

MACEDONIAN CALL

"Come Over Into Macedonia and Help Us." (Acts 16: 9.)

INDIANAPOLIS, IND., APRIL, 1927.

MISSIONARY LETTER.--No. 4.

Drifting, Drifting, Drifting.

Dear Brethren:--

The Macedonian call is still sounding, the cry of the unredeemed is still going forth, and an appeal for a knowledge of the true way is still raised to heaven; but the noise of the confusion and strife among the professed followers of Jesus has drowned these cries for help, and these unredeemed ones are sinking into their graves without hearing the gospel in its purity. If we can get at the root (or at least a root) of this strife, possibly we can remove it and get where we can surely do more than we are doing to save the lost.

In temporal matters we are drifting much. Our courts, schools, homes, etc., have drifted much from what they were forty years ago, and the drifting is toward the bad in moral things. However, if this drifting would stop in temporal matters there might be some hope, but it has reached religion as well, the fountain from which these other institutions are to be purified. There was a time when all denominations exercised church discipline on evil characters in their midst, but very few of the popular ones will now exclude a man, no matter how bad he is, if he is a "good payer". Church buildings for prayer have now become entertainment halls. Most Protestants no longer protest against Rome, but are drifting to her festivals, confessional, beads and mere outward religion. If John Wesley were to come back to earth today, he would not recognize the people who claim to be his followers. The Christian Church is as far from the original teachings as the Methodists are from Wesley's; so far, indeed, that even a Roman Catholic is asking, "What has become of the old time Campbellite preacher?" The "kingdom of the clergy", so much denounced by Alexander Campbell, is as firmly established among the dissentives as among the other denominations, and no longer do they cry for a "Thus saith the Lord" for their practices. The Bible college people left their principle of following the Bible only when they established human organizations of Bible colleges, orphan homes, old folks homes, etc., to do part of the work of the Church; and they have largely thrown their elders into the background with their parents whom they gently call "settled ministers" just as they did thirty years ago. Martin Luther said that one generation is as long as a religious revival lasts; and John Wesley said that Methodists live plain, economical lives, and soon become rich thereby, and then drift from their former piety. And this spirit of apostasy has surely taken the movement of which we are a part.

And now we come to those whom we call the faithful Church of Christ. To think that we could be uninfluenced by all this drifting around us, is to think that the days of miracles are not passed. I believe that most of the division and strife among us is due to the drifting among the brethren. The denominations about us can put a thing to a vote and all drift a little further, but there are still many in the Church of Christ who are determined not to drift; and then trouble comes. The period of great material prosperity which our country has had the past few years, has made its mark upon us, just as Wesley said the acquiring of riches did on Methodists. It is the old, old story of ancient Israel that "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked."

It is well that we take an inventory of our backslidings that we may see the real cause of the troubles in Zion today. Some who in the past have been strong for fighting evil through the Church alone, have joined themselves to a secret political society to fight the Catholics, and churches have been divided because preachers lectured and talked for this secret society. Some churches which have fought battles against Bible colleges and gained victories, now are

loosening up so much that some of their prominent leaders are willing to surrender to that apostasy and join hand in hand with them; and the Bible college people in turn are drifting into a "Broad-gaugeness", which an editor of the Gospel Advocate deplores. I have seen younger preachers who were at first strong in their denunciations against evils, come to the popular way of preaching in "general principles", and of telling the audiences that they would leave them to make the application--a thing which the audience would not, and could not, do. I know churches which have lost all the missionary zeal which they ever had toward sounding out the Word; and then when one tries to stir them up by showing them their true condition, some writers will apologize for them and hinder any disturbing their slumbers. Yes, brethren, there is much drifting, drifting, and there are so few who have courage to come out and warn the people. The spirit of "get together" is all right on personal troubles where the truth of God is not involved, but such plea is being used as a pretext for loosening up doctrinally and morally. It is the spirit of compromise with the world.

