

Issues—Issues— The Issue

By: Jim Hohnberger

Can present day issues actually keep us from, "The Issue" of life? I not only believe they can but know they actually do. Many sincere Christians are being constantly and continually distracted from "The Issue" God is waiting for all of us to take hold of. Our hearts fully and completely surrendered as well as continually and constantly kept through a living faith in a present Saviour.

Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, admonished us in all places and at all times to "keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23. You see, the greatest issue in the Christian life is to surrender the heart fully to God. This is "The Issue" which is generally being lost sight of in the issues of the day. There are unfortunately many in both camps, who are doing battle over the issues, but have not won the battle in their own hearts, for their spirit gives evidence that they are not fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They seem to find their "religion" in the defense and debate over issues, rather than in a life that is truly, "Hid with Christ in God." Col 3:3. Their very spirit, of argumentation, controversy, control and unreasonable censure and reproof give evidence that they know not a present Saviour that is able to keep them from "Self." So we might ask, what do they really have to offer?

The greatest difficulty after the heart has been fully surrendered is the actual, moment by moment, now experience of keeping the heart "hid" with Christ in God. Here lies

the very next "Issue" in true religion, once the heart has been fully and completely surrendered to Christ. This is what truly makes the way of life a narrow way and the gate, a straight gate indeed, and we are told "few there be that find it." Matt 7:14.

Did Christ have to face the problem of religionists wanting to sidetrack and entrap Him into debate and controversy over issues? He most certainly did and let us briefly touch on how He handled some of those issues.

We find in Luke 20:1-8, the issue of authority. Here Jesus is out preaching a saving gospel when the leaders of the church approach Him and try to draw Him into controversy by asking, "By what authority doest thou these things? Or who is he that gave thee this authority?" Now authority is indeed a most important issue, but Christ knew that unless these leader's hearts were in a fully surrendered condition, or desirous of entering into a full surrender, it would do no "saving good" to discuss with them by what authority He was out teaching and preaching the saving gospel. So instead of answering them, He asked them a question designed to bring introspection into their own hearts and lives. When it was evident that they would not be honest with their own hearts, He said unto them, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." In this situation Christ refused to enter into their issue, for it was evident their motives were only to discredit His life and work. We might well ask ourselves what we would have done! Most of us I be-

lieve would have gone on to debate the issue. But Christ knew it would amount to no "saving good." He saw that their hearts were only evil towards Him and knew that silence was the best defense. We all might do well to follow His example and learn that silence, in most of these situations, is sometimes the best defense, unless of course the inquirer is sincerely searching for truth and understanding.

We also find in Luke 20:19-26 that the chief priests and scribes sent forth spies which pretended to be just men, to "take hold of His words," that they might entrap Him with the authorities. What is the issue this time? The giving of the tribute money! But Christ didn't enter into their ways, we are told, "He perceived their craftiness, and said unto them. "Why tempt ye me?" Christ's commission was to bring a saving gospel, to unbind the souls of men from self and sin, not to argue over money. May we all learn from Christ's example when He responded "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's and unto God the things which be God's." He left it with the individual conscience to make the determination and again avoided needless controversy with the antagonists over the issue they were raising. The significant thought in this issue is that, "They could not take hold of His words." In other words, Christ's manner of dealing with the issue over money was by leaving it with the individual conscience. We too, have been cautioned by the inspired writings that, "The least you have to speak about the tithe ... the more sensible you will be." Spalding & Magan 215. Most of us would do well to follow this advice, for while we are debating over the issue, the saving gospel is not being preached and souls are being lost!

Not being able to entrap Christ in issues over authority or money, they now send a lawyer to him, "Tempting Him" to enter into strife and debate. For this was the religion of the Pharisees and Sadducees; strife and debate. You can read about it in Matthew 22:34-40. "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" But again Jesus was above arguing over issues and went right to "the issue." They weren't really in love with God nor was their whole heart, soul and mind surrendered to Christ. This is still true in the majority of cases today, we are arguing over peripheral issues, while most of us are destitute of a life fully and entirely surrendered to Jesus Christ, not in theory perhaps, but certainly in everyday practice.

