

Church Union: Ecumenism in the Light of Scripture

by Paris Reidhead

The church must stand firm on the truth of God's Word and reject the pursuit of selfish interests and the rejection of sound doctrine in order to live a life of faith and obedience to God.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1

Topics: "Sound Doctrine", "Ecumenism"

Description

Paris Reidhead addresses the theme of church union and ecumenism, emphasizing the perilous times described in 2 Timothy, where many within the church exhibit a form of godliness but deny its transformative power. He warns that as organized Christianity faces increasing pressure to unify, it risks compromising sound doctrine and succumbing to superficiality. Reidhead calls for a return to a vital, personal relationship with Christ, urging believers to prepare for persecution and to actively participate in their faith rather than remain spectators. He highlights the importance of enduring sound doctrine and warns against the dangers of following teachers who cater to itching ears. Ultimately, he encourages a movement of genuine fellowship among believers, transcending denominational boundaries.

Transcript

Church Union: Ecumenism in the Light of Scripture By Paris Reidhead* And it is walking and talking with the King in personal vital relationship that becomes the insulation and the protection that is needed for spiritual survival in these days, days such as these. In keeping with our text, Church Union: Ecumenism in the Light of Scripture, I am asking you to turn to two portions: II Timothy Chapter 3, Chapter 4. I will read 5 verses from chapter 3 and will read then 8 verses from chapter 4.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 5Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. (And II Timothy 4) 1I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine. 3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall

they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of the ministry. 6For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

It is customarily thought that verses 1 - 5 in the 3rd Chapter refer to the irreligious community, the unchurched. It is a conviction that has deepened with the passing of the years that this portion describes Christianity as it will be in its organized and visible appearance at the close of the age, that you are finding in these verses not a description of the sinners, outside in the broad way. They are described aptly and clearly and correctly in Romans, Chapter 3. And this describes the ones that have identified themselves with religion, ostensibly Christian religion, and are unchanged by all of this affiliation.

Let us look at it for a moment in the light of this. As the times become increasingly perilous and increasingly near the time of termination, we should expect to find these characteristics more obvious. "Men shall be lovers of their own selves." This is a verse that deserves far more complete and exact a treatment than I could possibly, give it now, but might I suggest that with the development of the Industrial Revolution came the greatest opportunity in human history whereby want could be alleviated, and the goods of the world could be shared.

But, instead of using these tools for production as the means whereby all might be shared, they gave rise to unprecedented selfishness and today we are engaged in a colossal battle to see whether or not two forms of government can survive on a planet as small as this and as antithetically opposed to each other as they are. But bear in mind that actions generally produce reactions. And this that you know today as Communism has undoubtedly been a reaction to pressures and to forces that have been loosed and released just during this brief period since about 1850.

And so this matter of selfishness is in its essence the cause of the peril. The peril in which we live today is the reaping of that which has been sown during the last century and a half. And this of course has been associated, this rapid development and the means of production has been associated primarily with those nations and lands calling themselves Christian. Consequently, we have to recognize that peril comes, always and ever, out of "men being lovers of their own selves."

It is therefore to recognize that the church and religion and so-called affiliated people will exhibit some measure of this characteristic of selfishness. Self-righteousness is another aspect of the same. Boasters is simply a pride in achievement. Proud, resulting from it. Blasphemers, disowning God's place and right. Disobedient to parents, now would seem to characterize the 3rd generation of this, when we are dealing with juvenile anarchy rather than mere delinquency. We discover that it is not something that is confined to the East Side, or the lower income areas, or to the slums.

But now sociologists are becoming appalled by the fact that this "disobedient to parents," this disregard for parental authority and established government in the home has penetrated into suburbia, and seems no longer to be that which we can confine to certain so-called distressed areas.

Unthankful, and unholy, characterized the individual's attitude in the midst of all that he may have. Without natural affection indicates the breaking down of normal and natural morals. Truce breakers, false accusers has reference to the power that comes as a result of the prosperity and wealth accumulated. Incontinent,

fierce, despisers of those which are good. Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Now one might say at this juncture that all this refers to the godless world around us.

But the key to understanding the portion is that they are having a form of godliness, having a form of godliness. They are associated with religion. They are associated with that which in terms of tradition of teaching is godly. But it lacks personal, vital, experiential dynamic. There is nothing real in it. And because thus they are associated with it they can salve the conscience and continue to persist in that which has been described with no seeming inconsistency. This then I submit to you is a description of the lack of social and personal ethic that will result in the last days and will characterize the church.

