

Making Havoc of the Church

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Saul of Tarsus is first introduced to us as an enemy of the cause of Christ. He consented to the death of Stephen and vigorously took part in the great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem. Acts describes Saul's actions in these words: "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." The ASV renders the verse thusly: "But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison."

W.E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words defines the word *lumainomai* as "to maltreat, outrage."

After Saul was converted at Damascus, he preached Christ in the synagogues, "that he was the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). "But all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem . . ." (Acts 9:21). ASV says: "And all that heard him were amazed, said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of them that called on this man?"

This word is from *portheo*, which W.E. Vine defines as "to destroy, ravage, lay waste, is used of the persecution inflicted by Saul of Tarsus on the church in Jerusalem, (Acts 9:21, and Gal. 1:23)." Paul said in Galatians 1: 13 that "beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it." In the ASV he said: "beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and made havoc of it."

In Galatians 1:23 those in Judea who knew not Paul by face had heard "that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed" KJV. The ASV renders it: "He that once persecuted us now preacheth the faith of which he made havoc."

What is obviously meant by making havoc of the church is the persecuting or destroying of both the faith (doctrine) and those who believed it. To lay waste is to render to nothing. This was the work of Saul until he came face to face with the Christ whom he sought to destroy.

Individuals in the church now are not maltreated physically as Saul did, but they are spiritually mutilated by grievous wolves in sheep's clothing. Almost every congregation has its own internal agents laboring to make havoc of the church.

There are many ways by which havoc is being made of the church today. I mean exactly what the scriptures meant by the words which are translated by "havoc" – destroy, maltreat, outrage, lay waste, and persecute. Many ways are being used to accomplish this goal, but three are prominent in my mind as I write this.

Lack of Spirituality

The almost complete lack of spirituality on the part of bishops, preachers, deacons, saints and all, make it obvious that some force has been at work making havoc of the churches in the land. I lay no claim to having all the answers to this serious problem, but I think I know some of the reasons for it. For the past fifteen to twenty years brethren have been seeking "some new thing": some gimmick by which to attract numbers and compete with the denominations about them. Little by little the great distance between truth and error has been closing, so that now in many areas there exists no longer a scriptural difference between the people who were the Lord's and the denominational world.

The pseudo intellectuals are the leaders of some of the attacks that make havoc of the church. More and more emphasis is being put upon schools and education and less and less upon the nature and function of the church. Although many educators vehemently deny this, the fruits are too obvious.

I seldom go to the post office that I do not get announcement of some "workshop," "forum," "dialogue" or some such meeting for the purpose of finding a compromise among dissenting brethren. These are almost always arranged and directed by schools and educators and their influence has its impact upon those who assemble.

In the absence of inspired apostles who could and did deliver the decrees of the King in heaven, there is not an ounce of authority in the New Testament for such conduct. Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Peter, John and all those of the first century "debated" and "contended for the faith" with all comers, both in the church and out. They spoke boldly the word of truth and cared nothing for the wisdom of this world. They "disputed" in the market places, synagogues, and streets of the towns they entered. They were, for the most part, considered unlearned and ignorant men (Acts 4:13), but those who heard them took note that they had been with Jesus. This makes the difference!

I know a few men who have attained the highest recognition in the educational field, but have always recognized the difference between the wisdom from above and worldly wisdom. On the other hand, I know hundreds who have thrown over the wisdom from God in favor of the wisdom of this world. This is where the spiritual drain originates. Spirituality has been virtually lost in many congregations because the preachers and elders are so enamored with the worldly wisdom and devices of "smart" men that the tricks of drawing a crowd and making them like you are being used to replace the powerful preaching of the pure simple gospel of Christ that makes a sinner realize he is lost and headed for hell.

In case you get the idea that I am opposed to education, let me make this one thing clear: I am certain that God expects every man to prepare himself to the fullest to do the best work in life he is capable of doing. But this does not mean that education of this world will ever save one sinner from his least sin. It is only important in making a livelihood and serving mankind in some better way.

