

# STRAIGHTWAY

“And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him” [Mark 1:18].

## CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

The Witness Outreach of Foundations Bible College  
P.O. Box 1166 · Dunn, North Carolina 28335

VOLUME 29

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2001

NUMBER 2

## The Peril of Permissiveness

by Dr. H. T. Spence, President

*And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see. I Samuel 3:1*

In the days before iron steamships, shipbuilders went through the forest selecting the giant trees best fitted to build the great ships that would carry people and cargo across the seas. In like manner, when the Holy Spirit was preparing the divine ship of Scripture, the Bible, He searched out through human history those persons, places, and events best fitted in carrying the cargo of Truth across the seas of time. No Scripture was written simply

for the sake of the people then living, but it was for the enlightenment and feeding of the souls of men throughout all generations. Within the sacred Scriptures is the incident of I Samuel 1-3 that became a historical tragedy in Israel's history and yet is most pertinent for our generation.

### Three Notable Forces

This classic story took place at the end of the Judges period when the nation Israel was in dark days of apostasy. In those days “the word of the Lord was precious,” “there was no open vision,” and Eli’s “eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see.” In days such as these, God begins to withhold light. This withheld light is a lack of the manifested revelation of the God’s divine Will to which His

people had been accustomed through His Word. Inevitably, there will result a spiritual declension and change in God's people. The passage of I Samuel 1-3 presents three notable forces that mark this period of decreasing spiritual light among God's people.

The first force is typified in Samuel, Hannah's young son. He had not become a leader yet. After I Samuel 3, he drops out of public notice for about twenty-five years. He represents a growing, silent remnant which in all ages clings to the true voice of God in a time when the Word of God is otherwise scarce or unpublicized. He represents the elect whom God candidly speaks to during such silent days. Yes, there is always the elect, the remnant in every generation.

The second force is typified in the sons of Eli. They were corrupt in their lives and character. They corrupted the priesthood with not only fleshly cravings for the luxurious life but also the immoral conduct with women, which usually

accompanies the idleness of lost spirituality. They represent leadership which lives by the law of the flesh; carnality rather than spirituality is their passion. They represent those who become more open about their manner of living; they could care less about spiritual living in a time when carnality triumphs in the church. They are the growing number of people who have no real concern for doctrinal preaching and maintaining biblical standards. They despise any preaching that strikes the deathblow to the carnal, worldly living of the people. Yes, there are the sons of Eli who represent the carnal force within the church. It is the most preeminent force within the institutional church today.

But there is a third force that is represented in Eli himself, the religious leader of his time. He did not have the heart of Samuel, but yet he could not be categorized with his sons either. He was a man given to the peril of permissiveness of the hour. He was aware of the condition of the times, and yet he proceeded *not* to sanctify the hour or stand up for righteousness. He was led by the people, rather than being a leader of the people. Yes, he is the third force, the failing ecclesiastical leader.

### Why Does Permissiveness Exist?

It is almost impossible for us to understand just why a condition like this goes on unnoticed and unaccounted for. One would think that a godly people would quite naturally discern changes taking place and endeavor to dissolve the

## STRAIGHTWAY

Published 10 months of the year

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evils of Eli's time. However, we can see in our own time a similar condition existing in the institutional church. There is truly an elect-remnant in the visible church that is not in power, but which is behind-the-scenes. As with Samuel, this remnant discerns and desires a true reformation, a true return to biblical doctrines and godly, practical living. They long for it in their church and in the denomination or movement. Yes, they are praying for a spiritual revival to come, one that would cause the Church to return to the biblical spirit it once had.

But within such a changing church there is a significant group represented by the sons of Eli. They consider prosperity, progress, and popularity the evidence of faith and spirituality. They live enjoying luxury and lukewarmness. They share in permissiveness in their attire and in their morals. Divorce and remarriage are tolerated among the clergy; the character and principles of the Pastoral Epistles are almost meaningless among them. Carnality reigns in their hearts, and they enjoy such carnality in every facet of the church.

On the other hand, the average ecclesiastical leader of the institutional church today is so much like Eli. These leaders are not immoral like Eli's sons, but they *wink* at dealing with such sins. They will take somewhat of a stand in the preaching of a sermon, but they compromise in not pressing the practicing of the principle. They make a difference between the policies and the principles of the church or the Christian school. They say

policies can change for the situation, and yet the principles of the Bible (which they believe are different than policies to run a church or school), are considered unchangeable. It is amazing how such schizophrenia can be among such leaders of the time. They would not dare preach without a positive spin towards an audience for a good psychological effect, yet they would dare to ignore modesty and holiness. There is a feeling toward a person who is conscientiously endeavoring to be true to Scripture and its practice of living, that he is overbearing, legalistic, and hateful. Yet, they seem to have no feeling against a person who is liberal and worldly as long as he has "love" and does not "rock the boat." They do not seem to realize that all love is not good and all hate is not evil. God rebuked Jehoshaphat in his alliance with Ahab by stating, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD" (II Chronicles 19:2).

