

WHERE TO LOOK FOR THE ENEMY

■ *... as heard on Songtime USA by Dr. Howard Clark* ■
former Pastor of Grace Chapel in Lexington, MA and Northwest Bible Church in Dallas, TX

These are incredibly exciting days for America - historic days. In Washington, DC, impeachment hearings have been going on while the Asian Economic Conference is trying to avert a meltdown in the Asian economies. But the greatest threat to our security and our prosperity isn't what most of us think. It's not the unthinkable terror of nuclear war, even though rogue and outlaw terrorist states like North Korea, Libya, and Iran now have the capability of threatening their neighbors. But that's not our greatest threat.

The greatest threat to our liberty isn't the scourge of hunger, or disease, or natural disasters. Even though we have seen some of these in ancient times, and we see them today when we thought we had eradicated those great enemies. In the immortal words of Pogo, "We have met the enemy, and they is us."

The greatest threat to our peace and security is not some external force of the government - *it is us*. Do you remember the single issue that divided the public debate in the last presidential election? Simply stated, the issue was: "Does character matter?" And en masse, the gatekeepers of the American culture declared, "No, it does not." Their position was captured in that silly bumper sticker that we saw all over the country: "It's the economy, stupid." Charles deGaulle faced a skeptical audience one day, and he observed - since a politician never believes what he says, he is always astounded when other people do.

I want to show you this day what happens when good men and women concentrate on the economy at the expense of character. There is a fascinating story of political intrigue and incompetence in the

Bible. It is found in one of those accounts of the political history of the nation of Israel — in Judges, chapter 9. I would like to briefly tell the story. You will notice that it sounds uncomfortably similar to the latest issue of US News and World Report, or even The New Republic. It is the tragic story of one of ancient Israel's greatest military and political heroes. It is about Gideon's son, Abimelech, who must have been voted by his senior class in high school to be the kid "Least Likely to Succeed."

Judges, chapter 9 reads as follows: *Abimelech son of Gideon went to his mother's brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother's clan, "Ask all the citizens of Shechem, 'Which is better for you:*

to have all 70 of Gideon's sons rule over you, or just one man?"

Remember, I am your flesh and blood."

When the brothers

repeated all this to the

citizens of Shechem, they were

inclined to follow

Abimelech, for they said,

"He is our brother."

They gave him 70 shekels of

silver from the

temple of Baal-Berith, and Abimelech used it to hire reckless adventurers who became his followers. He went to his father's home in Ophrah and on one stone murdered his 70 brothers... But Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, escaped by hiding. Then all the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar of Shechem to crown Abimelech as their king.

When Gideon retired from leadership, he left a leadership vacuum and he created an opportunity for incompetence to take power. He did what many modern leaders do. He made no provisions for the next generation of leadership, and as a result, most of what

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A SONGTIME FIRST!

Songtime went on the air in New England in 1964. Throughout that time, our outreach has grown to cover many of the New England states, but we have never really been able to reach the state of Vermont. As of January, Songtime was given the opportunity through CMI Radio to reach much of VT with the following stations:

WCMK 91.7 FM Burlington, VT/ Plattsburgh, NY
WCMD 89.9 FM Montpelier and Barre, VT
WCKJ 90.5 FM St. Johnsbury, VT/ Littleton, NH
(under construction, nearly complete)

and two translators:

96.5 FM Barton and Newport, VT
96.3 FM White River Jct., VT/ Hanover & Lebanon, NH

Songtime's half hour daily program can now be heard at **4:30 pm each weekday** as well as **Sunday at 8:00 am**. If you are in the area, tune in and let us know you are listening. Please pray for and support this newest opportunity.

he worked for all of his adult life was eroded in one generation that followed him. One political sage observed that the selfishness that allows public offices to come into the hands of inferior men is a sin on the part of the more capable. Look closely at Abimelech's background and you see what motivated him for public office. Like so many dictators since him, he was a driven man. He was haunted by feelings of inferiority. It created in him insatiable lusts for power. His hatred of the establishment and legal authority made him determined to get even with the world no matter what the costs. The noble and useful people are often too busy to seek power because they've got their own agenda. And rather than seeking public office, they have to be persuaded to lead. The useless are always way too eager to take public office.

Gideon, Saul, Moses, David — each had to be compelled to step forward and serve. Isn't it interesting that Abimelech and Judas were all too willing to take their leadership positions! The danger in organizations of all types today, whether it is government or business, schools or churches, is that we tend to relinquish to others the responsibility that we should bear ourselves. Then, we deserve whatever leadership we are forced to endure. The selfishness that allows public offices to come into the hands of inferior men is a sin on the part of the capable.

Let's continue with the story in Judges 9: *When Jotham was told about this, he climbed up on the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted to them, "Listen to me, citizens of Shechem, so that God may listen to you. One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to*

the olive tree, 'Be our king.' But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored to hold sway over the trees?' Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?' Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?' Finally all the trees said to the thorn bush, 'Come and be our king.' The thorn bush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thorn bush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'

In this little parable, each fruit tree sees that it must sacrifice one of its particular advantages to hold a public office. We all know that it is easier to criticize than it is to organize. What's going to mark your life? What mark will you leave on the world? Look at all of the things which most of us live for. Very much like these trees: like the olive tree, we're proud; like the fig tree, we're too busy being prosperous; like the vine, we're too committed to personal pleasure. The selfishness that allows offices to come into the hands of inferior men is a sin on the part of the capable.