I know a preacher who was once strong on elders' being subjects of discipline the same as others, and wrote a tract defending the procedure where an elder was tried regardless of his determination not to be tried at all, though he had the privilege of choosing the tribunal the same as his accusers; but now that preacher has lent his influence in overthrowing the things he once builded. In the Review twenty-five years ago he contended strongly that elders should be developed to feed the flock of God, by saying many other things ~~that~~ like this, "We preachers must be satisfied with NO success that does not leave the ELDERS, deacons, and TEACHERS better qualified to do the mighty work which is intrusted to them." (The capitals are his.) And yet now he throws his tongue and pen against this teaching of his, and shows that elders do not have to feed the church, as Paul commands, but they may have "regular preaching, either ALL his time, three-fourths," etc., for "that is not determined in the Scriptures." If the reader wishes to see the full text of this "face about" of this prominent old preacher, let him send to D. A. Sommer, 918 Congress Ave., Indianapolis, Ind., for it. As a fruit of this preacher's change, a certain young preacher carried out this old preacher's new principles in a prominent Kansas church, pushed to a vote his preaching there "all the time", divided the church, and is now pastor of that church; and this same old preacher who has made this change has gone there and endorsed his work of division publicly, so that it comes out in the daily press. This flip-flop of this aged preacher has brought much confusion to the brotherhood.

A certain young preacher helped fight this "all the time" preaching system of this old preacher, using a certain tract on Mutual Edification, and even writing one of his own as strong as I ever wrote against the "one man" system" but when he finds that he can become the "one man" his tune changes. He permits children along with grown people to vote in business meetings of the church as to the meaning of passages of scripture on which are based an exclusion of members who are hindrances to his rule, adopting in this system of voting one of the greatest evils in Christendom. And he runs past the "all the time" preaching Christians whom he opposed, all the way to the Bible college people, and joins hands with those who have not only the human organizations of Bible colleges and other such institutions to do work of the Church, but have the very pastor system over which in part he helped divided his home congregation. John says that if we endorse errorists we are partakers with them in their evil deeds. This same young man said in a private letter to me, dated Oct. 23, 1926, "I have much respect for you as a preacher of the gospel. I believe you to be sincere and honest and I think you are interested in building the Church in accordance with the New Testament pattern." I am sorry that I can not say the same of him, for I regard him as a traitor to his brethren who have sacrificed so much to help uphold the simplicity in Christ in his home congregation, and a traitor to the New Testament itself. But the sad thing is that he has deceived several good brethren by his misleading subterfuge on the college question, holding up to their view a college which never has and perhaps never will exist. Many a time have I asked, Who will be the next one to "face about" against the Word of God? Do you ask, Why are we having so much trouble? How can we expect anything else when so many are changing in this way?

I know an effective evangelist who has drifted much in his business affairs, so that by reason of his looseness in such he has worked confusion and division among churches, and divided brethren and even families; and he has also used an old preacher to bolster himself up. I know of an elder who became considerably indifferent to the church (going to picture shows, etc.), so indifferent indeed and worldly that his wife took her troubles to others; and then when evangelists went and tried to purify the church, a division occurred, with some preachers taking the side of looseness in discipline and ~~the~~ others the side against it; and much confusion has been brought among the brethren because of this drifting. I know an elder in a prominent church who took the stand there is no authority for establishing more than one church in a city, and if anything else is started the brethren should all come to the mother church on Lord's day mornings; and he has worked considerable confusion over his ambitious plans, manifested also in other ways. Who will be the next one to advocate some Romish doctrine or some worldly plan? Drifting!

What elders today are exercising discipline? Most of them permit the church to go the way of least resistance. If an evangelist preaches strong against worldliness, and some few become offended the elders often permit these few to dictate that they shall not have that strong preacher again, nor one like him. When a certain church was deciding which of two evangelists to have to come to hold a meeting, one of the elders said, "Bro. Blank will bring the most people into the church, but Bro. Dash will do the church the most good;" but another elder in that church said that they would have no more strong preaching like Dash's. Blank was the man they sent for, and thus opened up the way to drift further into worldliness. It is the show before the world that most are interested in, not real conversion and real spirituality. Drifting, drifting!

Many elders are turning their work of feeding the flock over to preachers. Many churches are now having preaching half the time; and some, all the time; and in a short while the full-fledged pastor system will be firmly established, for that is exactly the way it came in among the digressives. Elders do not realize that it may soon be like the following case of recent date: A preacher was preaching all the time for a church; one of the elders, who was a local preacher, decided that the new order was not apostolic, and tried to stop it; but said imported preacher put it to a vote, and voted this local preacher out of the eldership, and thus out of the way. Elders who will not help us fight this evil may soon unsettle themselves. Preaching "all the time" may draw for a while with us, but when the newness wears away we shall have no more interest than the sects with their pastors. It is development, not entertainment, that is going to hold the true church together. Our drifting will finally lead to spiritual death.