Now I am not disclosing some new fact when I say that with unparalleled church membership in 1962, more people affiliated with religious groups than ever before in the history of any nation, and certainly this nation, we discover that there has not been a sufficient release of moral integrity to stop alcoholism, crime, divorce, and all that seems to accompany decay of institutions and of those values for which we have paid such a price through the past years. The fact that we are having a revival of religious life has not communicated itself to the personal life, the social life, the moral life, the economic life of the nation.

And this is a matter of great concern. It was in the days of revival in the past that, when God moved as in the Great Awakening in Massachusetts under Jonathan Edwards¹ that debts were paid, drunkards were completely transformed, homes that had been ruined by sin were reconciled by grace, and lives that had been torn were healed as a consequence of God's gracious working in revival. Now one of the things that astounds and disheartens, if you please, is the fact that in all the apparent excitement and interest, and increased activity there is concomitantly so little effect in the social and moral life of the nation.

Ninety million people in church, seemingly, release not enough moral energy to stop any of the progress of disintegration that has alarmed us. Now this, I think, indicates that the cause of the disintegration lies in the source of protection, or what we should think would protect us, namely, the church life. But you see they are having a form of godliness, but deny the transforming power, the personal power that is to be released by this release of this godly truth and teaching, and God's people are therefore commanded to turn away from such.

We see an amplification of this, (and remember that this letter to Timothy was one of the last that was written by the Apostle Paul). He declares here in the 4th Chapter: Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reproving, rebuking, and exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine,... regardless of personal consequences. And he then declares, "The time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine." Now where will he teach it? Where will he preach it? It will be in the church.

For that is the place where the teaching and the preaching is to take place. Obviously, sinners have rejected sound doctrine ever since they crucified Christ, stoned and slew Stephen, and left Saul for dead outside the gates. The world has always been an enemy of the truth. We are not expecting rejection there. This is certainly not to be any indication of a change in climate. The world is certainly no friend of grace. And thus when it says the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, I believe that it is they; refers back to those set forth in verse 5 of the 3rd Chapter, They that have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof.

They will not endure sound doctrine, because after their own appetites they will heap to themselves teachers. Now some have thought that the structure here indicates "the teachers will have itching ears." This is not the case. It is the people that "have itching ears" that hire the teachers to scratch. This is the

purpose for it, to relieve the itching of a troubled conscience. And all the preacher has to do is just come in with a little feather and tickle it a bit so that sufficient stimulation will cause circulation and relief of the temporary discomfort.

And they will hire teachers that will be prepared to do this for the sake of such emoluments as they can secure. They will find out what the people want and then they will proceed to give it to them to their benefit and to the peoples' destruction. But this is what they has reference to. These that have denied the power, and have but a form of 1 Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) A Christian preacher. America's most important and original philosophical theologian.

godliness. They shall heap to themselves teachers that will agree with their appetites and consent to their lusts and will give them doctrines that comfort them in their iniquity and leave them pleased with their death. And these that have thus rejected sound doctrine will turn away their ears from the truth, and they shall be turned unto fables. They shall be turned unto fables, unto that which is made up out of old cloth, unto fiction, that which has no basis in revelation, no basis in Scriptural authority, but that which gives logical structure to the kind of preaching that "scratches the itching ears."

And this is thus going to become a system associated with the religious structure that has a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof. Now you will notice that the word is that Timothy and all who follow in his steps and seek with Paul to serve the Lord Jesus at whatever cost are instructed to watch in all things. Thus it behooves us to ask ourselves tonight, Is this in any sense characteristic of our day of our age. And if we find similarity, then I believe we are to recognize that God gave us the Scriptural frame of reference, the measuring stick, by which we could know what is happening.

But you will notice that even when you see that this is what is taking place in organized religion in America and around the world today, that you are not to consent to it, or succumb to it, or be seduced by it, but he has clearly established that we are to endure affliction. Now remember it was organized religion which crucified Christ. It was not the world. It was not the Romans. Oh, they performed the act, but it was not instigated by them. It was a system of religion which had the form of godliness but denied the power of regeneration and of the supernatural working of God in taking that which was dead and making it alive.

When the Pharisees found out that Christ had something they did not have, they had one of two alternatives. They either had to seek it, or to kill Him. And, because they were not prepared to seek it, due to the cost that would be exacted of them, for it was extremely costly. A cross was right there, the gate through which they entered into eternal life that He offered. They were not prepared to come this costly way. They knew that His continued existence was a threat to their security.