You can make a difference. You can begin to pray that God will push those godly, and wise, and capable men and women to take leadership in the church and in the community. You can live for something that is worthy of you. You can live for the Lord, Jesus Christ, and exer-

cise your God given wisdom, as you are informed by the Scripture, and as the Holy Spirit empowers you.

How do men like Abimelech get into positions of power in government, or school boards, or PTA's or church councils? It is because people who are qualified in their character and gift are unwilling to submit themselves to public criticism, and the brutal and bruising press conferences, and second guessing that is a part of leadership. Can you imagine what would have happened if Gideon's older and wiser, and stable and gifted sons had been willing to step out? To extend a positive and mature leadership? If you shrink from leadership that God has qualified you to take, you can be sure that the place of influence and power will be filled by someone who's motives may not be pure. And the result will be your fault as well as theirs.

America has the kind of leadership it has because we have abdicated our duty as godly Christians. Let me say it one more time. The selfishness that allows offices to come into the hands of inferior men is a sin on the part of the capable.

DATES TO REMEMBER:

May 6-9 – Bus trip to Vermont

Reservations are needed immediately as the bus is filling fast! Cost: Single \$530/ Double \$400 per person and Triple is \$360 per person. Deposit of \$100 is **due March 15th**. For more information call Songtime.

June 25 – Songtime USA Anniversary

Banquet at Lantana's with John Starnes & Dr. Jimmy DeYoung. Banquet tickets available through Songtime for \$25 per person.

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Songtime on the Road

January 30 - Feb. 2 - National Religious Broadcasters Convention

in Nashville, TN. Visit the Songtime booth and meet Dave Donnelly & Dave Beguerie.

February 6,7 -

First Baptist Church Main St. in Waldoboro, ME Sat. 6:00 PM Dinner, Sun. 10:45 AM service

February 14 -

Bus trip to the Brooklyn Tabernacle for their 3 PM service. Call for reservations. \$40 round trip fare is due by February 5th.

February 20,21 -

Brickerville Grace Brethren Church in Brickerville, PA - Sat. 6:30 PM, Sun. 10:15 AM

February 28 -

Tremont Temple Baptist Church 88 Tremont St. in Boston, MA - 11:00 AM

March 13-14 -

Foster Center Baptist Church S. Killingly Road in Foster, RI - Sat. 6:30 PM, Sun. 10:00 AM

Meaningful Church Membership

Pastor Steve Butts - MILLERSVILLE BIBLE CHURCH

During New Testament times those who confessed the Lordship of Jesus were baptized and considered to be Christians. Such a confession assumed the intention of being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. True Christians are those who intentionally seek to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. Such devotion was required by Jesus when he commissioned his disciples to go and make more disciples. Jesus specifically ordered them to teach new disciples to “obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Obedience to Jesus Christ is a non-negotiable part of being a Christian.

Since making disciples involves teaching obedience to all Jesus commanded, it must include an element of accountability.

Christian leaders must hold people accountable to God’s standards. All who are involved in disciple making need to ask if they are providing healthy accountability for those being discipled.

One of the most effective means for ensuring Christian accountability is local church membership. Commitment to a local church and submission to its leadership is not optional for a Christian. “There is today a widespread belief that one can be a Christian or develop one’s own faith system apart from the church. The proposition is ludicrous. For everyone regenerated by God is by definition a part of the universal church. It’s not a matter of choice or membership. And following the pattern made normative in the book of Acts,

each believer is to make his or her confession, be baptized, and become part of a local congregation with all of the accountability that implies. So membership in a church particular is no more optional than membership in the church universal.” (*The Body*, Chuck Colson)

Many professing Christians do not want the integrity of their commitment to the Lord to be tested. They do not want to be in an accountable relationship with other believers unless they get to define the commitment. These people resent it when a church determines to make membership a serious (and even difficult) process. “Commitment in a community environment means participants can no longer commit themselves to the Lord in the abstract. Nor can they commit themselves to one another on a superficial plane. Community always tests the integrity of commitment” (Elizabeth O’Connor).

“It is scandalous that so many believers today have such a low view of the church. They see their Christian lives as a solitary exercise — Jesus and me — or they treat the church as a building or a social center. That the Church is held in such low esteem reflects not only the depths of our biblical ignorance, but the alarming extent to which we have succumbed to the obsessive individualism of modern culture.” (Colson)

Perhaps the greater scandal is that church leaders allow people to get away with casual attachment to the church. Have we as leaders allowed people to enjoy the benefits of the Church without sharing the responsibilities? Would we allow our children to do this in our homes? It would be good to remember that a man’s management of his home is the test for his qualification for leadership in the church (see: I Timothy 3:4-5).