Some men have written article after article trying to show that all the trouble in Zion is because the evangelists are out of place. I do not apologize for evangelists who may go beyond their authority. But it is the duty of evangelists to reprove and rebuke and to try to hold the brethren to the truth, and of course when they do this, trouble often comes. Aaron and the Israelites were getting along fine with their golden calf till peddlesome (?) Moses appeared and "caused trouble"; and Ahab and Jezebel were having a good time with their false prophets till Elijah, the "troubler of Israel", came upon the scene. So today many churches are doing well in their own eyes till a faithful gospel preacher dare preach the truth and stand behind it. There are good evangelists and bad ones, good elders and bad ones, and good unofficial members and bad ones. The trouble is not specially because one particular class is trying to lord it over the others, but because there is a general break-down of religion in all classes. I wish I could get myself to believe with some that we are living in the days of Solomon; but everything convinces me that we are living in the days of Jeremiah. Let us not imagine that godly-goddy preaching and writing is going to save the church from the spirit of the world which has crept into it. I believe that only the strongest kind of preaching and writing will save a remnant from general apostasy, and that that kind of preaching is going to stir things.

But let not the earnest soul become weary with the strife. The whole thing is part of the great plan of God. In order to be free moral agents, we must have both good and evil placed before us; and in order to be praised we must have a chance to resist the evil and accept the good. The history of mankind is the story of accepting and rejecting the good, the history of backslidings and reformations. Read the history of Israel in the wilderness, in the period of the judges, and in the age of the kings. When they went so far in their sins, then God sent natural or special judgments upon them. Through wars and other desolations his people were humbled, served him awhile, then began in another generation their old sin of drifting from God. So it has been in the Church. One generation fights for certain principles, the next generation enjoys those principles and drifts away from them, and the third generation knows very little about the principles that their grandfathers fought to uphold; and the battle must be fought all over again. "There must needs be heresies among you that they who are approved may be made manifest." So it has ever been, and always will be, until the last battle with sin will have been fought, and all the overcomers will have been gathered to their rest. Men will change, but God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Ev'ry human tie may perish, friend to friend unfaithful prove;
 Mothers cease their own to cherish; heav'n and earth at last remove;
 But no changes can attend Jehovah's love.

In the furnace God may prove thee, thence to bring thee forth more;
 But can never cease to love thee; thou art precious in His sight;
 God is with thee--God thine everlasting light.

The age of ease and indulgence has left its blighting touch upon the Church, and the time for real struggling has come. This is no time for parents to shift their work of teaching their children in morals to school teachers or Bible school teachers; nor for elders and others to shift their work of feeding the church and edifying one another, to preachers; nor for preachers to shift theirs of planting new churches and helping weak ones, to--no one, leaving their God-appointed work undone; nor is it a time to compromise with the world, nor for elders and others to desert those preachers who are determined not to compromise with it. It is a time for every one to be in his place, doing his God-appointed work with all his heart. Drifting with the current will bring us into the great gulf of eternal ruin, while only plodding at the oars will bring us up to God. Lord, save us from this pleasure-loving, duty-shirking and hell-drifting age in which we live; and bring us out of this division and strife, a purified and missionary Church.

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TO THOSE who have not seen before a copy of the Macedonian Call, I shall state that our plan is to send it out once in two or three months to help stir to greater work for the Lord. The sheets with a circular letter will help to catch the attention of brethren, and many preachers and others are commending the plan. We are told that we are doing good in helping stir brethren. The next No. will be on the Problem of Saving the Young People, a greatly neglected problem yet a most important one. I have been asked several times why I did not print in tract form the articles I wrote on this subject several years ago in the Review. The next No. will deal with that subject, and will be printed in tract form. This tract should go into every home of the Church of Christ. Will you help put it there? I am donating practically all my work, which runs into days and even weeks; will you help pay for the material? Write me how many of the tracts you will need for free distribution, or send me the names and addresses, which I will like better. But a bundle taken to the meeting house may accomplish great good in awakening sleeping parents that see not the dangers that beset their children. Send to D. A. Sommer, 913 Congress Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

Show your "Macedonian Call" to others.

