

“PAY-DAY—SOME DAY”

With Other Sketches From Life and Messages From The Word

by

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

RELIGIOUS RACKETEERING

In the last twenty years our country has experienced new “rackets” which have become black spots on our beautiful land and a disgrace to our government. The most widely known are the “alcohol racket,” the “kidnapping” and “political rackets.” The government is doing its utmost to wipe out these gangsters but is having a difficult time doing it. These deplorable conditions are causing our nation great anxiety and concern.

But the “religious racket” is by far the most deplorable and is a blot on the Church of God, working havoc in religious circles and undermining the Christian faith.

The Epistle of Jude describes these racketeers perfectly. Boiling it down we find this:

Spots on your feasts
Feeding themselves . . . without excuse
Clouds without water
Clouds carried about by the wind
Trees without fruit.

If you apply this to our present day you will have a dismal picture, a dreary painting, but a true description of some of the present day religious movements:

Spots on the Church of God
Feeding—getting the money—without fear (a lot of nerve)
Clouds without water (nothing for the thirsty soul)
Clouds carried by the wind (swayed hither and thither)
Trees without fruit (fakes).

I shall never forget an article written by a Swedish farmer a few years back and published in *Chicago Bladet*. His description of the terrible drought and scorching heat of that summer touched my heart and especially so when he told of the sadness that was his when he had to take his team of faithful horses down to the pasture and shoot them because they had no food left. Then he went on to describe his disappointment when day after day and month after month there was no rain—just scorching heat on his already parched land.

Then one morning, early, his wife called him to come out on the porch to see a cloud she had noticed. Eagerly and prayerfully they hoped that this cloud, would bring showers to the thirsty land, but again, as on so many other early mornings, they were tearfully disappointed because even this so promising indication proved again to be a “**cloud without water.**”

This is a true-to-life picture of many churches, communities, and denominations today. People remember when there were times of refreshing, revivals, and days of victory, but such seasons are now only happy memories and, in contrast to present conditions, add only discouragement and sadness. “Showers of blessing” do not fall any more. “Old-time blessings” seemingly have vanished from the church, and “Holy Ghost power” is not felt in the meetinghouse.

The song that best fits in as they gather for worship is:

Lord, I hear of showers of blessing
Thou art scattering full and free;
Showers the thirsty land refreshing,
Let some drops now fall on me.

We hear of old-time revivals in Norway, in Sweden, in Scotland, on the west coast, and times of refreshing here and there, and we sigh: “Oh, how long, till we hear the glad song? Oh, Lord, let some drops now fall on me . . .”

Under such circumstances many are ready to swallow anything, and they do. Unless one is rooted and grounded in Biblical truth it is easy to become a victim of wild-fire and unscriptural self-made “messengers.” A thirsty soul anxiously looks for any sort of a cloud and readily follows an illusion or mirage that appears like a “**stream in the desert.**”

This is the soil where the religious racket flourishes. It is the fertile ground for their illusive dreams and many honest souls are caught in this wave of emotionalism and become shipwrecked in faith before they are rudely awakened to the realization that these new movements are “**clouds without water.**”

These “new lights” who “**feed themselves without fear**” claim to have a new truth, a patent on God’s blessing, “**and with their mouths speak great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage**” (Jude 16). In other words, they are big-mouthed (me, mine and I) and they tickle and admire people for money. And, strange as it may seem, they get it! People who are rather close-fisted in supporting their own church and a real trustworthy missionary program get extremely big-hearted all of a sudden and cheerfully offer their sacrifices on these altars, which in reality is only “**strange fire.**”

People who have not been called into the ministry by God, but have chosen the preaching profession because of personal advantage are just plain racketeers. One who takes money for preaching the Gospel and does not believe or practice what he preaches is nothing but a racketeer, and one who preaches a truth because of advantage and does not believe it himself belongs in the same class.

But about the meanest racket of all is the *healing racket*.

Why? Because it squeezes blood money from the sick, the helpless and the dying knowing that **“all that a man has will he give for his life.”**

The writer is a firm believer in healing—the Bible way—and has seen God’s wonderworking power manifested in sick bodies, but I make this bold statement, that I have yet to find one of these professional healers that I have come in contact with who believed what he preached.

