

LESSONS TO FORTIFY YOUR FAITH

—Volume III—

by
JOHN WADDEY

Editor

CHRISTIANITY:
then & now

Published by The Church of Christ
12213 W. Bell Road, Suite 211
Surprise, Arizona 85374

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INTRODUCTION

These **Lessons to Fortify Your Faith** were first sent to the recipients of our weekly email lessons by this name. This is the third collection of them to place into a permanent form. We send them forth with a prayer that in this format they will continue to bless our brethren for years to come.

I well recall the first time I happened into a church that change agents had captured. I remember when I first sat down to write an article relating to the change agents and their attempt to subvert the faith and worship of Christ's disciples. At that time I had no idea how extensive was the damage already done or how arrogant and militant the agents of change were as they pursued their course. I remember writing numerous letters to well-qualified brethren urging them to take up the sword and lead our brethren in this conflict. I recall the beginning of our efforts to confront and defeat this destructive apostasy. My wife and I resolved to use our own funds to print and mail our **Christianity: Then & Now** paper to the 100 or so congregations of the Church of Christ in Arizona. Now, seven years have passed. The paper goes to the preachers and elders of virtually every congregation in the USA (some 9,400) and to some 350 in other nations. In 2007 we were able to double the size of CTN to eight pages.

Soon we added a weekly email **Lesson to Fortify Your Faith**. From a mailing list of a few dozen it has grown to some 1800 recipients. In the past year we added our midweek **First Century Lessons for Contemporary Christians** sent to the same mailing list and a weekly Lesson for Preachers.

The last seven years have been incredibly busy. Some 1320 articles have been written on the various aspects and follies of the change movement. Six books have been written and the seven years of **Christianity: Then & Now** bound into book form. Hundreds of letters have been written. Hundreds of questions relating to this movement and how to deal with its promoters have been answered

All of this has been possible only because God stirred up the hearts of faithful Christians who have joined hands with us in supporting this effort. The members of the West Bell Road Church of Christ in Surprise, AZ have worked tirelessly, preparing our papers for mailing. Bro. Jeremy Menefees of Everett Washington has managed our website and emailings in a most efficient way. Jean Baxter does an excellent job doing the layout for our CTN. To each of them we are most grateful. Other brethren across the nation have seen the danger before us and taken up the battle. Standing and fighting together, with God's help, we will be able drive the innovators back from our gates.

This will be a long, hard-fought battle. Many of us will not live to see the final results. Let no one mislead you! The future of the Church of Christ here in America and around the world is at stake. If the change agents prevail, the Lord's church will be severely damaged. Many congregations and multitudes of members will be swept into denominationalism. Thus, we cannot afford to give up the fight. I hope that you, the reader of this book, will be inclined to stand with us and lend your encouragement to this holy endeavor.

May it be that when we have finished our earthly course our children and grandchildren will be well rooted and grounded in the faith and fully prepared to carry the flag of faith throughout their days. May Christ's church flourish and prosper until he comes to claim her.

John Waddey
12630 W. Foxfire Dr.
Sun City West, AZ 85375
Ph. (623) 214-3715

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1.

JUST WHAT ARE THE CHANGE AGENTS DOING THAT IS SO WRONG?

Dear Bro. Waddey: I love God and want to be like Jesus. I love Jesus' church and want to do the will of God in all things. I believe in the inerrancy of the holy Scripture and think that spiritual and moral truth is knowable and is intended for my life. What I don't understand is why there is so much turmoil. Is it mostly about ways to worship? I cannot find a biblical reason for arguing over which songs to sing or for specific teaching methods. I cannot argue over the number of cups to use in communion or whether the cups are passed to me or I walk to the cup. I have searched and read and prayed about this. I have been talking to friends who feel the same way. Can you tell me exactly what the problems are? Does everyone else know what problems you are talking about but me? Katie

Dear Katie: God bless you for your love for his Son, his Church and his Word. We are in agreement on the things you mentioned. Yes, there are some who are protesting over the trivial, insignificant things you mentioned, but I do not.

It matters not which songs we sing so long as they are psalms, hymns and spiritual songs offered to God through Christ . . . sung in spirit and in truth. It does matter however if instead of singing praise to God, we listen to a musical presentation, whether vocal or instrumental when we assemble for worship. When we sing we are to speak one to another with the words we sing (Eph. 5:19). It does matter if in addition to our singing we add instrumental music, which is something other than singing. Singing in worship Christ has clearly authorized, the use of instruments he has not. We are to do that which he has commanded us to do (Matt. 28:20).