And consequently the world was not big enough for both Christ and the Pharisees. It was paramount, of paramount importance that they should destroy Him. They could not rest until they had done it. He had to be eliminated. He had to be taken off the scene. Now do you think things have changed any? They certainly had not changed in their apostolic times. There was a brief period of respite when the church was able to put its roots down in fellowship, and strengthen itself in the Lord.

But then with the healing of the lame man in the Temple, persecution broke out; relentless ceaseless persecution continued. Brief periods of respite along the way, but you could say the first 150 years of the church history was marked by continued persecution. However, it was not long until we discover that the method of persecution changed. We will speak of that a little further. Notice, however, that whether it was persecution by Rome, or later by a church in authority, those that would live godly in Christ Jesus were

persecuted.

And thus our Lord Jesus says here, by Paul, that in these last days when men shall have a form of godliness and deny the power thereof, when they will not endure sound doctrine but will secure the kind of teachers that scratch the itching of their ears, when they are turned away from the truth and turned unto fiction, that it will be necessary for Christ's own to endure affliction. This will be necessary. It is imperative, therefore, that anyone that begins a life of following of Christ recognize at the very threshold of it that this is what he should expect; and thereby - therefore, not be surprised when it comes.

You will notice that as one enters this way, prepared to have affliction and to endure it, that he is called upon to do the work of an evangelist, that is to carry the message where it has not gone, to fully prove his ministry, and there is laid up for those who will endure a crown of righteousness. Therefore, this is to be the pattern, one of the last epistles written by the Apostle Paul, and one that should give to us a picture of the days that were to come, and a plan for the years which lay ahead.

I have already suggested that following the death of Paul this was the pattern, periods of intense persecution with multitudes dying; then with the prairie fire of progress made by the Gospel Rome saw that it was futile to try to stamp out Christianity by persecution because where one died ten arose, and thus they would relent and for a little while persecution would cease. Then another period of persecution, and still another period of persecution. Finally, however, in 313 A.D. this momentous date in the history of the disintegration of the precious things of the Lord, Christianity was made state religion. Now it was changed. Now the persecuted became the persecutors. And one of the first things you discover is the persecution of such groups as the

Montanists, a group of people who believed in the necessity of repentance, holiness of life, the presence of Christ in supernatural power in the midst of the church. About the only records we have of the Montanists are the diatribes written against them by their accusers. But someone has said, You can almost tell who you want your friends to be by who their enemies are. And if you read anything about the Montanists, your heart leaps and says, These are my kind of people. This is where I would have been if I had been there in those days.

I would have been with them. For this is what I believe. Well then, you discover that parallel to the church, all through those periods, those centuries of the dark ages, was this small splinter group; the writings of the church are repeatedly given over to references to times of intense persecution against the Montanists, against the little known people the Albigenses. Then on up later to the Waldensians, the Anabaptists. This trail of blood, this cord of blood, as one has well called it, of groups of people across the centuries that refused to bow, that refused to submit to the domination of the state church.

And here we have this little group persecuted, enduring affliction all through the centuries. Now while that is happening, there are these luminaries that are seen even now in the midst of the dark ages. We have referred to them repeatedly, these men whose lives were so pure and so illuminated by His presence that we still profit from meditating upon their writings. John of Ruysbroeck², Meister Eckhart³, and Tauler⁴ and others. And they did somehow rise to the top of feted ceremonialism, and let the fragrance of their life and testimony blessed the world and us today.

But, for the most part, the church was in bondage, God's people were in chains, blackness reigned. This went on for a thousand years and more, till the time of the Reformation. First, John Hus⁵ lighting the candle, and then joined by Luther and others in between that had sought to serve the Lord Jesus. And we

find then that there is this period of Reformation that has come. The church was at one time in a sense ecumenical in the extreme, all of Christianity but for the Greek Orthodox group which there again was still in a type of totalitarian structure.

But the Roman Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the affiliates of the orthodox group were together in control of all of Christianity. Then came the Protestant Reformation. And in the 400 years and more since then there has been this schism, this time of sectarianism, breaking up into groups, until today in America we have, I believe, 312 groups that are listed and known and registered in Washington with the Government, and probably again that number that are two or three churches that have reason to look upon themselves as part of a group but have no stationery or official registration.

Now today the whole pressure is back to church union. We find that at the present time there are innumerable efforts being put forth toward church union. It is in this area. It is in that area. I think all of us were appalled just a few months ago when out in San Francisco Eugene Carson Blake⁶ made the suggestion that four major denominations in the United States amalgamate, and form one large super protestant group. Perhaps you, too, were listening that evening on television when it was announced that there would be a dialogue between Eugene Carson Blake and Bishop Pike⁷ of the Anglican Church in which they would express their views on this matter.

