

CHAPTER FOUR

INVADING SATAN'S KINGDOM

"The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath,
because he knoweth that he hath but a short time"
- Revelation 12:12.

"Some of the most vicious opposition to revival has come
from the professing church."
- Brian Edwards

"Nothing can be done towards recovering lost sinners to
God without invading the kingdom of darkness."
- Dr. Asahel Nettleton

"Examine yourselves because if ye make a mistake ye can
never rectify it, except in this world. Well might the
apostle say, 'Examine yourselves.'"
- C. H. Spurgeon

To be sure, there is a great risk involved in old-time preaching and counselling. Agitation, flurries of backbiting and outright church splits will often attend such ministry. How do we know? By reading the Bible and Christian history.

The Book of Acts describes one division after another across its pages. For instance, in Acts 4:2-4 some of the people believed, while the rest were grieved. The preaching of the Apostles produced grief or belief. There was no middle ground. In Acts 13:48-50 there was a division of the people which resulted in the preachers being "expelled from their coasts." In Acts 14:4 we read, "But the multitude of the city was divided." In Acts 17:1-9 we read of certain people who were "moved with envy" who "troubled the people and the rulers of the city when they heard these things." When Paul preached at Ephesus, "diverse were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way...he departed from them, and separated the disciples" (Acts 19:8-9). At Rome, "some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (Acts 28:24).

Clear, plain preaching which caused people to examine their own salvation produced great division throughout the book of Acts, as the Apostles followed the example set by Jesus in His own preaching ministry. Jesus, Himself quite often caused such division through His preaching (John 7:43; John 9:16; John 10:19). The last verse in this list, John 10:19, tells us, "There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings." Jesus' sermon was so probing (He called them thieves and robbers in verse 1) that although they understood little of its spiritual content, it angered and divided them. In Luke 12:51 Jesus said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division."

Dr. John R. Rice once said:

No need to blame Hollywood and the liquor and drug crowd for the mess we are in. Blame lies at the doorstep of sissy, compromising, back-scratching, ear-tickling preachers who know the truth yet refuse to preach it for fear of hurting someone's feelings. It is not inviting to be unpopular. No one likes to be shunned. It is not a good feeling to know you are not appreciated. But our Lord went through all that - and more. He set our example.¹

Yes, the preaching of Jesus and His Apostles produced divisions between the saved and the stubborn, hard-hearted lost. This has happened throughout Christian history to men who preached as Christ and the Apostles did, men who made lost people examine themselves to see whether they were converted (II Corinthians 13:5).

Remember that Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic church for this reason. Remember that John Wesley wrote again and again in his journal, "I must preach there no more," when church after church closed to him, and he was finally forced out into the fields to preach because no church would have him in its pulpit. Remember that George Whitefield was bitterly lampooned on the stage and also driven from the churches for such preaching. Remember that Bunyan was put into prison for such preaching, and Jonathan Edwards was fired from his church for trying to get lost teenagers in his congregation converted.

Brian Edwards has said, "Some of the most vicious opposition to revival has come from the professing church."² He pointed out that, "Every church was closed to Bakht Singh" the great Indian evangelist.³ At Cambuslang, Scotland in 1742 the Associate Presbytery called George Whitefield "a limb

of Anti-Christ" and spread "lies, slanderous reports, and ridiculous stories" to prejudice people against his preaching.⁴ The Scottish evangelist Duncan Campbell was accused of hypnotizing people in the 1940's.⁵ Evangelist Howel Harris of Wales declared, "I was almost murdered once, and twice in danger of my life, besides being before the Magistrate."⁶ This sort of opposition to preaching for conversions is very nearly universal in history.

When we today take up the desperately needed task of preaching "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith," we must expect a response similar to that experienced by Jesus, the Apostles, Luther, Wesley, Whitefield, Bunyan, Edwards, Wesley, Howel Harris, Bakht Singh, Duncan Campbell, and so many other faithful preachers. We must expect angry, hard-hearted, unconverted Protestants and Baptists to reject us, speak evil about us behind our backs, and put us out of their churches.

The man who is faithful to the Lord in his preaching must expect to be rejected in this time of apostasy. His true companions will be the faithful preachers of long ago. He will walk alone among the dead, his path described by the nineteenth century Irish poet Thomas Moore:

I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed.

The God-Called Preacher - Rare Today

I believe that one main reason there are so few old-time, sin-denouncing sermons today, is because many ministers have no clear calling to preach. Men who are not called by God to preach will give soothing Bible studies that don't disturb anyone; they will *not* preach like Howel Harris, Duncan Campbell or John Bunyan. There must be a clear call from God for a man to preach like them.

On three separate occasions I can vividly remember God calling me to preach. God called me the second time directly after a youth leader censured and rebuked me for preaching against sin. I was seventeen years old. God Himself told me, in my heart, that this man was wrong, that I should continue to preach as I did. Later it was revealed that this "youth leader" was a pervert.

The third time I was called to preach, I was thirty-two years old and had

been a student for two years at a Southern Baptist seminary. A liberal professor told me not to take a strong stand for the Scriptures. He said, "You're getting a bad reputation as a trouble-maker." I thought that over. I wanted to quit the ministry because I felt I couldn't speak out the way God had called me to do. Then, late at night, God called me to preach again. He spoke to my heart and plainly told me to go back to the seminary, uphold His Word, and preach hard against sin. I did get a reputation as a trouble-maker among the Southern Baptist liberals, but I have been greatly blessed by God in my own family, home and church. Such a reputation is not necessarily a bad one in a time of deep apostasy.