It matters not which method is chosen to distributed the communion to the worshipers. It does matter however if should change the day He authorized for the communion to be observed. His New Testament clearly shows that it was on the first day of the week that disciples assembled to break the holy bread (Acts 20:7). It does matter if we should try to mix the communion service with a common meal (I Cor. 11:20-22).

The thing that is troubling our churches is the spirit or attitude that says we can do anything we want to do in our worship. The change agents hold this mistaken view because they do not respect the New Testament as the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) or accept that it is a pattern for us to follow (II Tim. 1:13).

We are troubled by men who no longer believe the teaching of Scripture that makes baptism an essential element of the sinner's salvation. They correctly emphasize salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9) but then they place baptism in the area of something one does as a demonstration of his salvation. They hint that a man can be saved even if he never gets around to baptism, because of God's grace and the man's faith. Such teaching is diametrically contrary to the plain teaching of God's Word. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16); "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16).

We are troubled by men who no longer believe the truth of God's Word about the nature of the Lord's church. They often speak of the Church of Christ in a derogatory manner. They shame her before the world. They seek acceptance among folks who are members of churches founded by men. They seek to reduce the Church of Christ to the status of a denominational church of human origin. Christ built but one church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4-5). The idea of dividing into groups that call themselves after men is clearly condemned (I Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-6). While building large congregations for themselves, they are undermining and harming the body of Christ. For that we fault them.

I regret very much we have to deal with such unpleasant matters as we serve Christ and make our way to eternity. If however you read your New Testament carefully, you will see that such problems existed even in the days of the apostles of Christ. We must be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10). God be with you and keep you strong and faithful. JHW

2.

WEAPONS OF FALSE TEACHERS

Those who wage war have an arsenal of many weapons. So do the enemies of Christ's church. The weapons are age-old and as effective now as then. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul mentions the "wiles of the devil" and the fiery darts of the evil one" (Eph. 6:11, 16). Consider the following weapons of false teachers.

* The chief weapon of the false teachers is **deception**. They never volunteer to reveal their mission which is to capture control of, or overthrow a congregation of God's people. Thus John writes, "Let no man deceive you" (I John 3:7). Such a deceiver might appear as an angel of light when in actuality he is a servant of the Evil One (II Cor. 11:13-15).

* Another of their weapons is **lies**. A man can deceive by conduct, words or appearance. But when questioned as to his intentions, a false teacher often lies. He will vehemently deny that he intends to harm the church or change her faith and worship. He will assure you that he loves the Lord, his church and his Word, while in his heart he despises one or all of them. He will lie with a straight face when elders ask if he believes thus or so, knowing that to admit the truth would close the door to further opportunities in that congregation. Paul warns of false teachers "speaking lies in hypocrisy" (I Tim. 4:1-2).

* False teachers are adept at **misrepresentation**. They pretend to be skilled teachers of God's word (I Tim. 1:7) when they know only their cherished doctrines. They misrepresent the faith and standards of the church, They misrepresent the actions and teachings of righteous leaders who stand between them and their goal. Paul suffered greatly from such misrepresentations (II Cor. 7:2-3). They call evil good and good evil (Is. 5:20).

* The advocates of error are **masters at distortion**. They are skilled in using half truths. They are good at exaggeration and twisting truth to justify their error or polishing their error to make it appear to be truth. A slight shift in the tense of a verb, a subtle change in the spelling of a word can make a black appear white. Taking a teacher's words out of context or shifting them to a different time frame can produce a desired conclusion for false teachers. They try to offset God's truth with their half truth.

* A favorite weapon of today's false teacher is to **revise the historical record of the church**. Since we are part of a continuous flow of history, we learn much by a study of the past. We can glean valuable lessons regarding wholesome things to continue and destructive things to avoid. But false teachers delight in revising the historical record, making it say what they think it should say. When they are finished, the heroes are often villains and the villains heroes. The good man appears to be a promoter of error and the bad man the champion of truth. The error shines brightly and truth is painted in dark colors.

* False teachers use **denunciation**. The faithful brother whose arguments they cannot answer they seek to discredit by denunciations. Thus the Jews did to righteous Stephen (Acts 6:11-14). The good man may be accused of troubling God's people as was Elijah (I Kings 18:17). They may be denounced as corrupt or evil when their only sin is loyalty to God, his word and his church.

