

“Crossing The Rubicon”

In 1967, Fanning Yater Tant wrote an editorial in The Gospel Guardian titled, “On the Banks of the Rubicon.” The title was taken from the common phrase “crossing the Rubicon,” referring to a small river crossed by Julius Caesar in defiance of the Roman senate. His treasonous action could have no result other than victory or death. The phrase is used to refer to an irrevocable action or an event from which there could be no turning back.

The editorial appeared in a special issue of the magazine dealing with institutional issues, specifically the sponsoring church arrangement. As Tant wrote, the issue was intended to exhort brethren to “turn their backs once and forever on the enticing, exciting, and deadly” country that lies across the Rubicon, the country of ‘denominational Christianity.’”

Perhaps some heeded the exhortation, and turned away from a movement that has led to all sorts of innovations, doctrinal error and unauthorized practices. Many did not. There are hundreds of congregations with the name “church of Christ” on the sign that not only do not bear a passing resemblance to the church of the first century, but have greatly diverged in look and substance even from those institutional churches of the late 1960’s. Once error or sin gains a foothold, the trend is rarely reversed.

Apostasy can happen in any generation. Brethren who began to advocate the “sponsoring church” arrangement to finance their “campaigns” for Christ did so while decrying the missionary church movement of a previous generation. There are hundreds of congregations presently in America that would never support the institutional practices of the 1950s, but is it possible that another Rubicon might be crossed in our time? The danger signs are present, and exhortations to faithfulness are needed when ...

- False teachers are defended and fellowshiped. Some misuse Romans 14 as a rationale for maintaining fellowship with those who teach error. Even more disturbing is the unwillingness of those who know and teach the truth to be consistent in their practice of the principles. The instruction of 2 John 10, “do not receive him into your house nor greet him” is too often ignored.
- Moral standards are falling. Many preachers, while calling for modesty in dress are unwilling or unable to biblically define what modesty is! Christian young people are defending going to bars to watch soccer games (just last week), and social drinking is becoming more common. Parents and young people alike are Facebook-ing their excitement about

upcoming Proms, and some preachers, after proclaiming the dangers of lust, are later found to be guilty of the treachery of adultery. The admonition of 1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" again, is often disregarded.

- The single most pervasive influence upon Christians today is a human institution. This may have been true in the past as well, with Campbell's Millennial Harbinger, or the Gospel Advocate of the 1950s. Abilene, TX has been humorously referred to as "Mecca" by some in the institutional church because of Abilene Christian University. The institution to which I refer is Florida College. With the large number of alumni, the success of the summer camps, and the number of preachers who received their education from the college, its influence is widely felt. Even if that influence is positive or neutral, the destructive potential is worrisome. Too often, association with the school is the prime determining factor with regard to which meetings will be attended, and which preacher will be hired. Further, children equate true spirituality with a week spent at summer camp rather than the ongoing association with a congregation of God's people (again, personally witnessed). As we are fond of telling institutional proponents, the church is sufficient for the task God gave it. It is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Some are supplanting it with Florida College.
- Brethren think bigger is better. This mentality is the reason why the "sponsoring church" gained a foothold, and is destructive in non-institutional churches as well. Numerous times young people have been told that they "need to be" at such and such congregation, because of the number of young people there. Families will pass by numerous faithful congregations to go to one of the "big" churches. While everyone clamors to go to the "annual" lectures and singings that are touted as "events", gospel meetings in other churches are seldom attended. Big name preachers bring in the crowds, but many faithful and talented men speak to small groups because of the apathy of those who only want to be part of "the crowd." So, some congregations pander to the young and families, rather than challenge them with a faithful and concerted effort to be like Paul: "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

Some may consider these admonitions to be unneeded, and perhaps the grousing of a bitter spirit. Regardless, the observations are defensible, and have been noted by others as well. This leads to the question, are we again "crossing the Rubicon", going a direction that will eventually and inexorably

lead to apostasy? Of course, any individual may turn back, but I fear that the trend will continue unabated, as have so many before it. Please consider and heed the century old warning of J. D. Tant, "Brethren, we are drifting!"

Adapted From Stan Cox