I know some men say that strong stands like this are not necessary in our day. I know they often say everything can be taken care of "behind closed doors" now. They'll tell you that we no longer need preachers like W. B. Riley, T. T. Shields, J. Frank Norris, or Bob Jones, Sr. They say we can avoid controversy by secret negotiations, but they are wrong. Sin cannot be exposed without controversy. Error cannot be corrected without controversy. Ask Paul. Ask Luther. Ask Bunyan. Ask William Jennings Bryan. The old-timers knew that a real preacher must stand for God's truth and against error, even if it is controversial to do so, even if the preacher has to stand alone. The old-time preachers knew that, even though their grandchildren may have forgotten it. No man can preach the way God wants him to without ruffling someone's feathers, without preaching against sin.

One reason men are afraid to preach against sin today is that many of them have not been called to preach at all.

"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jeremiah 23:21).

"I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah...for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land" (Jeremiah 23:14-15).

"I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:32).

God-called preachers are the only ones who understand the need for old-fashioned preaching against sin.

C. H. Spurgeon said this about the men God calls to preach:

The word of God must be unto us as fire in our bones, otherwise, if we undertake the ministry, we shall be unhappy in it, shall be unable to bear the self-denials incident to it, and shall be of little service to those among whom we minister.⁷

Dr. E. C. Carrier once made this statement about the God-called preacher:

There is no way to explain his behavior apart from his calling.⁸

Dr. Roy Branson says,

To the unbeliever and the carnal Christian everything about a truly called preacher totally defies understanding or explanation.⁹

The divinely called preacher gradually becomes aware of the fact that he has embarked on a whole new manner of life - a life for which he was born into this world, but of which he probably never dreamed before. All the goals of his life before his call become meaningless, discarded as ashes from last winter's fire. "I never felt that way," someone may protest. We can only reply with the kindest intent, "You were never called of God. Please quit preaching."¹⁰

I repeat, only a God-called preacher will understand the need for preaching against sin. Those who have *not* been called will think he is odd. "Why not negotiate? Why be controversial? Why make a fuss?" These are the questions often asked by those with no clear calling to preach. But God-called preachers will instantly understand the answers to their questions. They will know intuitively why they must preach against sin. It is part of the enlightenment that goes with the calling.

Invading Satan's Kingdom

Asahel Nettleton said,

Nothing can be done towards recovering lost sinners to God without invading the kingdom of darkness. The adversary is tenacious of his subjects. Nothing can be done by the gospel without awakening his jealousy, and arousing his opposition. He will exert his power to the utmost to retain every soul in his kingdom...When the devil tries to make sinners believe they are not lost, they try in turn to believe him. When others soothe and flatter and attempt to quiet their fears, and tell him that they need not be alarmed, there is no danger, they are pleased with it. Especially when they hear smooth things from the (pulpit), this is exceeding pleasant and useful and the most effectual means of helping on the work of fortifying the sinners' hearts against Christ...When the solemn truths of God's word are declared in a clear and convincing manner, sinners are often alarmed. They are sometimes almost convinced, and begin to say, if these things be so, then my situation is truly alarming...In this situation the sinner will seize with avidity every thing which may help him to condemn others and justify himself. If he cannot condemn the messages of divine truth, he feels an awful conviction.¹¹

Most preachers want to avoid conflict. That is understandable. But conflict cannot be avoided if souls are to be converted. As Nettleton indicated, conflict with Satan and demonic forces is inevitable.

A preacher who is afraid of losing lost church members will not be able to enter into this sort of conflict with Satan. He will be afraid he might lose someone in his congregation.

One man said, "You don't understand. We can't preach like that any more. There are many churches where they can transfer." Such preachers feel trapped. They must now help Satan deceive the lost people in their congregations out of the fear of losing them. Satan uses this fear to enslave preachers and use them as his servants to help destroy the souls of their lost members.

Instead of being a strong man, preaching the truth of God, the pastor is reduced to a servant of Satan. In this way, the devil makes slaves of many preachers today. They are dominated and ruled by people in their own

congregations, unconverted members who are used by Satan to manipulate and control the preacher. Unconverted wives of preachers can occupy this position, as well as others in the church. Such pastors become enslaved to the rulers of darkness, rather than fighting against them as they should, according to the Bible:

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"
(Ephesians 6:11-12).

The work of true ministry is warfare with Satan and his angels. Paul recognized this in this exhortation to Timothy:

"This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare" (I Timothy 1:18).

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (II Timothy 2:3-4).

The work of a preacher is to wage war with the devil (cf. Ephesians 6:11-12). The man who fails to understand this will never preach the way he ought to, because he will not understand who he is opposing, how and through whom his opponent operates, or how to expose his enemy. He will not be able to invade the kingdom of darkness and recover lost sinners to God. Such preachers become unwitting tools in the hands of demons rather than warriors of the Spirit. Hear the words of Jeremiah to such a preacher:

"The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie; Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth"
(Jeremiah 28:15-16).

Examine Yourself

We have prayed long decades for revival like that which came in 1859,

but it has not been sent to us. Why? We must first expose the demonic error of decisionism in all its forms. Satan will oppose the man who does this. The very name of Satan means "adversary," because he opposes the true work of the ministry. The God-called preacher must have enough moral courage and spiritual insight to preach, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (II Corinthians 13:5; cf. I Corinthians 11:28). Preachers who are afraid of saying such things will *never* experience revival like that which came in 1859. They may hold on to a church, but they will not see revival in it.

The price of revival, the cost of soul winning,
The long hours of praying, the burden, the tears,
The pleading with sinners, though lonely, a stranger,
Is repaid at the reaping up there.