* False teachers **scorn** that which can they cannot overthrow. They scorn those whose work they would discredit and demolish. Righteous men whose testimony and record are spotless, they scorn as their inferiors (Luke 8:53). They scorn the brother who establishes his point by citing scripture. They pretend he is inferior and unworthy of their August attention.

* When false teachers feel secure in their position they don't hesitate to resort to **intimidation**. If an individual or a minority dare to resist their take-over, they use intimidation to silence them or force them out of the congregation. Diotrephes intimidated those whom he could not dominate (III John 9-10).

Although this list does not exhaust the total arsenal of false prophets, it gives us a fair idea of what we are up against. Observant disciples will note that these weapons are favorites of those change agents now troubling the Church of Christ. JHW

"There is no great future for any people whose faith has burned out or congealed" (Rufus M. Jones).

3.

AFTER LENGTHY PRAYER AND STUDY

When the Quail Springs Church in Oklahoma City decided to introduce instrumental music into its worship, minister, Mark Henderson, stated the decision came only “**after lengthy prayer and study**” by the church leaders. He pointed to the fact that the Old Testament Scriptures allowed instruments therefore they felt such was not a forbidden practice. Similar justifications have been offered by other preachers whose congregations made the same move.

Across the Atlantic, in Africa, we have several thousand congregations. There, our brethren are a minority living in the midst of society that is primarily non-Christian. There, polygamy is the prevailing marriage practice. For the Christian to practice monogamy places him in a unique and awkward situation. His neighbors laugh at him and ridicule his strange practice. It creates a distinct disadvantage when talking to others about Christ. There, when the Church of Christ is mentioned, people immediately think of it as the anti-polygamy church. The people crack jokes about those strange one women men in the Church of Christ. The situation is really exacerbated when radical preachers insist that **monogamy is the only marriage God approves** and condemn as sinful those living in polygamous marriages.

Bro. Josiah B. was privileged to travel to America to get his education in a university. There, his professors helped him to understand that his literal approach to interpreting the Bible was obsolete. They showed him how contemporary scholarship had exposed the weaknesses of the old traditional way introduced by American missionaries. They explained to him that God was full of love and mercy and wanted his children to be happy.

Back home in Africa, Bro. Josiah took a position with the Midtown Church of Christ. After getting his feet on the ground, he invited his elders to enter into an extended period of prayer and study on the question of marriage and polygamy. After weeks of discussion, prayer and study they came to the conclusion that they had been too restrictive in their teaching. They had discovered from the Old Testament that God had accepted and approved of polygamy. Great saints like Abraham, Jacob, Moses and David the man after God’s own heart had practiced polygamy. Obviously, one could not say it was biblically wrong! The truth was, monogamy was simply a cultural matter, an American tradition.

Josiah and his elders understood the tender consciences of many of the brethren who had been wrongly taught by missionaries and poorly trained older preachers and they certainly did not want to offend them. So they proposed having two services, one for the monogamous brethren and the other for those who saw no harm in polygamy. What was important was that there be no division over the matter. So they issued a stern warning to those who felt monogamy was the only acceptable way of marriage. They informed them, “If you cannot display a tolerant spirit toward your brethren who want polygamy, you should leave.” Josiah arranged for an interview with the local newspaper so they could get the word out to their neighbors, that their congregation was no longer to be considered narrow and rigid on the question of polygamy. His more conservative brethren were upset and embarrassed by the events in their congregation. But Josiah reported that they were hoping to attract thousands with their new policy.

In case you wonder, the situation in Oklahoma really happened. The one in Africa is fictional, but the similarities are remarkable. In each case the desire of the exegete dictated his conclusion. The latter illustrates the fallacious reasoning of the former. Bro. Josiah’s case is no more shameful than that in Oklahoma. Lengthy prayer and study cannot make black white. It cannot make error truth nor can it make pleasing to God that which He has not authorized. JHW

“Of course the Pharisees were wrong in their legalistic approach to serving God, but so were the Sadducees, the liberals of that generation of Judaism. The same is true today. True Christianity is neither legalistic nor liberal, but it is thoroughly biblical. Christ is still the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him (Heb. 5:9).”

4.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PAY THE EXECUTIONER

There was a strange custom practiced in England 500 years ago. Those condemned to death were expected to pay their executioner for his work. There was a practical aspect to this bizarre custom. It encouraged the messenger of death to dispatch his victim one swift, clean blow of his ax.