The next time you hear one of these preach on Mark 16 you ask him to go with you to someone dying of cancer or some other malignant disease and ask him to do as Jesus said, **“Lay hands on the sick and they shall recover”** (Mark 16:18). You will be astonished to note how quickly he will sidetrack the issue. I challenge anyone to contradict this statement, that a healing program invariably is put on for “effect,” “getting a crowd” and “getting the money.”

Oftentimes these “healers” find it most convenient to pass the collection plates two and three times and usually pray longer for the collection than for the sick. Why? Simply because they are more interested in filling their pocketbooks than helping the sick.

Some years ago I had occasion to make a close study of an up-to-date professional healing machinery and will give you the results, which will illustrate the point I am after.

This “healer” held forth at a certain large tabernacle and because of his brazen advertising program, cleverly worked out by an advance man, great crowds attended. I attended some of the meetings for two reasons:

First, because I loved the people who called him and wanted to share some of the blessings, Second, because of my interest in praying for the sick and my desire to see and hear this widely advertised evangelist.

But, my friends, as the meeting progressed my heart became heavy as I noticed cleverly devised schemes and the craftiness in handling the Word of God deceitfully (II Corinthians 4:2).

Here was the procedure: “Those of you who want to be healed get my book on healing, which can be had from the ushers for one dollar, or at the bookstand. Then you sign a card and take in three lectures on three consecutive evenings in the lecture room and then the fourth evening you may come up on this platform and be anointed.”

Just let me add that in the lecture room a woman gave a series of instructions to ailing people, one point particularly emphasized being that if we expected things from God we should gladly sacrifice what we have, and then a touching story would be told which opened the purse strings again. In the main auditorium were hallelujahs and outbursts of applause, especially if someone stood up and waved a five dollar bill for the ushers to add to the rolls they already had in their hand— before the “ordinary” collection was taken.

Then came the main event and the sick stood in line to march up to the healer, who was assisted by another who held the bottle of oil. As he touched them with his hands and prayed for whatever the ailment was he told them to “praise God for healing.” And they did.

Now, my friends, I submit to you that the one who can read and study a book of some 150 pages, then take in three lectures on consecutive nights and then walk up on a platform before a thousand people, especially after a two-hour claptrap meeting, is not very sick, or physically weak.

One of those assisting in these meetings was a friend of mine and at the close of the meeting I asked him to have lunch with me the next day.

“What did you think of the meeting last night?” was his first question to me.

“Oh,” I answered, “maybe I am too old-fashioned to grasp this new-fangled way, but if you will give me the name and address of one who has been healed, I may be convinced and feel better.”

Then I added, “I have here a specially published paper which tells of some miracles performed at these meetings; maybe you could give me the address of the lady with these initials, who tells of being cured of this awful disease.”

“But, Mr. Hedstrom, don’t you believe in healing?”

“I certainly do,” I answered, “but the Biblical way.”

Then he asked me if this was not the Biblical way and I answered “Absolutely no! You are using James 5:14 for your action and I read: **‘Is any sick among you? . . . let him call the elders,’** You have turned that around so that the elders call the sick.”

Then I added, “Brother, I may be all wrong, in which case I am willing to be convinced, but without entering into any controversy on doctrine let me say this, that I personally don’t believe one will be healed. However, I shall be so happy and will thank God if at the close of your meetings I know of one or two that have been healed,” and concluded by asking that he bring me the addresses of some specific cases that he knew of.

At the close of two months’ effort, in which some over three thousand books were sold and great sums of money taken in, he came to me with the sad news that he could not give me one name, and that notwithstanding the published propaganda to the effect that thousands had been healed.

My friends, I repeat that the healing racket is the most despicable of all. Lying does not glorify God, and make-believe and sham should be treated with contempt by all true lovers of God and the testimony of Jesus.

There are numerous rackets that, through cunning craftiness and artificial means, have been foisted upon the church today.

Conditions as outlined in the beginning of this chapter have opened the door for this “streamlined evangelism,” and many whole-hearted pastors have fallen for it in sheer desperation, longingly hoping that even a questionable cloud may bring some water.

Other “**spots on our feasts of charity,**” that are “**trees without fruit**” and “**carried about by the wind**” are the many windy advertisements of former jail-birds, boy-preachers, cowboy and cowgirl evangelists. Thank God for His infinite marvelous grace that can transform a 1 robber, save a little boy, convert a farmhand and bless a milkmaid; but in the name of common sense I ask why make capital of shame, or bring a cowboy uniform behind the pulpit? Does that honor God?