- Dr. John R. Rice, "The Price of Revival"

There are many praying people who could be blessed with revival, but not without courage, not without risk, not without cost. The preacher must be willing to say to a lost church member, "My dear, you have never known the Lord Jesus," as Mrs. Colville did at the beginning of the 1859 revival in Northern Ireland.

Throughout Christian history leading preachers have taken our position on II Corinthians 13:5. The 17th century commentator Matthew Poole said of this verse:

He bids them to be very often and very seriously proving themselves, as to this thing, whether they be in Christ, and whether they have saving faith.¹²

Jonathan Edwards gave these comments on the verse:

We should look upon it as of the greatest importance to us, to know in what state we are, whether we ever had any change made in our hearts from sin to holiness, or whether we be not still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; whether ever sin were truly mortified in us; whether we do not live in the sin of unbelief, and in the rejection of the Saviour. This is what the apostle insists upon with the Corinthians (II Corinthians 13:5). Those who entertain the opinion and hope of themselves, that they are godly, should take great care to see that the

foundation is right. Those that are in doubt should not give themselves rest till the matter be resolved.¹³

Albert Barnes wrote:

This examination, however, is never unimportant or useless for Christians; and an exhortation to do it is *always** in place. So important are the interests at stake, and so liable are the best to deceive themselves, that all Christians should be often induced to examine the foundation of their hope of eternal salvation.¹⁴

In a sermon titled "Self-Examination," which was based upon II Corinthians 13:5, C. H. Spurgeon said:

Examine yourselves because if ye make a mistake ye can never rectify it, except in this world...I cannot afford to have my soul cast into hell. What a frightful hazard is that which you and I are running, if we do not examine ourselves! It is an everlasting hazard; it is a hazard of heaven or hell, of God's eternal favor or of his everlasting curse. Well might the apostle say, "Examine yourselves."¹⁵

Twenty-six years after he gave that sermon, Spurgeon preached another one on II Corinthians 13:3-5, titled "The Proof of Our Ministry." In it he said:

A man cannot make too sure work about his own salvation...We must again and again examine ourselves. If you do not test yourself you may sit down and say, "Oh, I am all right." Yes, but you may be fostering within your spirit a peace which will end in your final ruin, and you may never open your eyes to your deception till you lift them up in hell.¹⁶

Closer to our own day, evangelical Bible commentator J. Vernon McGee gave the same interpretation and application of II Corinthians 13:5,

Paul says we should examine ourselves to see whether we

*Emphasis by Dr. Barnes.

are in the faith or not. We should be willing to face up to the issue. I think two or three times a year we should do this. I think every believer ought to do that.¹⁷

II Corinthians 13:5 is a key verse in our day. It should be preached and fearlessly applied by men who have the spirit of Bunyan, Edwards and Whitefield. We may go through fierce conflict with Satan and his demons. We may be rejected and scorned for preaching such self-examination, but the results will be real conversions and, very possibly, real revival. Let us call upon the people in our congregations to indicate their willingness to obey II Corinthians 13:5. Let us then pray for them, as they obey the Word of God and examine themselves whether they be in the faith. Let us also preach sermons, like the old-time preachers did, which help complacent, lost church members reject their carnality and lay hold on the Son of God.

Asahel Nettleton, the nineteenth century evangelist who opposed Finney's decisionism, often called for professing Christians to examine themselves. In a sermon on II Corinthians 13:5, Dr. Nettleton said:

The duty enjoined in the text is no less important to us than it was to the Corinthians, and is as binding on professors of religion now, as in the days of the Apostles...In this business, every individual must sit in judgment on himself. Deal faithfully with your souls. A false hope is worse than none. A mistake in this momentous concern is awful. Examine well the foundation on which you rest your hopes of heaven, lest you discover your mistake too late.¹⁸

We have prayed for decades for revival like that which came to America, Great Britain, and Northern Ireland in 1859, but it has not come. Why the delay? Because we must first expose decisionism in all of its insidious and satanic forms, and be willing to tell lost church members, "My dear, you have never known the Lord Jesus," as Mrs. Colville did.

The Boneless Wonder

Many preachers today have become too cowardly to confront the lost in this way. They remind me of what Winston Churchill said in Parliament, about Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, in 1931. Churchill's description of this weak politician is a classic:

I remember when I was a child, being taken to the celebrated Barnum's circus which contained an exhibition of freaks and monstrosities, but the exhibit on the programme which I most desired to see was the one described as "The Boneless Wonder." My parents judged that that spectacle would be too revolting and demoralizing for my youthful eyes, and I have waited fifty years to see the boneless wonder sitting on the Treasury Bench (the Prime Minister and his Cabinet).¹⁹

Like Prime Minister MacDonald, many preachers in our day have become "boneless wonders," too cowardly to preach against sin, too spineless to insist on conversion, too blind to see that the enemy is Satan.

Dr. J. Gresham Machen was a champion of fundamentalism. He also believed that modern preaching had gone wrong. Machen said:

Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin...Such is modern preaching. It is heard every Sunday in thousands of pulpits. But it is entirely futile.²⁰

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was pastor of Westminster Chapel in London for many years. He is considered one of the foremost authorities in the twentieth century on the subjects of revival and preaching. Like Machen, he also believed modern preaching had gone wrong.

Lloyd-Jones said:

Present-day preaching does not save men. Present-day preaching does not even annoy men, but leaves them precisely where they were, without a ruffle and without the slightest disturbance. Anyone who happens to break these rules and who produces a disturbing effect upon members of his congregation is regarded as an objectionable person.²¹

All over America there are preachers who are against sin in their hearts, but are afraid to say so behind their pulpits. They fear the lost people in their congregations. They may preach with loud voices (although this is rapidly becoming a thing of the past), but they do not preach against the sins in their

own congregations. The Bible says, "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Proverbs 29:25).