Today we see congregations being systematically destroyed by preachers who are imposing their agenda of change upon them. Given time, this will surely result in the death of those congregations as "churches of Christ." Rather than a swift, deft blow, it will be a long and tortuous death, lasting months or even years before the end is reached.

While the custom of paying the executioner has long since vanished, many Christians continue to pay those who are destroying their congregations. They see the damage being inflicted. They are upset and offended at the changes imposed, but still they give their generous gifts to support the very men who are inflicting the blows that are destroying the church they love.

In many cases a brother or sister may have no voice in what is being done. Their elders don't listen to them. Their preachers do not care what they think. Thoughtless fellow-members are eagerly rushing into oblivion in their pursuit of something new and different. We don't have to reward our executioners!

The faithful disciple is not without means to express his/her unhappiness:

* Your contributions. Don't contribute to those who are harming the church you love. Give to Christian causes you know are pursuing and promoting God's will. Vote with your pocketbook.

* Refuse to support Christian projects that are no longer faithful to God's word. The radio and TV ministry known as the Herald of Truth once faithfully preached the gospel of Christ to a lost world. As the original leaders of that Highland Church of Christ in Abilene passed away, those who replaced them lost their way. That church is now caught up in the change movement. Their broadcast ministry no longer serves the Lord's Cause as it once did. We should not support it.

* Do not support, recommend, or send your children to Christian Schools that have abandoned the goal of restoring the apostolic faith. Seek out those schools still faithful to their founders' intent and direct your support to them.

* Do not encourage and lend your support to lectureships, worships and forums featuring those who are no longer friends of Christ's church. Your presence increases the value of their worthless stock.

* You need not stay with a congregation that has abandoned the faith of Christ for a new gospel. Vote with your feet. Find a faithful church and cast your lot with them. There you can truly worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). There you can honor God as he has directed and feel happy, contented and satisfied for having done so. If no sound church is within driving distance, seek out other Bible-loving souls and start a congregation that will be what Christ expects it to be. Meet in your home, or a rented facility. The Lord will bless your efforts and reward you for keeping the candle of faith burning brightly in your community.

Promoters of change will doubtless succeed in destroying numerous congregations before this painful conflict is over, but they should have to do their destructive work without the financial support of those they are harming (II John 9-11). Refuse to pay the executioners! JHW

"Like all his fellow change agents, Bro. G. rejects the Bible as a divinely given pattern for human conduct and for the faith, worship and practice of the church. He wants to be free to believe and worship as he wishes. He wants to be able to fashion his church in a way that pleases himself. He must deny the clear Bible instruction to "hold the pattern of sound words" given by the apostle (II Tim. 1:13; Heb. 8:5)"

5.

A LONG TRAIN OF ERROR

Some things in life are like a train. There is a powerful engine pulling a multitude of cars behind it. In religion, powerful leaders, ideas or practices bring with them numerous other doctrines or practices.

The engine pulling the train is called "The Emergent Church" Movement. When it appears, it will be towing some or all of the following practices: Taize worship (candlelight meditations), centering, labyrinths, breath prayers, Lectio Divina (meditation on a particular verse or word), Eastern mysticism, Orthodox and Roman Catholic mysticism.

Like a train emerging from a tunnel, the above items are the ones we can already see. There are other cars still to be revealed. Those who are engaged in Catholic mysticism will eventually feel the need for aids to assist them in their spiritual exercises. They will need rosary beads for prayer, crucifixes to wear about their necks and the sign of the cross. They will desire images of Christ and other spiritual heroes to bow before and adore. They will have stations of the cross to aid them in their contemplation, holy water to help them purify their thoughts, cassocks and habits to remind them of their dedication, relics and pilgrimages to fulfill their spiritual hunger. For those graduating to the more exotic Eastern mysticism there will be mantras, yoga, altered states of mind and ultimately pantheism and pantheism. The final step is the belief that through mysticism men of all religions can find God and be acceptable to Him. You might say, Oh, that will never happen! Ten years ago no one thought the concept of the Emergent Church, with its contemplative spirituality, would ever surface among our brethren. It has arrived!

If some of the more zealous, adventurous and enterprising change agents should decide to do some or all of these things, on what basis could any of their comrades object?