No Respect for Divine Authority

The complete lack of respect for divine authority is making havoc of the church. I can well remember within my lifetime when a statement from the word of God usually settled a matter between brethren, but now many do not believe in the verbal inspiration of the scriptures. They even debate that we do not need authority for all that we do. Many even become involved in great projects without ever thinking to inquire whether it is authorized by Christ. This is the reason we have had all the trouble with the institutional questions, unauthorized works by the church, and the involvement of the "Christian" schools with the church. The determination of most school men to get the schools into the treasuries of churches (several have now admitted doing this for years, but they have carefully kept it from the brethren), creates one plan after another to get this easy money. As far as I know Florida College and the school at Athens, Alabama are the only ones not now accepting funds from churches. About all the rest are accepting church funds and even soliciting it with the same zeal as they did a few years ago for orphan homes. Now the men who then strongly denied their belief in schools being supported by churches are now yielding to the pressures of the great force of these in high authority; and I must say here that these are in authority against Christ.

Another place where this lack of respect for authority shows up is in the organization and function of the church. I am amazed and sickened at the number of churches now who have no elders and *do not want them*. They make the excuse that they have no one qualified, and I guess this is so in many respects. But I wonder why they did not do something about the preachers and teachers who for years did not and still will not teach the sound doctrine on the need for elders and deacons and try to help men become qualified by being more spiritually minded.

Where is the New Testament authority for the "voting" machinery and the "committee" systems that have supplanted the scriptural assignment of most of this work to bishops? I am anxious to learn why *sound* churches (when we are talking about institutional problems) ignore divine authority and build a human organization within the church called "The Business Meeting" with all its parliamentary officers and rules. An appointed *committee* usually becomes a permanent fixture that forbids the very thought of elders. This unscriptural organization functions with the power which often excels anything scriptural for elders, and when one asks for authority, the best I have ever heard is: "How else can we do it?" The same question of the institutional church supported orphan home is asked when they say: "The Lord told the church to do it, but did not tell the *how*. How else can we do it?" I do not see much difference so far as divine authority is concerned.

If you charge that I am giving aid and comfort to the digressive brethren on the institutional problem, you missed the point. I am no more sympathetic with their disregard for divine authority than before; I am just putting others who have no more respect for God's authority in the organization of the church in the same class. This is what is making havoc of the church today.

If you ask why brethren are doing this, I know of no better answer than to say that they have more respect for human wisdom than for divine authority.

Conforming to The World

The conformity of the church to the world is complete surrender. Romans 12:2: "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." More and more the language, dress, conduct, principles of right and wrong that are ruled by the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world (Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4) are being accepted by the professed disciples of Christ. Moral decay is everywhere.

Where is the standard that once branded a liar just what he was and called upon him to repent of it or be disciplined by the church? What happened to the divine principle that children are to obey their parents, and that fathers are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:1-4; Col. 3:20,21)? Where is God's immutable law that branded fornicators and adulterers as vile sinners who were not to be tolerated in the fellowship of the church unless they repent? (I Cor. 5:1-10). Where is the infallible word that marriage between a man and a woman is to be held inviolate for the life of that husband and wife upon earth? Now the rules are changing: the church is conforming to the world, and the world is making a mockery of God and His word. When it reaches the point that a Christian cannot be distinguished from those of the immoral world by his speech, dress, habits, company, family life, and religious claims, who can deny that these are making havoc of the church?

It must rest upon the people like you who read these words with interest to do something about it. There must be a strong, strict, scriptural discipline initiated in hundreds of churches who have not known one case of discipline in two or three generations. Those who do not love the Lord and do not want to serve him faithfully must "be put away from among" the church (I Cor. 5:13); "taken away from among you" (1 Cor. 5:2); "deliver such an one unto Satan . . ." (I Cor. 5:5); and "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly . . ." (2 Thess. 3:6). Before this can be done effectively in some places it may be necessary to do something about the cowardly, faint hearted, untaught elders, preachers and church members who are afraid to undertake this obedience to God "because we will lose members" and "just stir up trouble." No member was ever lost or trouble stirred up by obeying God. The trouble was already there and the members were already lost. It must take obedience to God's will in this regard to save these. They are making havoc of the church and something must be done about it. Everything done in word or deed must be done by the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17).