Many other preachers are even worse: they are actually false prophets. Jesus said, "Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11). Few thinking people would question the fact that many of the preachers in our day are false prophets. God said:

"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jeremiah 23:21)."

Like the false prophets of Jeremiah's day, these modern preachers are "boneless wonders."

Oh, that God would raise up men to preach converting messages to this generation! Oh, for God to raise up men like Edwards, Nettleton and Spurgeon, to confront our people with the saving message! Oh, for preaching like that in olden times!

Read Old Books to See the Change

Brian H. Edwards writes, "The problem is that we have forgotten what God has done in the past, or we are not particularly interested in being reminded. Mention church history and Christians scatter."²² Yet it is only by knowing what happened historically that we can correctly evaluate what is happening now.

Alvin Toffler, in his book *Future Shock*, describes modern people who are "so ignorant of the past that they see nothing unusual about the present."²³ Most books and articles on Christian history today are written by those who see revivals through the "glasses" of a decisionist view of conversion. The best way to understand what evangelicals believed in the past is *not* to read these current books, but to study those that were written in the time-period of the great revivals themselves. They are called "primary sources." To comprehend the great shift that has taken place in evangelical thought regarding conversion, one has to read what was written in the past regarding this subject. Then one can see how much change has occurred through Finney's decisionist methodology.

A Treatise on Conversion was written by the Rev. Richard Baxter in 1657. It was republished countless times, and was one of the main textbooks influencing the ideas of many preachers, from John Bunyan to Jonathan Edwards to George Whitefield. This book had a direct influence on all three of America's Great Awakenings. Its contents characterize what the average

evangelical believed in that day. I am quoting from an edition published by the American Tract Society in 1830, before Finney's ideas of decisionism changed the way people see salvation. In the prefatory notice, at the beginning of the American Tract Society edition of Baxter's book, the editor allows that "a few pages, chiefly of more abstract discussion on points which have now lost their interest or on which evangelical Christians differ, have been omitted."²⁴ This quote shows that Baxter's main ideas on conversion were accepted by virtually all mainstream evangelicals before Finney introduced his methods.

Now, here are the tests that Baxter gave for determining whether a person is converted or not:

I shall here tell you for the negative, who they are who are yet unconverted, and must be changed, if ever they will be saved.

(1.) *They who never yet perceived and felt that sin is a great and detestable evil, deserving the wrath of God, and who never felt their need of the pardon of sin by the blood of the Lord Jesus*, nor were ever humbled because of their rebellion against God, *are yet unconverted*, and without conversion cannot be saved. Matt. 11:28; Luke 13:3,5; Psa. 51:17; Isa. 57:15; Luke 14:11; 18:14.

(2.) *That man who was never led to Christ for deliverance, nor beaten out of the conceit of merit or sufficiency in himself*, nor brought to admire the glorious design of God in the great work of redemption, nor to relish the sweetness of the glad tidings of salvation brought to distressed sinners in the gospel, so that his heart was never warmed with the sense of the Redeemer's love, but who hears and reads the gospel as a common story, or as if it were not he who was thus redeemed, *is yet unconverted*, whatever he may seem or think. Phil. 3:8, 9; Eph. 3:18, 19; Luke 7:47, 48; Rom. 10:15; Acts 13:32.

(3.) *That person who has not had his heart and hopes in heaven, and looks not at that as his only happiness, and does not make it the business of his life to attain it, but sets his heart more on the things of this life, is certainly unconverted*, whatever he may pretend. Phil. 3:20; Matt. 6:21; Rom. 5:2; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 11; 1 Cor. 15:19; Col. 1:5, 23.

(4.) *That person who is not weary of all known sin, and hates it not; who would not be rid of it with all his heart, and*

is not willing to be at the labor or cost of duty, in the use of those means which God has required for obtaining this conquest, but will venture his soul on a careless life rather than be brought to diligent godliness, and takes up godliness on mere necessity; who would rather let it alone if he dared, and takes it as a grievous thing to be hindered from his sin, **that person is not as yet converted**, but must have a further change before he can be brought into a state of life. Luke 18:23, 24; Rom. 6:14,16,17,21; 7:13,22,24; Psa. 119:5.

(5.) **That person who does not heartily engage in the duties of holiness to God, and righteousness and mercy towards man;** who has not the Spirit of Christ within him, and the image of God upon him, **and does not express it in his worship and obedience**, and is not compassionate and merciful to others, nor humble in his own eyes, nor delights in doing good, nor is willing to do as he would be done by, I say **that person is not truly converted**, whatever appearances of conversion he may have, but must yet be converted or be condemned. Matt. 5:20; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15, 16; 2:5; 2 Peter 3:11; Heb. 3:1; Psa. 1:2.

Alas, what multitudes of sinners are yet in the state of death. And how little do they believe it, or lay it to heart...it must be, therefore, **that they think they are converted when they are not;** and that is the thing which deceives them and quiets them in their misery.²⁵

How many today could pass Baxter's tests for conversion, printed for use by mainstream evangelicals in the early nineteenth century? Surely a remnant could pass, but I fear that this remnant is quite small.

How many have "perceived and felt that sin is a great and detestable evil, deserving the wrath of God?" How many have "conceit of merit or sufficiency in (themselves) beaten out?" How many have their "heart and hopes in heaven?" How many are "weary of all known sin?" How many "heartily engage in the duties of holiness to God" (eager church attendance, daily Bible reading, daily prayer, etc.)? Most evangelicals today would think that a person couldn't pass Baxter's tests without being a strong disciple for several years, perhaps a missionary or elderly pastor. **But Baxter gives these to test whether one is born again or not!** And you will note that this was the opinion of mainstream evangelicals before Finney. It was the general thought on conversion prior to the beginning of "decisionism" as we know it today.