Indianapolis, Ind., April 18, '27.
918 Congress Ave.

Dear Christian Friend:--

We are enclosing No. 4 of the Macedonian Call in this envelope. Consider it carefully, for it deals with a very vital subject--DRIFTING. When you have finished reading it, ask yourself the question, Am I hindering the salvation of souls by drifting in doctrine or morals or zeal?

I wish to thank the brethren for sending in money for a tent; but after we wrote that appeal we found an unused tent in Illinois, which has since been turned over to me. The money sent has been disposed of as the donors have since dictated. I have two tent meetings booked for this summer, and another mission meeting with a new church.

Is your home church preparing for greater work for the Lord? How many of the members can sit down with an open Bible and tell an outsider what to do to be saved, and give him book, chapter and verse? I do not believe that one out of twenty-five members in the average church of Christ can do that. I have tried it in dozens of places, and that is my decision. How would you like to have a week or two of Bible drill this fall or winter? Why not make arrangements now? It is just as important to get members into the work as to get them into the Church.

I just received the following in today's mail, "Would you please send me a copy of your poem, 'Why the Church is not Converting the World'? I think it the best thing I ever read on the subject. I just got through preaching a sermon like that last night at this place and they tell me that it was the best thing they ever heard. I only wish that more preachers had the courage to tell the brethren their shortcomings, etc. So far we have had fifteen additions and I surely told them their duty BEFORE they came in. The churches have too many of these half-baked 'Christians' ". I don't know whether this brother thought that I wrote the poem, which I did not. We have some of these poems left. Send for as many as you can use. They are free.

Here is what a few more think of the plan of the Macedonian Call: "Am sure the plan is a good one, and am willing to help all I can." (Supt. of County Schools.) "I endorse the plan and trust that much good will be done." (Arkansas preacher.) "I like that way of arousing sleepy Christians fine. The last one on 'At Ease in Zion', was so good." "No. 3 reached me, and I realize all too well that though it is sad it is true." (Neb.) "The good scriptural teaching of the Macedonian Call is needed in many places." (Ohio.) "Have read the excellent and timely A. C." (Pa.) "We think the Macedonian Call fine, and read them and pass them on." (Ind.) "We all think the Macedonian Call plan a good one." (Ill.) "This seems to me to be one of the best issues," (No. 3.) It will surely take effect on some, if their minds are not hardened through the evil practices of the world."

"It's fine! Just what we need." (Colorado preacher.) "I am one to encourage this good work along." (Ariz.) "Your letter (M. C.) is to the point. Will assist you in whatever way I can." (Far western preacher.) "Thanks you for a copy of the last No. of M. C. which I consider the best sheet which has reached my desk for many a day." (Missouri preacher.) "Enclosed find \$1 for some copies, and a small bundle of the wonderful poem, 'The Church and the World' ". (Preacher.) "I looked them over repeatedly, and handed them to people who were anxious to get them. They are fine."

Bro. L. E. Ketcherside of Bonne Terre, Mo., has bought a duplicating machine on time, and is printing tracts to try to stir the brethren to greater missionary work. Let the churches in Missouri help him pay for the machine and the material. He is donating his work. Instead of discouraging every scriptural effort to stir the brethren and advance the gospel, except that which is under our control, as some are doing, we should encourage such efforts. A preaching brother told me a few days ago that he visited a certain church which was being stirred to greater missionary work through the Macedonian Call. Send me the names and addresses of all the reliable members in your church, and let us see what we can do. Every little counts. Remember, if you leave the work of the Lord to the "other fellow", he is probably doing the same to you, and that is one of the causes of the indifference among the brethren.

If every Christian were just like me,
What kind of a Church would Christ's Church be?

God does not approve a course of conduct which if carried out by other Christians would destroy his Church. "Examine yourselves", brethren, before the Lord examines you and finds you "wanting".

Work for the night is coming,
Under the sunset skies;
While their bright tints are glowing;
Work, for day-light flies.
Work till the last beam fadeth,
Fadeth to shine no more;
Work while the night is darkening,
When man's work is o'er.

Yours for the advancement of the Kingdom,

H. A. Sommer.

P.S. - Remember that if you wish the "Macedonian Call" to come often to try to stir the brethren, we must have your financial support.