It is just adding a theatrical note to the service and makes “unholy” the sanctuary of God. I happen to be in the shoe business, but have also worked in a meat market. Would people be drawn to the Cross, or come under Holy Ghost conviction if I appeared on the platform with a shoemaker’s apron, knife and hammer, or would it be easier for me to lift a church to a higher plane attired in a butcher’s white uniform with a long knife in one hand and a meat cleaver in the other? Let us get back to common decency and divorce from our services that which brings dishonor to the testimony of Jesus and grieves our Heavenly Father’s heart.

Only eternity will reveal the great harm these sensational lecturers with their “heroic exploits” of a sinful, degraded and shameful life have done. Boys sit in wonderment and drink it in and this “evangelist” becomes their hero. What goes through their minds is needless to say, but the seed has been sown—and the harvest will come. “That’s the kind of fellow I’m going to be.”

Even this sort of thrill makes an indelible impression on a young life, not as a warning that will work good, but mostly a stimulant to sow wild oats. But people want a thrill and in order to satisfy a crowd of carnal Christians we let such trash into the sanctuary.

Space does not permit going into detail in regard to many other unscriptural movements. They generally have a “holier than thou” testimony, but close examination will often prove that it was just a bread and butter affair in the name of God. Those more successful work it on a higher plane, but usually follow the same procedure. Many pride themselves on the fact that they have no membership, and that “all of God’s people are welcome to worship with us, no matter where you belong.” But most of the time you will find that this is a convenient method to operate with responsibility to no one. The only excuse for not having a membership that can select or appoint men to lead the work on (Acts 6) is a rescue mission. I have closely studied these “one man independent movements” and have seen many sad endings.

One of the perplexing and unsolved problems to me is why Christians with ordinary intelligence who ought to possess at least some spiritual discernment will allow themselves to be drawn into so many of these wild-fire movements. Is it because of the coldness of their own places of worship, so that they long for warmth, no matter what sort of “fire” may bring it?

We are all human. If we watch the boys on the street we see how excited they become about a fire engine and how they will run miles to see a fire, the siren and loud fire bell stirring every fiber of their emotions. But I have failed to find that an ice wagon has any such attraction.

I have seen automobiles in ditches on the side of the road and time and again have seen them go right into the ditch on the opposite side as they have been assisted out of the first ditch. My friends, there is a middle of the road in our Christian service and worship, and it is the only safe way. It is just as dishonorable to God to slide into the ditch on the left side as it is to be mired in the trench on the right side of the road. God help us to stay in the middle of the road. It is the only assurance of going forward on the King's highway. God save us from cold, metallic ecclesiasticism with its deadening ceremonials, but also from extreme emotional and unscriptural teaching and practices, that are like "**raging waves of the sea**" and "**wandering stars.**"

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To prove the danger of these "movements" let me show how completely even well-meaning Christians can be swallowed up by this kind of sham.

I visited a certain "temple" of this wild-fire brand. Mingled with "Amens" and the Word of God was this "**strange fire,**" this carnal means to kindle the fire of devotion and praise (Leviticus 10). It was nothing short of blasphemy, and it grieved me to see and hear those people shout "Praise God" and "Hallelujah." I felt the need of a "second work of grace" after sitting through those three hours. I have never visited a vaudeville or theatrical performance, but from pictures and advertisements I can surmise what it is like and the show this "prophetess" put on had them all beat to a frazzle.

The dressed-up band that looked like a Halloween party played catchy gospel choruses that would set any worldly dancer in hilarious motion, and that big farmer-ish fellow with the half-wit appearance added a barnyard dance rhythm with both feet and tambourine. Then on the theater-like stage a fancy bicycle rider gave an exhibition of his cunning, followed by two schoolboys fighting it out till one of them was licked. This I suppose was for the purpose of lifting the audience to higher ground and giving the "sister" a perfect setting for her sermon on healing, which was the final act in the drama.

I have read accounts of a certain "father" in New York and some preachers and writers have even referred to his miraculous power. It is said that thousands are among his followers, even millions. I wanted to see and hear. But this was the limit. It again proves that if you feed the stomachs the people will raise you to the skies.

