominational preachers. Their work and message doesn't even resemble that of gospel preachers. As their thinking becomes more liberal the preacher's work becomes that of a "pastor" whose message is a "How-do-you-do-God-loves-you" pep talk rather than a proclamation of the word. Are you seeing any evidence of this already happening?

6. To the role of elders changing. The Biblical role of elders is to watch for the souls of those among them (Heb.13:17). They are overseers (1 Pet.5:2). But liberalism will not tolerate that; thus elders, in time, will become nothing more than "checkbook" elders who are keepers of property."

7. To then role of the church changing. With respect for the word decreasing, the need for the church to be the pillar and ground of truth also diminishes (1 Tim. 3:15). The church then becomes more social group that caters to the social needs of man. Does this sound a little familiar when you think about denominations and our liberal brethren?

8. To being more tolerant of sins and less tolerant of the preaching against it. Remember the transition period that we described in a previous article? As we move toward a more liberal way of thinking, we become less tolerant of the old principles we once stood for.

I read in the newspaper about a denomination that fired their preacher because he suggested that homosexuality could be wrong. Who would have thought twenty-five years ago that any church would tolerate this gross sexual perversion. Yet, some not only tolerate it but also forbid the preaching against it.

If we continue to lose respect for the word, we will not only tolerate such sins as dancing, gambling, social drinking and immodesty, but we will not tolerate those who speak out against them.

9. To the point that we will not care. Why should we care about how we live and whether we are following the word of God? With little respect for the Bible, we will not care. If we don't care, we will be doing what is right in our own eyes--

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

In the last article we will discuss some of the causes of our departures.

(GOT July 20, 1995 by Brother Donnie V. Rader)