I was quite appalled personally when Blake, a Presbyterian, made the statement that they considered that this union that they were proposing was not a final union. But, said he, it is but one step in the ultimate union of all Christendom. Two or three years ago I was down in Louisville, Kentucky, for a meeting with Brother Epperson. I had become greatly concerned about this matter. I made the statement, With the election of Pope John you can (and I made this in the service on Monday night, shall we say-- I haven't checked to know just exactly when) -- I made the statement that with the election of Pope John you are going to see an entirely changed attitude on the part of Rome toward Ecumenism and toward church union.

I said, You may expect that very shortly he will announce an ecumenical council of some sort that will have as its over-all and larger design implementing means to bring all Protestantism back into union. I said, Now expect this. I was speaking from another Scripture that evening. 2 John of Ruysbroeck (1293-4-1381) 3 Eckhart von Hochheim (1260-1327) A German Theologian, Philosopher and Mystic 4 Johannes Tauler (1300-1361) 5 Jan Hus (1369-1415) Also known as John Hus or John Huss, was a Czech priest. 6 Eugene Carson Blake (1906-1985) An American Presbyterian Church Leader 7 James Albert Pike (1913-1969) An American Episcopal bishop

Well the next day the telephone began to ring the preacher's house. They did not know where I was staying or they would have been calling me. They said, What about this? Did he have some information? Because that day was the announcement from the Vatican to the effect that Pope John was calling for an Ecumenical Council to take place next year, that this was the initial announcement that was made. Well they thought I had certain prophetic powers. I did not have them at all. It was not that in any sense.

It is simply that, with the fact that the Church of Rome, and the great Protestant denominations view themselves as social and political entities, and in the conflict with Islam on the one hand, Communism on the other, union is essential for survival of the kind of political structure that these groups represent. It is just the common sense logic that you either unite or perish. That is all. It is that simple. It is either get together, or be extinguished. And therefore it did not take a great deal of insight to understand that it had

to be, and it had to come from Rome, because essentially this was the point of disunity.

When the Roman Bishop back about fifteen hundred years ago said that the Roman took primacy over the Orthodoxy at Constantinople, this was the first schism, the first break. Therefore the invitation overture had to come there, because it had begun there. Well now you saw in the paper, perhaps six weeks ago, that there has been a statement put out by the Ecumenical Committee appointed by Pope John. It was this, that there will be at the council that is called for, I believe it is next year, '63...; there will be three matters of primary importance on the agenda.

The fact that they are announced now means two things. First, it is a trial balloon. If there were world indignation, then there would be reason for him to say. Oh, to the committee, you have gone too far. If on the other hand they do not, then he knows that he is on safe ground. It is very hard you know for someone that is infallible to retract, so he has to find out again which way the wind is blowing before he puts his kite up. And so he had this take place as the means whereby he could see what the world reaction would become.

Now three things were presented. The first was that the priesthood could marry. Now this is not anything new, because the old Roman Church has had a married priesthood right down across the centuries in some parts of Europe and elsewhere. But it has now become one of that factors there, that the deacons in the Catholic priesthood will be allowed to marry. Now of course it goes on to say that Bishops and Archbishops and Cardinals will not marry, so when a priest marries he is forfeiting the opportunity for advancement.

But nevertheless this is one of the items that are being proposed at this ecumenical council. And you know that this is one of the barriers that stood in the way of ecumenical union. And the next issue was this: That hereafter the Mass is to be in the language of the people and not in Latin. This, too, has been one of the barriers standing in the way of union. And then the third was that the Pope would be elected, not by the cardinals, but by the archbishops. But the Pope would have to be elected from the cardinals.

This maintains the primacy of the Roman, but still allows the Orthodox archbishops the privilege of electing the Roman Cardinal to the Papacy. Now one other barrier stands in the way, and that is the infallibility of the pope, but there is a very simple means of circumventing this, even with Protestant amalgamation and union, all it will have to be is that he speaks infallibly when he speaks in behalf of the super council. And then that is dealt with. I believe, therefore, that you have seen within the last three years a period of historic importance when great barriers that have separated the large groups of Christendom have found it means, both psychological, theological and political, whereby they can bridge the gap that history and the centuries have made and effect a reconciliation between them.