Here was a howling mass of people that sang and shouted that their leader was God almighty. If noise, emotionalism and wild hysteria are a barometer of holiness and Holy Ghost power, then this crowd "had it." In the midst of this meeting, which consisted of men and women, a man arose on the platform and when he had taken his stand behind the pulpit introduced himself as an evangelist from the Angelus Temple and Los Angeles Four Square Gospel, and mentioned the place where he was conducting services. Then he went on to say how wonderfully he had been blessed in this meeting and said that this was the old-time Gospel and this was the atmosphere he rejoiced in. Then he kept on exhorting this wild mob to more shouting and concluded by having them sing: It's the old-time religion, and while he led them on with marvelous emotions they howled like wild Indians, waved their arms and shouted.

This meeting continued until after midnight and as they marched up to the upper hall to be fed they sang: "What's the use of worrying, when Father Divine is God."

Well, you say, these are extreme cases. Right, but this "extremeness" was not from the start. There was a "beautiful appeal" in the beginning, but carnal leadership and unscriptural teaching always lead to a blind alley. Many of us remember Alexander Dowie. He seemingly started well, but what a sad end!

Let me in conclusion give you something "ordinary" among religious racketeers.

A friend of mine whose words and integrity no one questions went with his wife to a new movement assembly whose "new teaching" had "blessed" her. After the public "ordinary" meeting was over and dismissed, friends were invited to the "tarrying meeting." This brother kept near the door while his wife joined others on the platform and around the platform. It became a howling scene, with arms raised and agonizing prayer; then blabbering noises until men and women lay stretched out, seemingly under a certain power and ecstasy.

Suddenly the pastor-evangelist who had fallen "under the power" and was lying on his back, moaning and shouting, raised his legs skyward and soon was practically standing on his head shaking his legs and feet wildly. This was enough for this brother and in sad disgust he left the meeting and waited outside for his wife. A few days later he was visited by this preacher, because he had admonished his wife, and this preacher with this "new revelation" asked him what made him angry.

"Oh," he said, "I wasn't angry, but left because of the way you acted during the after-meeting."

When he told him what he had done the preacher answered, "When the power comes over me I am not responsible."

"Can this power come over both men and women and make them act that way?" my friend asked.

"Certainly," was his reply.

"Well," he said, "that is just what I was afraid of with my wife right there on the platform."

Another "**cloud without water**" is this racket of mailing oil-soaked handkerchiefs to sick people, assuring them that these napkins have been "blessed" and anointed by these "mighty" healers.

What a measly, low-down trick to use in the name of our Master! "How much did the mail bring today? We should have had a great response because we mailed out so many last week."

Are these foxy money-mad healers interested in getting news about someone being relieved of their pains? They seem more vitally interested in relieving these bedridden sufferers of their needy dollars.

“But they are sent out free!” Surely, but granting that some in their ignorance actually believe something good will come from such an act, I make the statement that the real reason for oil-soaking the handkerchiefs is to “soak” the sick. These professional healers know well enough that these napkins have no healing power, but they are smart enough to realize they will not cause much harm, except some mental despair. Knowing that a sick and dying person will grasp at even a straw, they capitalize on a defenseless and weak humanity and **“speak great swelling words for advantage.”** This is one of the most contemptible religious rackets I know of.

Then I hear someone say, “But people are saved even among these groups.”

We cannot deny this. God will always honor His own Word, no matter who delivers it and no one denies that the word of salvation is preached in many of these movements, even if they are “off” on other lines. But remember that Jesus tells of a crowd that will come to Him on that day and say, **“Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name and in Thy Name cast out devils, and in Thy Name done many wonderful works?”** And Christ will not deny it. Why? Because they have done works in His name, but— **“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”**

These were not even backsliders, because Christ says He never knew them.

Paul also mentions a kind of people who **“are with us, but not of us.”** They are **“clouds without water, trees without fruit. They are raging waves of the sea that foam out their own shame, and wandering stars that have no fixedness.”**

Had the church of God held forth all the truth and the preachers had rightly handled the Word of God, this deplorable condition would not exist and these many factions and splits would have had no foothold in the Church of God.

We need to preach the transforming power of Calvary and at the same time the Pentecostal power. Paul made it very clear that he wanted to know Him, and also the power of His resurrection. We need to set forth the command not to be drunk with wine, but also that we should be filled with the Spirit. One is just as much a command as the other.

If ever there was a period in the history of the Church when the truth of the infilling of the Holy Ghost needed to be preached, it is today. This truth would be the antidote to the wave of fanaticism and unscriptural movements and give the Church the impetus to go forward to new victories. We do not need, a new Pentecost. That is a historical event. But we need the power of Pentecost in our lives and in our service.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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