

## **“UNCERTAIN SOUNDS”**

Jay Lockhart

I don't know about you, but in articles I am reading, in tapes I am listening to and in conversations I am having, I am hearing some uncertain sounds from some members of the church. These uncertain sounds are coming at the very time that the churches of Christ have moved from the fastest growing church in America to the place that we are barely holding our own -- some students of church growth tell us we are actually in decline. Whatever our problems are that have halted our growth, the uncertain sounds coming from various places in our brotherhood do not seem to be helping but in fact may be a contributing factor to failure to grow. The Apostle Paul, said, "If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?" (I Corinthians 14:8). When we were the fastest growing church in our country, we knew what we believed and we boldly proclaimed it. At the present time there are those among us who are saying that our attitudes were bad, our methods were faulty and our view of Scripture was wrong. I am not here to defend anything we did that was not right, but I am wondering why some of us have so watered down the message that we reach few people. Some have reduced "the pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13) to some suggestions about how to be nice and give little attention to how we are to worship, the nature of the church, the authority of Scripture or how to be saved. We are told that if we go easy on doctrine we can reach the unchurched, but many who say this are seeing their churches decline. They tell us that the New Testament presents no patterns for us, yet these very people often look to community

churches like Willow Creek in Chicago and Saddleback in Southern California as their patterns. They are often busier reading best selling religious authors than they are Peter, Paul, James and John and they believe the church will grow if we follow cunningly devised fables based upon little more than the feeble thoughts of human reason. These are the folks who are telling us to let them show us how to grow the church. The church will grow when we believe the world is lost; when we care enough to take the gospel to the world; when we boldly present the truth in love; and when we honor God's Word and trust Him for the increase. On the other hand, an uncertain sound will assure perpetual decline. Which will be for us?