

## HERESY AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE ON THE CHURCHKINGDOM

It is important that we understand what is meant by the term "heresy." According to *Vine*, this term means "an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects...such erroneous opinions are frequently the outcome of personal preference or the prospect of advantage" (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, page 217). We are therefore considering some opinions which are currently being taught as a means of avoiding submission to the power of truth, the Word of God (John 17:17). However, we are concerned here in this tract only with heresies being taught by those who are among God's people, the church. Bear in mind, as suggested by *Vine's* definition, that such teachings lead to "division and the formation of sects" and that these teachers of heresy are often motivated by "the prospect of advantage," perhaps monetarily or in popular opinion. In this tract I want to present evidence for the existence of such heresies among us and then boldly with the teachings of God's Word stand up against the false teachings and false teachers. As the psalmist declared, "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104).

It is not our purpose to be harsh or unkind; but, rather because of our love for God, His Word, the church for which Christ died, and the souls of mankind, we are obligated to expose error and stand armed with the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17) against those who teach it. As one earlier observed,

- "Although some today would discourage the exposure of false doctrine among brethren, it should be remembered that the apostle Paul exposed error and called the

names of those teaching it (cf. II Timothy 2:16-18)" (*Liberalism's Threat to the Faith*, 1972, Rubel Shelly, page 3).

In this I stand where **Rubel Shelly** once stood when he made this statement. I know this to be the solid ground of God's Word (II Timothy 2:19). Now consider a statement made by Rubel Shelly on April 20, 1990, at the Missouri Street church in West Memphis, Arkansas:

- "Right now churches of Christ are pretty much an irrelevance in the world. We are about like a flea on the back of a large dog on our way to becoming something like a dust mite on the back of the flea on the back of the large dog." Later he stated, "My children will not stay with the church I grew up in; they will not be a part of an irrelevance."

Brother Shelly has made similar statements in many other places since then. Brethren, the church of our Lord is precious to God – it is not an irrelevance! It cost Jesus His life's blood. He "gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). It was, and is, obviously important and relevant to Jesus! Brethren, it grieves my heart to hear anyone speak of my Lord's church in such an arrogant and irreverent way. Not only this, but here Rubel begins to suggest that the church should reflect the thinking of each generation. The church, according to Rubel, should not remain the same. It must, according to him, change to accommodate the desires of each coming generation. This certainly explains why he has become so involved in trying to change "the church (he) grew up in." Through his efforts, and the efforts of others like him, he may obtain a church that is more "relevant" (to use his terminology), but he will not have the church that belongs to Christ that we read about in the pages of the New Testament, the church for which Jesus died.

I think also of **Max Lucado** when he preached and prayed in the First Presbyterian

Church in San Antonio during the "1991 Lenten Series." He prayed:

- ⇒ "Be with Reverend Zbinden. Bless his great work. Bless his associates and his secretaries. Bless those stalwart families of this congregation that you know and they know, and let this church really be a church built on Jesus Christ...Father, may they find fellowship tonight, if not with other people, fellowship with you in your presence."

It is obvious to me that brother Lucado does not understand the church of the New Testament because he thinks that these teachers of error, the Presbyterians, are in it, that they are in fellowship with God, and that they should be blessed in their works of error. Regrettably, there are many among us who do not know what the church of Christ is!

### Jubilee Speech

Rubel Shelly in his Jubilee speech (July, 1991), stated one of his peculiar views of the church with these words,

- ♦ "Again, some of us were taught growing up don't say your going to church. That is exactly what you should say. Because we are the church in the technical sense only when we are assembled. I'm not the church walking down the street. I represent it. What I do will reflect positively or negatively on it, but I'm not the church. The word church means assembly. **We are the church only when we are together.** But you can be gathered and not be under the domain of God." (emphasis mine, LK)

This is especially peculiar in light of the Scriptures since Saul "made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). Obviously the church, according to Scripture, exists when its members are not assembled, it does not exist only when assembled! In 1973, when Rubel Shelly wrote *Simple Studies About Christ's Church*, he obviously had a better grasp on the truth for then he wrote:

- ♦ "When the word 'church' is used in the Scriptures.

it means something very different from what people mean by its use in everyday conversation. For example, the word is very frequently used by our contemporaries to mean public worship. Therefore we often hear people speak of 'going to church'....Each of these uses of the word 'church' is very common in ordinary conversation. But the New Testament never uses the word in any of these ways."

### Errors Being Taught Currently

I would like to concentrate now on the errors being taught currently relative to the relationship between the church and kingdom. Let me first say that this is a subject which faithful brethren have discussed with sectarians over the years in numerous debates, usually in connection with refuting the false theory known as *premillennialism*. In these debates the truth prevailed over the false distinctions that have been made by denominationalists regarding the church and the kingdom. It is my conviction that the position taken by our brethren in previous years in these debates is absolutely correct.

But let me emphasize that I am not taking the position that the church and the kingdom on earth are one and the same thing simply because brethren in years gone by have defended it as truth but rather because **it is what the Bible teaches**. I believe that "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Peter 4:11). I believe that the Bible can completely furnish us to every good work (II Timothy 3:17). I believe that we must "contend for the faith" (Jude 3) against every false doctrine and the efforts of every false teacher. Brethren, there are many false teachers (and their number among us continues to grow), and we sin when we bid them God speed either by our words or by our silence (II John 10,11). Brethren (elders, preachers, members), we need to know what God's Word teaches and how some today are "wresting it to their own destruction" (II Peter 3:16) and leading many others into the same errors and damnation, so that these gainsayers can be silenced by