No wonder the old time converts became wonderful Christians, while those who claim to be born again today often miss church, live loose lives, and hold false doctrines. The simple difference is this: large numbers of people who have made a decision today are going to Hell. Baxter was right. They are not converted.

One point cannot be refuted: Baxter's beliefs were held by mainstream evangelicals, as the American Tract Society pointed out in the preface to the edition published in 1830. Finney's ideas had not yet produced the decisionism which has now engulfed us, and added millions of lost people to our churches.

Pilgrim's Progress Shows How Modern Evangelism Changed²⁶

John Bunyan (1628-1688) is undoubtedly the most widely read Baptist of all time. The only book in English which has passed his *Pilgrim's Progress* in sales is the *King James Bible*. Bunyan's book is considered the finest allegory ever written. An allegory is not fiction, but a story which uses symbols or images to represent something which is true. In *Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan pictures a man going through his life on earth as a journey. This character, named Christian, passes through various trials and difficulties as he travels from the City of Destruction, through the world, on his way to the Celestial City.

The story begins with Christian crying out, "What must I do to be saved?" He awakes the next morning filled with great heaviness of mind. He walks about the fields in distress. At last he meets a man named Evangelist who tells him, "Fly from the wrath to come." He asks, "Which way must I fly?" Evangelist says, "Do you see that narrow (Wicket) gate?" Christian says, "No." "Do you see that light?" He then says, "I think I do." "Keep that light in your eye," says Evangelist, "and go straight up to it; so shall you see the gate, at which when you knock, it shall be told you what you are to do."

Christian leaves the City of Destruction to find the narrow gate so he can enter through it and be saved. Notice that Evangelist does not have this man say a sinner's prayer, learn the plan of salvation, or make a Lordship commitment. Instead, the Evangelist points him to Jesus, Himself.

Christian is now off on his search for Jesus. He carries a great load on his back, which symbolizes the weight of sin. His wife and children try to stop him as he leaves home to find Jesus. They give a loud wail and beg him to come back to the City of Destruction, but he runs away, crying "Life! Life!" Friends of his wife come after him and try to persuade him to turn back with them to the city. One of them is named Obstinate. He scoffs at Christian's

search for Christ. His companion, named Pliable, says that if the joys and blessings Christian speaks of are true, they appear to be worth searching for. Obstinate cries, "What! More fools, still! Go back, go back, and be wise." When Pliable joins Christian in his search for Jesus, Obstinate declares, "I will go back to my place; I will not be one of such vain folks."

Christian and Pliable go off on their search for Jesus. Soon the road they are travelling goes through a slough (slōō, a swampy marsh). Here they lay for some time, stuck in the mud, and sinking more and more in the mire. Pliable says this wallowing in mire has not brought him the happiness Christian spoke about, so he leaves Christian in the mud and goes back to the City of Destruction.

Wallowing in the slough, Christian is at last greeted by a man named Help, who tells him what the muddy marsh means. "When a man wakes up to a sense of his own lost state, doubts and fears rise up in his soul, and all of them drain down and sink into this place." He then tells Christian how to get out of the mire and return to his search for Christ.

Next Christian meets Worldly Wiseman, a person only interested in earthly pleasures. This man gives worldly advice to Christian. He tells him, "I have seen more of the world than you. In the way you go, you will meet with pain. Pay no attention to what Evangelist tells you." Then Worldly Wiseman tells him to go to a town called Morality and speak to a man named Legality and his son, Civility, and they will tell him how to get the load of sin off of his back without going through the narrow gate (i. e. without coming to Christ). So Christian goes out of the way to find Mr. Legality's house to seek for help in removing his heavy burden. He meets Evangelist on the way. Evangelist says, "What doest thou here, Christian?" Christian cannot answer. Evangelist goes on, "Art not thou the man that I heard cry in the City of Destruction?"

Christian: "Yes, dear sir, I am that man."

Evangelist: "Did not I point out to thee the way to the Narrow Gate?"
(Christ).

Christian: "Yes, you did, Sir."

Evangelist: "How is it, then, that thou hast so soon gone out of the way?"

Christian: "When I had got out the Slough of Despond I met a man who told me that in a town near, I might find one who could take off my load. He got me at last to yield; so I came here."

When Evangelist had heard from Christian all that took place, he said, "The just shall live by faith, but if a man draw back, my soul shall have no

joy in him. Is not this the case with thee? Hast not thou drawn back thy feet from the way of peace? Give more heed to the things that I shall tell thee of. The Lord says, 'Strive to go in at the strait gate to which I send thee, for strait is the gate that leads to life, and few there be that find it.' Why didst thou disregard the Word of God and listen to Mr. Worldly Wiseman? The man whom he sent thee to, Legality, could not set thee free; no man has got rid of his load through him; he could only show thee the way to woe, for by the deeds of the law no man can get rid of his load."

Christian to Evangelist: "Sir, what do you think? Is there hope? May I now go back, and strive to reach the Narrow Gate?"

Evangelist: "Thy sin is great, for thou hast gone from the way that is good, to tread false paths, yet will the man at the gate let thee through, for he has love and good will for all men. But be careful that thou turn not to the right hand or to the left."

So he went on in haste, and could by no means feel safe till he was in the path which he had left. In time he got up to the gate. He gave three knocks and said, "May I go in here?"

The gatekeeper said, "Who is there? Where did you come from, and what do you want?"

Christian: "I come from the City of Destruction with a load of sins on my back; but I am on my way to Mount Zion, that I might be free from the wrath to come; and as I have been told that my way is through this gate, I would know, Sir, if you will let me in."