When the Sadducees came to Christ wanting to embroil

Him in the issue over whose wife a woman would be in the resurrection that had seven husbands. Jesus went right to "the issue." "Ye Do Err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." Matthew 22:29. Christ here indicates we need not only to know the scriptures concerning the issues of the day but we also need to be experiencing the power of God in our daily lives. Balance that's what we all are destitute of. We need not only a settling into the truth intellectually but experientially as well. Truth lived out in our daily lives that's where the real power of the gospel is displayed.

I wonder what Christ would say to all of us today! Are we "erring" in dealing with all the peripheral issues, while our lives - marriages - families - churches and ministries are destitute of the power of God in keeping us from **self and sin**? Everywhere I go, regardless of the camp, I see homes bulging with books, tracts, tapes and videos dealing with the peripheral issues. Yet while in these same homes and families, the rule rather than the exception is a giving way to irritation, anger, appetite, gossip, pride, a love of supremacy, murmuring, evil surmising, bitterness, jesting, joking, slander or evil passion. Friends, we must gain a Christian character and experience that will keep us from these sins. This to me seems

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to be "the issue." Many of us may have good intentions in acquiring the theoretical knowledge about all these issues but yet all the while be unfit for the kingdom of heaven and the society of holy angels. Let us all heed the counsel in Matthew 23:23. "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Yes, let us gain the correct understanding of scripture on the present truths of today but let us also gain an experience of a "life hid with Christ in God." Romans 2:23. More that aptly says, "Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God."

Desire of Ages 253 says, "Jesus had nothing to do with the various subjects of dissension among the Jews. It was His Work to present the Truth." Are we handling these issues as Christ did? Or are we letting the issues keep us from entering into and presenting "The Truth" Titus 3:9 cautions us to avoid "factious" issues, "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain." See also II Timothy 2:23 and I Timothy 6:5. I believe the testimony of Christ's life speaks well to the various issues of dissension of the day, when the first "Issue" of a fully surrendered

heart was not accomplished in practice, He seemed to by pass the peripheral issues.

We all can read about it in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, or in the woman caught in adultery, or better and perhaps easiest to see is the interview with Nicodemus. Here Jesus comes, "Directly to the point." Nicodemus had come to Christ wanting to discuss with Him the issues of His authority and His mission. We all can read about it in the Desire of Ages 167-177, but lets condense it to just one short paragraph on page 171.

"Nicodemus had come to the Lord thinking to enter into a discussion with Him, but Jesus laid bare the foundation principles of truth. He said to Nicodemus, it is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. you need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart. You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things. Until this change takes place, making all things new, it will result in **no saving good** for you to discuss with Me My authority or My mission."

Do you see the contrast between theoretical knowledge and spiritual regeneration? Between having our curiosity satisfied and possessing a new heart? This is where the struggle is still going on today. Many are languishing in an experience of possessing theoretical knowledge and having their curiosities satisfied, over all the peripheral issues, while they possess not a true, living, abiding experience in Christ Jesus. You see Jesus said it would amount to, **no saving good** to discuss His "authority" or His "mission" unless the real "issue" of a fully surrendered life was in place. Heart work must be made the great business of life.

Everything else should and must be held **subordinate** to it. This is the Issue! There are present day issues that need to be met head on, but they will never be met in the right way unless we are ourselves in a living relationship with Christ as Christ was with God when He dealt with similar issues. How many of us would have handled any of the four issues mentioned thus far as Christ did? Probably none of us! This ought to then send us all back to our knees at the foot of Calvary till we gain that which will enable us to handle all issues as Christ did, with the wisdom of God and not man.

If any of us were to have the opportunity of a face to face interview with Christ today, regardless of whether we were a high church official or the head of an independent ministry

or a lay person, what would Christ say to us? Would Christ discuss with us the various issues of today? Or would He go right to the "Issue?" Would He say that "Self" is still alive and quivering in our lives, in our marriages, in our families, in our churches, and or in our ministries?

Friends, if we haven't practically found in our lives how to trust in a Power higher than self, daily-hourly- moment by moment, how are we ever going to handle the issues as Christ handled them?