If leaders took seriously Jesus’ demands for fully committed discipleship, they would treat membership in the church with greater integrity. They would see people’s attitudes and actions toward the church as directed toward Jesus himself. Such an approach to church membership would help bring true renewal to the church. It could also serve to identify true Christians.

A “HYMNSTORY”

■ *Bill Dagle* ■

If there are two names etched on the pages of Christian history, they have to be the names of Dwight L. Moody and Charles D. Sankey. Moody—being one of the greatest evangelists to ever live and Sankey – his companion of 28 years. Together they would shake two continents for the cause of Christ and win well over a million souls to His glory.

The year was 1874 and Moody was conducting meetings in the British Isles. One day in Glasgow the evangelistic team boarded a train for Edinburgh. The mail was handed to Mr. Moody who immediately became engrossed in reading the letters. Mr. Sankey bought a paper and began to read it for the latest American news. He had just about finished the paper when in one corner he found a poem entitled, “The Ninety and Nine”. As he read it he exclaimed to Mr. Moody, “This is just what I have been looking for – a shepherd hymn.” Moody didn’t respond for he was too engrossed in his letters.

It would be a few days later at a meeting that Sankey needed a closing hymn. The subject that night had been “The Good Shepherd” and at first he was at a loss for a song. Then, remembering the poem from the paper, he began to re-read the words. He was later to say: “A voice seemed to say to me, ‘Sing the hymn’. ‘But I have no music’, I replied. But again the voice insisted, ‘Sing that hymn’.” With no further thought, Sankey went to the organ- sang the hymn, composing the music as he sang. When he was all through, Moody came and leaned over the organ and asked, “Where in the world did you get that?” They realized that God had just written a song for them. The words and music have stayed since that day.

Elizabeth Clephane had written the poem about a prodigal brother. Ira Sankey had removed it from a newspaper and the Spirit of God had supplied the music. Both Moody and Sankey are gone but their ministry is still felt in words and music. Together they shared the undying message that God loves individuals and will go to the ends of the world to save them.

*And the angels echoed around the throne,
Rejoice for the Lord brings back his own!*

If you would like the Moody story at your church (by way of a story, slides and song) give us a call at Songtime. We are celebrating the 100th anniversary of Moody’s home-going all this year.

■ Questions & Answers ■

Dr. Bob Burrelli - GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

Q: If we cannot change God's mind, then what sense is there in praying? (Part 2)

A: The question assumes that prayer is the means of getting our way, or some magical Christian formula that gives us control over God, or something that we use at our convenience. Some who are not shy about embracing this view have found out, or soon will, that "prayer doesn't work". Many proud others may flatly deny this view, but their actions betray them. Soon their confidence in prayer wanes, they question its validity, and ask the common question above.

Let me answer this question biblically. You may not like the answer, but if you accept it, you will revolutionize your prayer. Reject it and your communion with God will remain seriously impaired. We pray not to change God's mind regarding our will, but to change our mind regarding God's will. To be more specific, we pray so that we can know God's will better and align ourselves with it. Prayer is God's ordained means of bringing Christians more in line with His will. While there is more to prayer than what I have just stated, let me address this aspect which has been called to light by our listener.

God wants us to know His will better so that we will know what to pray for in every situation. For example, Paul comes to a better understanding of God's will for his own life and the life of his churches after ask-

ing God three times to remove his "thorn in his flesh" and receiving a stern "No". Whatever was happening in Paul's life and in the life of the church at that point was what God wanted to happen. Paul would have to learn to cope with this new context in which the Lord had placed him by sheer dependence upon God's grace. At this point, Paul becomes better acquainted with God's will and can now pray more intelligently. In another example, our Lord, just before being captured in the garden, asked the Father in prayer for a way to save His people other than by the cross. He certainly did not desire to be crucified, but realized that it was not His will but the will of the Father that He came to do. Obviously, the Father did not give Jesus another option.

We must condition ourselves to look at life from God's point of view, not our own. We must take into account the light of His divine plan and not our own human agenda. When we do that, we will begin to grasp the significance of prayer in our lives. We must realize that God's plan for each of us is set, fitting perfectly into His grander plan for the ages, like one piece of a jigsaw puzzle. That is why, many times God will bring about something completely different from what we had expected and prayed for in earnest. We get in the habit of praying for the immediate,

but He has our whole lives at a glance. And so He always grants in every individual circumstance what is best for our overall life. He looks at each situation in life as a single contributor to the whole, so that when all is said and done, He will have fulfilled His promise: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"*. Everything that God brings on us, whether trial or triumph, is but one of many contributors to the ultimate good of the believer.

Let's understand that God is interested in conforming us to the image of Christ and that He will do whatever it takes to bring us to perfection in the end. For that, He has set the course of our lives, a course that will include trials too. Part of our job as Christians, then, is to discover His good and perfect will and then pray accordingly. For this, we need to do two things: 1) focus on the goal, the prize-to be like Christ and what God will do to get us there (in the process, we will lose our spiritual shortsightedness and not be interested in "my needs right now"); and 2) study God's will, which is recorded for us on the printed page. If you know God's word, you will know His will, and you will know what your will must be when you pray.

I listen to Songtime on: _____
Station