I suppose it would be three years ago now, a book came to my hand, a view of it and excerpts from it. I have sought to get the book. I have not been able to, but I believe together with your help and mine, if you were interested, we could succeed. It was put out by a standing committee of the World Council of Churches, that Committee which is addressing its total effort to ultimate and total ecumenical union, or church union, of all Christendom. The statement was based on this fact, that there is no hindrance to the National Council of Churches in America today. You know at one time there was the World Christian

Fundamental Association, started by Paul Rood⁸ and Dr. William Bell Riley⁹. It is now defunct. It is not operating to my knowledge. At one time there was the American --still is-- The American Council of Christian Churches, but it has suffered from internecine warfare to the point where some of its

effectiveness has been dulled, though undoubtedly the principles for which it has stood have been valid. There has also been the National Association of Evangelicals which has performed yeoman service in giving voice for evangelicals, and in ministries that could not be performed by a single group.

But at the same time it is understood by those closest to it that it does not represent a foe in open opposition to the National Council of Churches. And they said, therefore, When an army is in the field and finds no army to confront it can assume that it has won. And they went on to say that the National Council of Churches was quite surprised at how quickly they had won this battle of ecumenical representation in the United States. They said, In fact we have won so quickly that we are now in no position to consolidate our gains.

We cannot do it. We have won so quickly we just are not able to do it. But then it went on to say, Since there is no one in the field, we will take good care to see that no one comes in the field, and we will hold the victory that we have won and will consolidate as rapidly as possible. Now I come to the place of projection. I want to do this in no sense authoritatively, for our family were not prophets, and I am not speaking to you now in terms of any inspired utterance at all, but just a projection.

It is my conviction that in the next 15 to 20 years you are going to see a closed shop take place in Christianity in America. I believe that there is reason for this, good reason that I could elaborately design and draw out. But at this point let me say that I believe that within 15 years no man will be admitted to the ministry, permitted to marry others, to bury, or to receive money deductible against income tax unless he has the approval of the Council of Bishops of the Catholic Church, the Council of Rabbis, or the National Council or its local unit the Protestant Council.

For we have now discovered that the closed shop has been allowed to be constitutional. If it has succeeded in the Electrical Union, it has succeeded in business, there is no reason whatever to feel that the temper of the American people will keep it from succeeding here. And therefore I firmly believe that this is going to take place. And so did the writers of this book, *The Shape of The Church to Come*. They said it is a fact, and went on to say that already there was legislation in one of the committees waiting for some national crisis to bring it out, which would say that no one could go into the chaplaincy and that these things that I have stated would have to be cleared through responsible bodies.

Now there is reason for that. If you drive up into certain sections of the city, up into Harlem for instance, you will find that there are little stores all along the way that have church signs, crude, grotesque, little incorporations under our broad church incorporation laws, and many of them are known to be nothing more than income tax dodgers -- where a few families get together, put themselves on the payroll, take their money, and pay it back to themselves. And thus they can avoid paying income tax up to 30% of their income - with no real serious attempt at a spiritual ministry in the community.

Now it is to correct such abuses that the legislation will be aimed. But it will have the effect of saying that in days such as these, with pressures such as these, with the mercantile interests of unscrupulous men being as they are, it is necessary to have some clearing body. I believe that within 25 years there will be such pressure that all men in any kind of ministry will be forced to accept the superintendency of these councils. That this could happen far quicker is of course obvious.

That it may take longer we will allow. But I believe that it is utterly inevitable that within a generation more or less there will come a time when no man can stand as I am standing unless he has the approval of one of these groups. No man can meet in assemblies such as we are meeting and conduct services such as

we are conducting, to receive your gifts and give you credit for them against income tax deduction. You see this is now a government matter. Now I further believe this, dear friends, that there will come, (perhaps far sooner than the time I have suggested) a total amalgamation between all religious bodies, that is all Protestant religious bodies and catholic. That all the Christian groups... 8 Paul W. Rood (1889-1956) President of Biola University. 9 Dr. William Bell Riley (1861-1947)

We have seen what has happened -- that out in India now in this recent World Council meeting, in which the orthodox groups have been admitted and to which the Russian groups have now also been admitted. Therefore I suggest that the world into which we are coming is a world entirely different, a Christian world that is, than in which I began to serve 25 years ago. It will never be the same. You young men and women that are entering the ministry today, recognize now here that there are these great changes that are coming.

Now the question is, Is this Scriptural? My own personal feeling is that, and I could have taken many other Scriptures to do it, that it is, that it is what we have reason to expect. The Scripture does not indicate from what I see, that there will come a time when organized Christendom as we are a part tonight, here in a property that has been set aside some 75 years of continuity, that such church life as we now are participating in will ever reach a period of spiritual purity and flowering.

