

A PORTRAIT OF A CHANGE AGENT

A hundred and 35 years ago our brethren were locked in a desperate struggle with promoters of change who were determined to remake the church so she would be more attractive to the culture and society of their day. **The Apostolic Times** was one of the gospel papers that bravely opposed that change movement. Such giants in the faith as J. W. McGarvey, Moses Lard and F. G. Allen used their powerful pens to respond to the fallacious arguments of the progressive brethren. On Aug. 31, 1871 Bro. J. B. Briney wrote a brilliant piece entitled, "What We Need." The following excerpt is remarkably applicable to our day and situation.

"There are some among us who seem to have imbibed quite an antipathy to first principles. They love to talk about the 'higher spirituality,' a 'deeper piety,' a 'broader love,' etc. Were it not that these men make such lofty pretensions to a 'higher spirituality,' you would be led to think that this is the very article they most need...

"The man that is tired of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ is tired of the only thing that can convert men to God, and lift their souls in holy aspirations toward heaven. But when a man says he is tired of first principles, what does he mean? Does he mean he is tired of faith? No. He has much to say about faith. It is his theme on all occasions. Does he mean that he is tired of repentance? Certainly not. He is for repentance, theoretically, at least. What, then, is the substance of all this opposition to first principles and to the men who are devoted to them? Simply this: 'I am tired of baptism for the remission of sins.' This is what you get when you simmer all this talk about a 'higher spirituality,' etc. down" (p. 161).

When you hear our champions of change calling on their followers to move beyond the "traditional teaching" of the church, remember Bro. Briney's analysis. The situations are identical. Isn't it remarkable that so many people who claim to follow Christ and aspired to go to heaven refuse to accept what the Master himself accorded to baptism: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Tragically before the battle was over, Bro. Briney defected to the camp of the enemy and devoted his last year to tearing down what he has once built up. This is another significant lesson for those who are standing in the ranks to fight the change movement of our day. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12). JHW

* This quote was found in David Hester's *Among the Scholars*, p. 95.