When carnal men step forward in fornication and worldliness and flaunt such forces within the church, it is the hour for Christian leaders to step forward and rebuke such forces and stand for righteousness. When the music begins to drift from the biblical standard, giving way to the Neo-Evangelical and Charismatic sounds, it is the hour for Christian pastors and music directors to step forward and stop the proclivity of such unholy trends. The church is not losing the battle today because the liberals and the Neo's are invading the

congregations; the battle is lost when Christian leaders lie in the peril of permissiveness. Such leaders of permissiveness may privately tell a layman or a concerned pastor that things are not right, that a certain music sound is not good, but they will go no further with their concern. In fact, their lack of actions will *permit* such things to continue.

Dear reader, this is where the battle is being lost. We may place the failure on the sons of Eli because their sins are obvious. But the permissive ways of Eli are truly the reason carnality and apostasy are mounting in the churches. Leadership that is permissive with wrong, with the sins of the people, and with carnality in leadership is the greatest failure found in churches today. To let the wrong go or to get by

without dealing with is the same as permitting it to continue. This is how apostasy takes over a local church or a denomination.

Oh that God will deliver pastors, evangelists, music directors, teachers, and the laity from the peril of permissiveness. For if compromise and error are permitted, time will be the only barrier for the inevitable, spiritual collapse. It is most worthy to repeat: may God deliver us from the peril of permissiveness.

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## Why Is This Publication Called *STRAIGHTWAY?*

*And Straightway They Forsook Their Nets, And Followed Him.*

(Mark 1:18)

By Dr. H. T. Spence, President

Back in 1973 my dear father, Dr. O. Talmadge Spence (who went to be with the Lord in July 2000), began a publication entitled *Straightway*. He took this word from Mark 1:18 that reads, “And **straightway** they forsook their nets, and followed him.” In this context Mark’s commentary on two of the Lord’s disciples depicts the tonal quality of his book as a part of the harmonious quartet of the Gospels. Mark’s Gospel portrays Christ as “the Mighty Worker,” rather than “the Teacher” as depicted in the book of Matthew. Mark wrote his Gospel to the Romans, a busy people, always in a hurry, working for the cause of the Empire. Through the Holy Spirit, Mark wrote with this theme, the activity of Christ, the “Servant of Jehovah.” The characteristic word of Mark in the Greek language is “*euthus*,” translated “anon,” “forthwith,” “immediately” and “straightway.” He uses the term some 42 times in his Gospel. Notice verses 10,12,18,20,21,28,29,30,31,42,43 in the first chapter of his book. All of these verses show the busy activity of the book.

In the reality of biblical truth, Mark 1:18 is the commentary of every genuine “servant” of the Lord. When the Christian views the depraved gallery of philosophies, the hopeless and dark oceans of life, it encourages him to abide in the Absolute Truth of God. The sinner has no hope in his invented nets out in the world. He tries endlessly through his birth-blemished vocation of sin, “we have turned everyone to his own way,” to reap something better than that which he has sown. The daily, senseless cycle of going out with nets made of filthy rags and coming back with an empty soul has no hope for eternity. What a fruitless life to live!

But thank God! One day while we were trying to mend our feeble nets, Christ came and extended the call, “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). While we were in our pollution, while we were “in” sin, He passed by and said, “Live.” “And **straightway**,” immediately, instantaneously, the Lord saved our convicted, repentant soul. It took place in a moment! Thank God for the experience of the New Birth!

But this small, truth-laden verse, has more to say of the two disciples: "...they forsook their nets." That is the purpose for salvation! Not only to save us "in" sin, but also to save us "from" sin. We are to "forsake the nets," or "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1), to "Come out from among them" (II Corinthians 6:17). That is the only way we can unreservedly follow Christ: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." We make our "exodus" during our "straightway," and Egypt is to be left behind, forsaken, denied, and forgotten. We all have been bought with a price, redeemed, and we are no longer our own; we have been made a servant, a laborer, a worker full time in the Kingdom of God.

Yet, you will notice in Luke 5 that for some reason Peter went back to fishing. He had forsaken the nets and ships one time, but he had not fully sold out to the Lord. The net business had taken over in his life again. Christ had to come for him again and once more in Luke 5:11: "...they forsook all, and followed him." Peter stayed with Christ until the cross. But again in John 21, we find Peter back in the fishing business. It is the FORSAKING that seems to be the problem. Oh, the sad portrait of so many servants who have been called by God. Take heed to the example, my friend. Forsake all, and continue forsaking all for Christ. Leave the nets, and don't return!

May God bless, keep, and preserve our lives until His Coming or until He calls for us through death. May we STRAIGHTWAY forsake this world and what it will have to offer; forsake all for His glory! Then may we STRAIGHTWAY follow our Savior throughout all the days of our lives.

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