There is nothing to indicate it, nothing from the Word of God to indicate it. But by the same token there is nothing to indicate in the Scripture the Wesleyan¹⁰ Revival. There is nothing to indicate in the Scripture the revivals under Jonathan Edwards¹¹. There is nothing in the Scripture to indicate the great movement under Charles Finney¹². It remains for every generation to face the responsibility for itself for its generation. But I see at the present time no force loosed through the churches as I now view them and know them, that indicates that such a revival that characterized Wesley's time or Finney's time or Edward's time is imminent.

It could come, of course, because God is certainly not restricted to my view at all. But I see in no sense today no evidence, no sound in the going in the mulberry trees, that indicates that God is moving in revival through the organized religious bodies that we see and view around us. Now having said that I turn around and say, I see a phenomena taking place that heartens everyone who knows and loves Christ that goes back to our own genesis some 80 years ago. For at that time you remember Dr.

Simpson¹³ was instrumental in starting little circles of fellowship. This church itself represented it. Henry Wilson¹⁴ was Episcopalian. Dr. W. T. McArthur was Baptist. Carter was from the Salvation Army. And this characterized the groups that met, a thousand of them in some ten years across the country, meeting Sunday afternoons in the halls, YMCA halls, women's clubs, little places where they could gather with open heart, open mind, open spirit, an open Bible. I see this taking place again today.

There are certain evidences of it, not nearly as widely as we wish it were. But there are evidences that people of different groups are becoming insatiably hungry for the Lord. And they are meeting together in Bible Study classes. I think all of us must take cognizance of the phenomena that has developed down in Dallas, Texas, where for these past 25 years Dr. Harlan Roper has demonstrated the virility and strength of the Bible Class movement. That church, Scofield Memorial, was a small group.

But he was successful in getting his people to believe with him in the importance of home Bible classes. And now he is having on the average of 150 such classes a week with the resultant blessing to the area, and the blessing to their church and other churches being established in the area on similar basis. We see

such groups growing up. We see Episcopalians meeting with Presbyterians, and Baptists and Methodists in their homes for fellowship. We see them hungrily reading the Word, waiting upon the Lord, opening their hearts to the Lord.

Now I bring to you this. Could it possibly be, could it possibly be that the revival for which we yearn and long will be, and I use the word advisedly in a limited sense, an underground movement. If it is true that the ecumenical monster (and I use it from an apocalyptic point of view) rising up out of the sea with its great talons will in 20 years engulf, will bring to itself with its claw like hands everything that has property and organization and so on, could it be that at this juncture God is circumventing that by causing people of different persuasions to simply love each other, and hunger to meet together in fellowship in the things of the Lord. 10 John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican cleric, Christian theologian, and founding the Methodist movement. 11 Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) A Christian preacher.

America's most important and original philosophical theologian. 12 Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) Leader in the Second Great Awakening in the United States 13 Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919) founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance 14 Henry B. Wilson (1841-1908) Worked with A.B. Simpson.

Wesley, you know, said Macaulay¹⁵ was instrumental in saving England because he was used of God to start the class meeting, groups of people. But here is an Anglican England. Now ours is made up of a myriad of Protestant Denominations, but we see no evidence on the part of denominations as such to see God in the sense in which it is imperative if in days of crisis such as this catastrophe can be averted. But we do find hungry people here, and there, and there, and here and there.

I have wondered if our Society, I have wondered if this church in this place cannot again come back to our original vision of being the means whereby hearts that hunger after God can meet together with spiritual counsel, with depths of Scriptural foundation. I would love to see this decade of the '60s be a decade characterized by a renewal given of God of a movement similar to that in England of the Wesleyan class meeting, when we should see a cell movement, for it is by this cell means that Communism has conquered.

Christianity is essentially a cell movement. Therefore, in the light of what is I see as irresistible pressure moving now to consolidate, coerce, control all organized Christianity, (I see nothing on the horizon to stop it, no pressure that is even addressed to it) While the ecumenists are reaching out and grabbing, and pulling into this, could it be that God's dear hungry hearted children just slip out and roll down and find each other? And in this climate, not fighting anything or anyone, but hungering after the Lord, they become like embers that have a stone thrown in it to put it out, but instead of putting it out each ember that falls gathers to it the tinder about it, and here is a group, and there is a group, and there is a group, and there is a group.