The gatekeeper then flung back the gate as Christian went in. He then ran till he drew near to a place on which stood a cross, and at the foot of it a tomb. Just as Christian came up to the cross, his load slid from his back. Then Christian was glad, and said, "He gives me rest by his grief, and life by his death."

The Great Baptist Author Speaks on Conversion

This sketch of "Christian's" conversion has been simplified and reduced to a bare outline of what Bunyan gave in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Originally "Christian's" conversion experience covers about one fourth of the book. It has been outlined here to show how the idea of conversion has been changed to mere decisionism in evangelical thought today.

If a lost person were trying to leave the City of Destruction and find relief from his burden of sin, what evangelical evangelist in our time would advise him the way Evangelist did in *Pilgrim's Progress*? Few if any, I fear, would point such a man to Jesus, Himself, who is the narrow gate to eternal

life. Few if any evangelical evangelists would continue to point a man to Jesus, though the man's family and friends pulled him back, though he went astray in a period of depression and hopelessness (the slough), though he were given false advice by the lost. Who, through all these events, would continue to point a lost man to Jesus? The vast majority of evangelical evangelists today would just have him say a quick prayer, or learn a couple of verses, or make a Lordship commitment.

Pilgrim's Progress shows us that today's "conversions" are quite different from those in the time of John Bunyan, in the seventeenth century. Read this classic again and ask yourself if you have anyone in your church with a testimony like "Christian's", or ***if you have ever even met anyone with such a testimony***. Think over the fact that testimonies like this were common in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Then ask yourself, ***what caused this change if it wasn't Finney's decisionism?***

One ought to remember that *Pilgrim's Progress* consistently outsold all books but the Bible for two hundred years. It was read and loved by Wesleyans as well as Calvinists. All branches of evangelicalism embraced it as a correct explanation of Christian conversion. Why? Because salvation experiences like this were quite common before Finney changed conversion into decisionism.

What evangelical evangelist today would give the kind of advice, over a considerable period of time, that the evangelist gave in *Pilgrim's Progress*? The evangelists of our day have largely turned away from the old paths. As a result, almost no one today has a conversion similar to Christian's.

While we do not think that every convert must go through an extended period of doubt and uncertainty, we can know for sure, by the long popularity of Bunyan's book, that this was quite often the case before Finney changed the meaning of conversion. Today, evangelical evangelists would pray instantly with the man in the story, or tell him that he had already been saved. Today, the average evangelical evangelist would demand a decision right then, on the spot, regardless of the man's spiritual state. He would then give the man some false assurance, and leave him unconverted, awaiting Hell.

Thus, by reading Richard Baxter's *Treatise on Conversion* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, one can see how conversion was changed into a mere decision by Finney and his followers in the mid-nineteenth century.

Church Splits - a Result of Decisionism

Decisionism not only deludes people into thinking they are saved, but it

also has brought ruin and confusion to the churches. Religious News Service reports, in a national survey of Protestant clergy, that 22.8% of the pastors say they have been fired at some point during their career.²⁷ David L. Goetz, the associate editor of "Leadership," who conducted the survey, said, "Denominational leaders often stand by and watch a percentage of their churches destroy pastor after pastor."²⁸ This survey shows that about one out of every four pastors has been fired.

According to another survey, "99 percent of all pastors reported severe division of one sort or another during their ministries."²⁹ This survey also shows that 89 percent of independent Baptists have experienced at least "one outright split."³⁰

These two surveys reveal that one out of four pastors has been fired, and virtually every other pastor has experienced "severe division" during his ministry. This is another result of adding people to the churches by decisions instead of conversions.

Unconverted church members cause severe division. Unconverted church members fire pastors. As the old saying goes, "You pay now or you pay later." If you add people who are unconverted to the church now, you will pay for it later. Most pastors have paid many times over for baptizing or transferring into their churches people who are unconverted.

Think of the untold horror that people experience through church splits. Think of the shattered lives, broken relationships and destroyed hopes that have been caused by church fights. Some of the most vicious actions I have ever seen or heard of have occurred through church splits.

Having lived through one church split as a teenager, one when I was in my twenties, and several since then, I can say without hesitation that church splits do more harm to the cause of Christ than any other single problem in the churches. Roy Branson writes, "Church split! The two most dreaded words to a preacher. Each hopes it will never come to him. In his early ministry he dares believe it will not, cannot happen to him. But it does!"³¹

I have become convinced, through my own observation of church splits, that the main cause of them is unconverted church members. A classic division, given as a type of church splits, illustrates this. Moses, as the leader of the congregation (similar to a New Testament pastor), experienced rebellion against his authority by the "church splitter" and his crowd (Numbers 16:3). In the following verses, the split grew. The end of the account has the leader of the division falling into the open pit of Hell (Numbers 16:33).

We read about the fulfillment of this type in the New Testament. Here,

in the antitype*, it is quite clear that God is speaking about church splits:

"But these speak evil of those things which they knew not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 10-13).

The Scofield note on the eighth verse of Jude is somewhat confusing. It says, "Apostate teachers described." This seems to imply that theological "teachers" in apostate seminaries or colleges are the people being described. But the Bible does not speak in Jude of "teachers" in theological seminaries or colleges. There were no theological seminaries or colleges, and no such teachers, when the Epistle of Jude was written. ***The passage does not speak of "teachers" at all.*** Instead, the verse is simply speaking of those who cause rebellion and "despise dominion" (verse 8) in the local church. We are told that they will perish in gainsaying (or speaking against) like Korah did. In other words, they will speak against authority, often the authority of the pastor, as Korah spoke against Moses in Numbers 16. Then, in verse 12, we are told that they attend the Lord's Supper, the "feasts of charity." Finally, we are told that these rebellious people will be sent to Hell, to the "blackness of darkness" (see verse 13). That is a clear indication that these railers and church splitters are unconverted people, especially the ones who lead a split. These lost people have "crept in unawares," into the membership of the local church (Jude 4).

