

THE CLARION

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ROBERT H. COX, Editor

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HOW DISTINCTIVE IS OUR WITNESS?

In my pastoral visitation recently I stopped in the home of some folks who were members of the Southern Presbyterian Church which I had left. They were still members of the old church although they were sympathetic with me and interested in our local Bible Presbyterian testimony. The question was asked, and it was not the first time I had been asked it: "Don't they preach the Bible at 'the Presbyterian Church' (referring to the old church)?" It took me some time to make clear just what the issues were so that I could answer that question without causing confusion and misunderstanding.

Again in a young people's class a question arose some Sundays ago as to the difference between the denominations. Comments on the part of the young people proved interesting and revealing. The Baptists were identified with distinction by water baptism but as to the other denominations, there was lack of clarity as to differences.

A common question which comes from those whom I meet for the first time as a "BIBLE Presbyterian" minister asks wherein we are different from the "regular Presbyterians". I always take advantage to point out that it is a question of accepting the Bible as full authority and as inerrant in contrast to the confusing testimony of almost all the leading denominations that the Bible has "errors" in it, more or less, depending on who is doing the speaking.

I never have such experiences without asking myself just how much the average man, and especially the church-member, knows about the distinctive witness of the Presbyterian Church, much less the Bible Presbyterian Church. There are few who do not know that Baptists are people "who practice immersion", if folks know anything about the Presbyterians at all it is too often that "they do not

practice immersion."

More and more I am convinced that a planned but simple program is necessary to instruct our people, as well as others, in the distinctive emphases of our BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN testimony. There are many in our movement who have been indoctrinated by faithful pastors and lay leaders. There are others, including faithful pastors and lay leaders, who want assistance so that they may do the same more effectively.

As Bible Presbyterians, we need to continue giving a **strong testimony against apostasy**. It is the feeling of some that since we are out of the denomination where we found apostasy and so repudiated it, there is no need for us to say anything more about apostasy. Such a path is impossible and impracticable to pursue.

It is admitted by all that there are true believers in these denominations we have left and we have responsibility to let them have the facts and also the scriptural reasons for our "separation". Sad to say, there are many who do not want the facts.

But for the sake of those whom God has committed to our pastoral care, we need to continually give witness against apostasy. They are surrounded by friends and loved ones and neighbors who are not acquainted with the facts. As we give this witness, winsomely yet without compromise, our own folks will be kept in touch with the issues which brought our testimony into being and will be able to give intelligent instruction to others who need and want to know.

But a look into the future, in the light of what has happened to separatist testimonies in past years, will remind us that we too may go into apostasy unless the great issue of obedience to the Word of God is continually presented and illustrated by living examples.

As Bible Presbyterians, we need to increasingly devote ourselves to a **vigorous program of indoctrination in the Word of God**. We are not a mere little sect of "fundamentalists" raised up to contest the attack of modernism on a few "essential" doctrines. We are dedicated to the defense of the Word but also its propagation to all men in all of its fulness.

We are identified, and rightly so, in the American Council with other denominations and individuals of kindred spirit and mind, but those who make up our Bible Presbyterian churches, at

least in most of the churches which are small and of a community nature, are little aware of the Federal Council in actual contact. But these folks love the Bible and want to know what it teaches about this, or that, or the other, in answer to their own questions and those of others. The Federal Council shadow is long one and touches many things and places, but the application of Bible truth in local situations does not generally touch the Federal council very closely.

We need to know more about the Federal council but we also need to learn more about our distinctive witness as Bible Presbyterians in local situations where Baptists Methodists, etc. are strong and aggressive. The new quarterly issued by the Synod's committee on young people's work is a step in the right direction but much more needs to be done.

With these suggestions, we must insist upon an **increasing effort to reach the lost for Christ**. That is our primary task as Christians and as a church. If we stop to think about it, we must acknowledge that practically speaking, that is the reason we have come out of the old denominations. How can men maintain a passion for the lost as members of a body which has a Bible without authority and trustworthiness? How can men bring the newly saved into associations, local and wider, where a dynamic conversion experience and a changed life are viewed with questioning or scorn?

Without deviating from our responsibility to witness against apostasy, we must go without consideration of cost or sacrifice to bring the Gospel message to lost men everywhere. With a testimony dedicated to an authoritative and trustworthy Bible and a fellowship of those who stand by that Word we cannot but help be faithful prayer-warriors and obedient ambassadors of the message of reconciliation.

If our prayer-meetings are not thronged and blessed, if our people are not devoting themselves heart and soul to the task of soul-winning, it is because we are not obeying the Word of God, to whose propagation and defense, the Bible Presbyterian Church is dedicated. May God help ours to become with increasing fervor and strength a witness made distinctive by Bible-reading, Bible-loving, Bible-obeying, Bible-living people and churches.

Robert H. Cox.