I would like to believe that Christianity can in the 20th century, in the 1960's, unashamedly come back to its genius which is the hungry heart that finds fulfillment sharing with the hearts that hunger, unfulfilled. Perhaps that will take place. I see nothing at all on the horizon, as I said, to stop the pressure of Ecumenism, no group, no forts, and no personality. I have prayed against it for 25 years. W. B. Riley¹⁶ was Pastor, mentor, teacher and friend, at his feet I learned the dangers of liberalism and ecumenism, and I have that as a heritage.

But under his tutelage learned to pray and to work and for one year gave much and most of my time to the World's Christian Fundamentalist Association, but the more -- it seems as though my prayers and the prayers of the rest of us have been but protein nourishment, and the more we have prayed the faster it has grown. Well after a little while you begin to say, Well Perhaps God is not interested in stopping it. For He has certainly not done very much to stop it. Then, if that is the case, what does He expect?

Could it be that this is the only way that those that are truly His will ever find each other, that as this other is gathered, His own will slip out and find each other in cells of the hungry and the burdened, the interested and the longing, will find each other, and it will become a communicating thing. As long as we can, fellowshiping here, laboring here, ministering here, but if the time ever comes that the lock comes on the door, and they want to stamp the forehead and take the mark of the beast and control the thinking for them, turn it over to them that is all.

Because you cannot stop something that has its focus on Christ, its center in Christ. It is the property they control. It is the people they control. It is the politically maneuverable they control. But those which are His, that little group of people that have not any time, but just meet because they long to meet and talk about Christ; they have no interest in them. That is not the issue. No, I believe, dear friends, that we are coming into momentous days, momentous days. I am afraid as I look into your faces and know and love you from six years' ministry with you, that some have been content to be spectators.

But I believe the day for spectator Christianity is about exhausted, and the time has come for us to be active participants because it may be that if we are content to be spectators that which we observe will be terribly distasteful to us. But the participant who is prepared to share Christ with those who know Him not, minister and labor; this I believe is the purpose of ministry here as well as back in those days of beginning to prepare you by the pulpit ministry, by every instructional ministry, and every means to be an effectual witness to Christ, so that should the day ever come when the door is locked and we can no longer meet, you will be quite prepared to go on extending the radiation of truth and testimony.

Is not that what our Lord Jesus intended to convey by the Apostles words, He gave evangelists, pastors and teachers. Why? "For the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry unto the building up of the Body of Christ." 15 Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) First Baron Macaulay-British historian. 16 William Bell Riley (1861-1947) Baptist pastor and educator.

I see nothing to indicate that on the earth as we know it the church will come to that perfect fulfillment and fruition. For just as rapidly as Christians come to maturity it seems that persecution reaps them. But when the devil thinks that he has controlled Christianity, Christendom in its ecumenical expression, and when he thinks he has it all under his power and influence, and when he thinks he has destroyed by persecution and assassination the last of the recalcitrant who won't submit and take the mark of the beast, then he can pat his chest with a Tarzan-like expression of victory, only to find that he has not won at all because we discover in the 21st chapter of Revelation that just as Satan thinks he has won, then the Lord Jesus will come on the white horse.

And then it says, The New Jerusalem as a Lamb's wife, the Bride, adorned for her husband, will be coming down out of Heaven. And all the time with the drawn sword Satan has been... What? He has just been the shipping agent for the getting of the raw material up for the temples being built. Not being built here. It is being built there. And it is coming down. But here is the forest where the timbers are being hewn, the quarry where the blocks are being squared, and without sound of hammer or saw or nail, they

are being built there, for He is the God of the living not of the dead.

It is going to be necessary I believe before many of us have completed our course to recognize that the church is part of the structure of our national life but that it is no means for the communicating of vital Christianity, and that we are going to recognize that it is in the quiet corner where the two or three gather. It is not that way now. But what is happening now is so patently clear that it seems to me it is incumbent upon you to awake from lethargy if in such you are and lay hold of truth as it is presented to you, and walk in the light as you receive it, and seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and cease and desist immediately from being content from being a spectator Christian and prepare yourself for ministry and service under difficult times, because in addition to what I have said, remember the Communists have said that by 1973 America will fall into their hands like an overripe fruit from the tree.

Again I see no spiritual effort being released through organized Christianity to avert such a crisis as that, and so, while I say the ecumenical pressure on the one hand is definitely to be recognized by us, we have Sennacherib's army at our gates, and it behooves us to recognize that the kind of fellowship for which I am calling is both preparation for and the means of averting the kind of catastrophe that hangs with a hair over the head of a sleeping church. Church Union - Ecumenism in the Light of Scripture.