In I Corinthians 6:10, "revilers" are listed with homosexuals, drunkards, fornicators and thieves. The word "reviler" means "one who speaks with

*A type is an Old Testament illustration, given in advance. An antitype is the New Testament fulfillment of the type.

abusive, railing backtalk." This is a person who leads church splits. We are plainly told that they shall not "inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6:10). So, the Bible tells us that those who lead church splits, who rail, who lead rebellions like Korah, are not converted, but are unsaved people who have come into the church but have never known true salvation.

Notice that nearly every person who leads a church split has made a decision at some time in his life. All of those who perished in the gainsaying of Korah had done so. They had made a decision to leave Egypt. They had made a decision to follow Moses. And virtually all of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God because of their "reviling" have at some time in the past made a "decision." But a decision like this does not stop such a man from attacking his pastor, confusing the young people in the Sunday School, and destroying the church.

Crows are the Mockingbird's Natural Enemy

I well remember one deacon who worked with all of his might to get a pastor fired so that he could take the money out of a bank account and keep it for himself. The pastor of that church called me several times each week asking for prayer and counsel. It was a heartbreaking thing to behold. This pastor agreed with me that the deacon could not be a saved person, but was like Judas, who was a thief (cf. John 12:6). Yet the deacon had made a decision years before.

In another church, a sex pervert led the choir. He split the church wide open by taking little children to bed with him and having sex with them. People fled with horror from the church. Families were broken. People were confused. The man who caused all of this had made a decision in a leading Southern Baptist church, but had not been converted. Like the deacon who was a thief, he had raised his hand, gone forward, or said a sinner's prayer, but had not received a new nature, had not been born again.

I have lived in Southern California for nearly sixty years. In the memories of my childhood, it was beautiful almost beyond description. Now many ugly things crowd out the beauty. When I was a boy, the California mockingbird was everywhere. It sings at night, you know. The lovely warble of this gentle bird once punctuated warm California evenings with heart-lifting music. Now we seldom hear them. They are being crowded out by the crows.

You see, the crows are the mockingbird's natural enemy. Crows raid their nests, break their eggs, and eat their young.

Great clouds of these crows now blacken the skies in many parts of Southern California. I have read several articles on this phenomenon recently.

It seems that restrictions on firearms have removed man as a player in this drama. We no longer shoot the crows, so their population has exploded. The mockingbirds don't have a chance.

That's similar to what has happened in our churches. The crows are multiplying and the mockingbirds are disappearing.

When religious-but-lost people pack our churches, it makes a very dangerous environment for our children, and a hostile, unfriendly one for every real Christian.

It is dismal to see the sky blackened with crows. It is sad to occasionally see one lone mockingbird trying to hold on. That's the situation in many evangelical churches today.

Chaos on Sunday Morning

Once I saw the pastor of a large church in the Southern Baptist Convention sitting with tears running down his face, his head in his hands, rocking back and forth and sobbing, while seated in the pastor's chair behind the pulpit. Before him, hundreds of people cursed one another with foul language, and some even threw hymnbooks across the aisles at each other. People cursed one another. Three men grabbed a church leader and threw him on the sidewalk in front of the church, taking him by the throat, and beating his head against the pavement. When he was unconscious, they rifled his pockets and took away his key to the church building.

This was done at 11:00 AM on a Sunday morning, during the morning worship service. I saw it with my own eyes as a seventeen-year-old boy. All of these people had made "decisions." All of them had said a sinner's prayer, gone forward, or lifted their hand. But how many of them could have been converted? Even then it seemed impossible to me that real Christians could behave in such an utterly indecent fashion in the house of God, if they had anything in the way of the new birth (cf. John 3:7).

Now, it is true that carnal Christians may take part in such splits. I Corinthians 3:1-4 seems to indicate that divisions can be led by carnal people. The word "carnal" is used. However, in Galatians 5:20 the same Greek word (*dichostasia*) is used which we find in I Corinthians 3:3. The passage in Galatians plainly tells us "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). From a study of these two passages, I believe we can determine this: Most church splits are caused by carnal Christians and lost people pretending to be Christians. Such splits are usually led by lost people (Galatians 5:19-21). Carnal Christians often follow these lost people in such a division (I Corinthians 3:1-3). No decent convert will

ever participate in a church split.

It seems significant to me that the word "seditions" in Galatians 5:20 is "dichostasia" and means "one who causes divisions." This same Greek word is used in Romans 16:17, where Christians are told to keep their eyes open for those who cause "divisions." These people are to be avoided according to this verse. Thus, the New Testament shows us the evil of church splits, and in Galatians 5:19-21 and Jude 11-13, the Bible shows us that most leaders of church splits are lost people. Yet, in the twentieth century, virtually all these lost leaders have "made decisions."

Wouldn't Korah be a member of an evangelical church today? Wouldn't most Baptist churches accept his membership on the basis of his decision? After all, Korah had made a decision to leave Egypt. He had made a decision to pass through the Red Sea. He had made a decision to eat the Passover. He was an upstanding man in the congregation. Yet the Bible tells us the ground opened up and he fell alive into the flames of Hell. And the New Testament uses him as an illustration of people going to Hell in the book of Jude (Jude 11-13). Korah is a clear example of a person who makes a decision but is not converted. Anyone in a local church who remains in an unconverted state, as Korah did, will be lost for eternity. Even upstanding leaders in the church who have made decisions will go to Hell without a conversion.