I would like to share two experiences which may help open our eyes. The first was a telephone conversation with a high church official. I called wanting to build a bridge through communication. But within the first few minutes it was evident that unless I saw the various issues his way, which is of course the "right" way, there could be no cooperation in bringing the practical gospel to the many souls in need of help. My heart ached for the man who was working from a position of policy, rather than gospel principle. There was little, if no concern at all for me as an individual, as Christ would have had. The whole focus was the system, but friends, when the system becomes more important then people, have we not lost our focus? I thought to myself, here is a man that is to

represent Christ's meekness and humility. Here is a man that is to be as sensitive to each individual soul as Christ was to the paralytic, the leper, the blind man, and the woman at the well. Christ never asked them where they stood in lieu of the system. No, His concern was for them and their entering into oneness with His father. This was His work, this is where He pointed all to. We would all do well to learn that, "A mere lineal descent from Abraham was of no value. Without a spiritual connection with Him, which would be manifested in possessing the same spirit, and doing the same works, they were not his children." DA 467. It is sad and disheartening for me to say that in this conversation, the lineal descent was obvious, but the spiritual connection was not evident. His concern for me was not the spiritual connection, no it was only the lineal descent. But we are again told that, "descent from Abraham was proved not by name and lineage, but by likeness of character. So apostolic succession rests not upon the transmission of ecclesiastical authority, but upon spiritual relationship." DA 467. Friends, we are not to magnify the church that Christ raised up, but the Christ that raised up the church. I am not against ecclesiastical authority, but

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history proves we have much to fear when the ecclesiastical authority becomes the authority.

My second experience was with the leader of an independent ministry. I had been conducting a series of meetings in another state and this individual approached me wanting to discuss some "new light" he had. Within 15 minutes it was beginning to be evident that unless I saw this issue in his light, I was not being led of God and he would dismiss me as a true seeker after truth. I thought to myself, is this the only measuring stick to be used for me, if I saw it his way? How my heart ached for this man. He was only working from a position of theoretical knowledge and his only concern was whether I would see it his way.

I asked him two questions. First, what would you have done with John the Baptist? You know he thought Christ was coming in all His glory as He will in the second coming. Here, John the Baptist, misunderstood the first coming of Christ. Would you have thrown him out because he didn't see it in its fullest light? The second question was what he would have done with Martin Luther. Even though God had given him great light and done a tremendous work through Luther, he still believed in transubstantiation. Would you have thrown out Martin Luther as well? Then I read to him Desire of Ages 309-310, of which I'll only quote a portion. "The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ's day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the gospel." While this individual may have had "light" his treatment of myself and others that weren't seeing it his way, was antagonistic and unchristian. His "truth" was not keeping "Self" from rising up and crucifying others who didn't see it his way. Self was being manifested in religious issues, but there was no evidence that he had brought the truth into practical life. In the same quote we are told that, "Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a **curse** to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world." This man's truth was not bearing testimony that he had a present living vital connection with the author of all truth, How Sad!

Friends, both these individual's bents to religion were equally dangerous! In my perception neither of them in their contact with me were found constantly looking to Jesus for His orders, as a servant looks to his master, and inquiring what He would have them do with me. They both seemed to miss the point of the whole gospel which is, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 13:14. Neither of

them in their contact with me, had a present now experience of being, "Swift to hear and slow to speak." James 1:19. Each were performing their supposed Christianity in the power of the flesh; rather than the power of the spirit. So what in essence did either have to offer me? Much less to offer the world?

We are admonished in II Timothy 3:5 that from those, "Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof; from such turn away." I won't turn away from them as individuals, but I must turn away from their bent to religion and turn to a practical gospel that gives me power to live above **self and sin** as well as understand the pertinent issues of the day.

The parable of the five foolish and five wise virgins is a good caution for all of us today. The foolish virgins had a theoretical knowledge of the truth (issues) but the wise virgins had brought the truth into practical life. They had gained the power and grace that comes through sanctification of the truth.

Many of us are yet unbalanced, we profess faith in present truth, but we hold these present truths in unrighteousness. Let us go beyond just dealing with issues and let us enter into "The issue" which is a settling into the Truth both intellectually and spiritually. This is "The Issue," may God help us all see it and live it!

Power for Living



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