Joshua said, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord. But choose ye this day whom you will serve." (Jos. 24:15) Shall we bow in prayer. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, it would be folly for me to say to any who are here without Christ that this is an easy way, a Sunday School picnic, that to receive the Lord Jesus is like a free ticket on a carousal. Oh no, it is not that. He said, "All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." He said, "They hated me.

They are going to hate you." A man's foes shall be they of his own household. It is not easy. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and come after me." (Matt. 16:24) But if I am speaking to someone tonight that came in unsaved, you have never been forgiven, you have never been pardoned, may I say that the Lord Jesus will give you Himself, first as the means of cleansing you from your sin, washing away your guilt and stain, releasing your conscience of its intolerable burden, taking away the scars that sin has made, making you a new person.

And then He Himself will come into you, and live His life in you and through you. And so, whatever it costs, it is worth infinitely more to have Him and to know Him. And wonderfully enough, He is standing outside the door of your heart, and if you will just open your heart's door and invite Him in, He will come in to pardon, to cleanse, to reign, to deliver, to empower, He will be everything you need. And so, cost as much as it will, it costs Him infinitely more to redeem you, and I trust I am speaking to some burdened hungry heart that says, I want Him, and will with the little children, for it is so simple, say, Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus.

Do this, will you, dear friend, and you can know Him whom to know is life eternal. But I speak now to Christians. I speak now to you that are in Christian service, I speak to you that are Sunday School teachers, elders and deacons, to you that are seeking to serve the Lord as best you can and are able; these are difficult days and there is nothing on the horizon or in the Scripture to indicate that they are going to get less difficult. Are you as spiritually mature as you ought to be after as many years as you have been a Christian?

Have you grown in grace and knowledge of Christ in proportion the truth you have heard preached? Has the doctrine that has been sounded in your ears been incorporated into your life? Have you come to the

measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ? Are you prepared to lead others to Him? Are you filled with His Spirit and walking in that fullness? And a member of His body He can control and empower and bless and

use? Or are you a spectator that is quite willing to go along just as you are, regardless of who is in charge or what happens? Are you one of those that are willing to have a form of godliness and deny the power thereof? "Are you prepared to consent to the absence of sound doctrine? and teachers that just scratch and tickle the ear?" Where are you? Oh, I trust that I am speaking tonight to men and women that say, I love Jesus Christ. I am prepared at any cost to endure affliction.

"I will fight a good fight. I will keep the faith. I will finish the course." "I can put my hand to the plough. I won't look back." (Luke 9:62) I have committed my life to Christ. I am going through, Lord, I am going through, cost what it will, cost what it probably will. I am prepared to go on. It is going to cost far more in the next 25 years than it has in the past. It could cost your life. It could cost everything. Are you prepared for that? That is the purpose of ministry, to lead you into the fullness of Christ and lead you into His Word, to prepare you to be a cell leader, to communicate the Gospel to others, to share Christ with others and see them through you brought to that place where they can do as you have done.

This is the genius of our faith. Why do you not indicate to the Lord tonight that it is your purpose to cease being a spectator and become a vital participant, and enter into all that He has for you? If you will stay for a moment after the service we would be so happy to talk with you and pray with you. Now let us stand for a time of prayer and benediction. Father, if we have succeeded in frightening this people tonight we give Thee thanks. We need to be frightened out of our complacency and indifference, and out of the vague and foolish assumption that if we just do not talk about unpleasant things they will go away.

Show us Lord that Communism is not going to go away because we do not like it, and show us Father that ecumenism is not going to go away just because we do not approve of it. And teach us, Lord, that things which are moving will generally tend to go in the direction in which they are moving, unless some counterforce is exerted to stop it, and the only counterforce that can stop either of these things is a release of vital, vigorous New Testament Christianity. And, Father, if it is not released here where will it be?

And so we ask Thee that by Thy Spirit Thou wilt do something for us so totally transforming, so completely different, so gloriously new, so wonderfully of Thyself that in these days when men's hearts fail them for fear, they will see that God moves when He finds a people willing to be moved by Him, be used by Him. May we be that people, Lord. Oh, God of grace, save us from being vines that cumber the ground that remember that harvest, fruit of yesteryear, and produce nothing but leaves today.

And so move upon us that Thou canst through us in these days, in these hours, get something that is perfectly Thine Own, gloriously Thine, to the Praise and Honor of the Lord Jesus Christ. So to that end seal our thoughts and meditation and consideration tonight, for Jesus' sake. Amen. * Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Evening, March 4, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor. ©PRBTMI 1962

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