Judas Made a Decision

In the New Testament, Judas is a clear example of someone who has made a decision without being converted. We are plainly told that Jesus chose twelve apostles and that one of them was Judas (cf. Luke 6:12-16). In Matthew 10 we are told that He "called unto him his twelve disciples." The verse goes on to say that He gave them power in prayer, in connection with demons, sickness, and other matters. Then we are told that Judas Iscariot, "who betrayed him" was one of these men that He called (cf. Matthew 10:1-4). Now, this shows that Judas was a man who was called by Jesus. It shows that he made a decision to follow Christ. It also shows us that he had prayers answered,* including miracles, given in answer to his prayers. Yet, we are

*The idea that God *never* answers the prayers of a lost person was expressed by a man who was still lost himself (John 9:31). This man was not converted until later (John 9:38). A clear example of God answering the prayers of a lost man is given in Acts 10:4, 31. Judas also had many prayers answered even though he remained unconverted.

told later that he went to Hell (cf. Acts 1:25).

Judas was the treasurer among the twelve apostles (John 12:6). Isn't it possible that some church treasurers today are also unconverted? How many deacons? How many choir directors? How many members of the choir? How many Sunday School teachers? How many pastors? How many pastor's wives? How many evangelists? Since one of the original twelve in the first church was an unconverted man, many church members today could also be unconverted, couldn't they?

Judas would gladly have raised his hand in an evangelistic meeting. He would gladly have gone forward at a "decision time." In fact, we are plainly told that Judas made a decision and went forth as a sheep in the midst of wolves (Matthew 10:16). He willingly went and witnessed for Christ, though he himself was lost. He clearly made a decision to follow Christ. "And he called unto him the twelve and began to send them forth two by two" (Mark 6:7). So, Judas had many prayers answered, went soulwinning, appeared to be clean living, and had made his decision to follow Christ. But the devil came and possessed him because he was unconverted. The Bible says that "Satan entered into him" (John 13:27; cf. John 6:70-71). Judas became possessed by Satan because he was an unconverted man. He had been religious, but he was lost. He was like so many thousands in our churches today.

I think it is self-evident that Korah and Judas are types of those who lead church splits. Notice that the Bible says that Judas "went immediately out" (John 13:30). This is surely a picture of leaving the local church. His further actions resulted in the scattering of the disciples: "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled" (Matthew 26:56). Many are scattered today through the actions of men like Judas.

Thus, in the Old and New Testaments, we have these two pictures of lost people causing dreadful splits, confusion and turmoil. How many are just like Korah or Judas today? How many have made decisions without being converted?

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us"
(I John 2:19).

Although we disagree with John MacArthur on several subjects, we are

in agreement with his comments on I John 2:19, given in *The MacArthur Study Bible*:

The first characteristic mentioned of antichrists, i.e. false teachers and deceivers, is that they depart from the faithful. ***They arise from within the church and depart from true fellowship and lead people out with them.*** The verse also places emphasis on the perseverance of the saints. ***Those genuinely born again endure in faith and fellowship and the truth.*** The ultimate test of true Christianity is endurance. ***The departure of people from the truth and the church is their unmasking.***³²

On this point, Dr. MacArthur is correct and Biblical. His statement on I John 2:19 says that deceivers cause church splits because they are not genuinely converted. They leave the church and "depart from the faithful" because they have never been "genuinely born again."

A wise pastor should see that unconverted people have given him trouble for years. His own best interest is served by making sure that his people have been converted, rather than merely making decisions.

FOOTNOTES

¹John R. Rice, *The Sword of the Lord*, September 19, 1997.

²Brian H. Edwards, *Revival! A People Saturated With God* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1991), p. 218.

³Ibid, p. 219.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 220.

⁶Ibid., pp. 220-221.

⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), pp. 23-24.

⁸Dr. E. C. Carrier in *Dear Preacher, Please Quit* by Roy L. Branson, Jr. (Lancaster, CA: Landmark Publications, 1987), p. 25.

⁹Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹Nettleton, *Sermons from the Second Great Awakening*, pp. 162-163.

¹²Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Edinburgh:

Banner of Truth Trust, 1990 edition, first edition 1685), vol. 3, pp. 637-638.

¹³Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume Two* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust; 1992, from the 1834 edition), p. 174.

¹⁴Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, I Corinthians (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983, reprinted from the 1885 edition by Blackie and Son, London), p. 268.

¹⁵C. H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit, Volume IV* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1981 reprint), p. 429.

¹⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 30* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1973 reprint), p. 371.

¹⁷J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1983), vol. 5, p. 145.

¹⁸Asahel Nettleton, *Sermons From the Second Great Awakening*, pp. 323, 333.

¹⁹Winston S. Churchill speech recorded by Martin Gilbert, *Prophet of Truth* (London: Mandarin paperbacks, 1990), p. 389.

²⁰J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprinted 1983), p. 68.

²¹Quoted by Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p. 206.

²²Brian H. Edwards, *Revival! A People Saturated With God* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1991), p.87.

²³Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p.20.

²⁴In *A Treatise on Conversion* by Richard Baxter (New York: American Tract Society, 1830 edition), preparatory notice.

²⁵Richard Baxter, *A Treatise on Conversion* (New York: American Tract Society, 1830), pp. 193-195.

²⁶John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, adapted from a simplified version in *Of People*, edited by Ian Anderson (Pensacola, Florida: A Beka Book Publications, 1995), pp. 144-154.

²⁷Los Angeles *Times*, January 6, 1996, p. B-11.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Roy Branson, Jr., *Church Split* (Bristol, Tennessee: Landmark Publications, 1990), p. 267.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 3.

³²John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), note on I John 2:19.