* They could not object that the Bible says nothing about such things. They have already decided that the silence of the Scripture is permissive, not prohibitive. They did this to justify their use of instrumental music.

* They could not argue that it is denominational. They see nothing wrong with being denominational. In fact they long to be recognized as denominational.

* They cannot complain that it might lead to New Age religion, Catholicism or Paganism. They have already conceded that spiritual rewards can be received from using these practices regardless of their origin.

* They cannot reason that such conduct would be unbecoming to those professing to be New Testament Christians. They long ago cast aside that claim, insisting that they could draw from the Old Testament and other meaningful sources or their worship.

* They cannot say that to do so would be surrendering to culture. They have argued that the church must embrace the culture in which it finds itself in order to survive.

* They cannot say it would hurt the church. They have already inflicted many painful wounds on the body of Christ without shame or regret. A few more blows would be of no consequence to them.

* They cannot condemn those who might go to such extremes. Being thoroughgoing Postmoderns, they cannot bring themselves to pass judgement on the beliefs and practices of one of their own.

Remember the engine pulling the many and varied cars is the Emergent Church Movement. It is wide spread in Evangelical circles and is already being promoted by our change agents. JHW

"It is possible for a person to slowly drift into a dangerous spiritual situation and not even be aware of his condition, just as bad health slowly creeps up on a person. Those who observe the person can see his decline before he does. It appears from your writings, my friend, that you have drifted far from your roots among those whose goal is to understand and practice simple New Testament Christianity."

6.

SOUND THE TRUMPET, ARM YOURSELF FOR BATTLE

Whoever you are, wherever you may be, you need to act now on behalf of the truth of God and his precious church. The church is besieged by a determined band of rebels in her midst. If left unchallenged they will destroy the church by imposing their unauthorized changes in her faith and worship. Every Christian, young or old, male or female, has a duty to rise up in defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:16). Below are some things that need to be done. While not every Christian can do all of them, all of us can do some of them. The key thing is to do something!

- * If you are a preacher, preach a series of sermons on the church, her faith, her worship, her uniqueness. Preach on the importance of faithfulness to the biblical standard.
- * Write articles on these themes for your church bulletin. You might glean them from other sources. The point is, use your bulletin to educate and indoctrinate your brethren.
- * Devote a quarter of your Bible Classes to the necessity of Bible authority, New Testament worship and the church of the Bible. Have classes on the concept and importance of restoring the original faith and worship of the church.
- * Write and publish tracts, a booklet or even a book addressing the challenges now facing the church.
- * Every Christian can copy and distribute well-done lessons on timely issues and distribute them to your elders, deacons and teachers. Have one a week to give each family that attends worship with you.
- * Forward pertinent email lessons on these themes to every Christian in your circle of contacts.
- * Read books that will inform and arm you against this destructive change movement. You cannot effectively combat that which you do not understand.
- * Purchase timely books for your church library and inform your brethren they are available. Supply copies to your preachers, youth minister, campus minister and elders. Especially provide copies to young men preparing themselves to preach or who are just getting started in their career.
- * Send pertinent books to missionaries with whom you are acquainted.
- * Speak up in her defense when you hear people, criticize, denigrate or disparage the Lord's church.
- * Lend neither help nor encouragement to those who are promoting this destructive change agenda. Do not support them with a single dime.
- * Help us provide complimentary copies of our books dealing with the change movement to school libraries in mission fields and to preachers in foreign lands.
- * Speak to your elders and preacher expressing your concerns and urging them to be strong in the faith. Urge them to address this matter in their teaching lest the congregation suffer harm.
- * Complement your preacher, teachers and elders when they do speak up in defense of the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).
- * Be alert to challenge the first efforts of those who would try to change the faith, worship and practice of your congregation.
- * Lift up fervent prayers for the Lord's church and her members here and around the world, that God would protect her from her enemies.
- * Speak, write and make phone calls expressing your appreciation and encouragement to all faithful servants of God who are holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:15-16) in this day of departures.

This is no time for hand-wringing and idle talk. It is the day of battle. Let every disciple arm himself and take his place in the battle line. This war is real. The goal of the enemy is the capture of the Church of Christ, and change her from being Christ's one true church into a worthless denomination. One job is to make sure they do not succeed in their evil intentions. Christ is counting on you to serve him well. Fight bravely for the spiritual welfare of your children and grandchildren and generations yet unborn. JHW

"We cannot live on probabilities. The faith in which we can live bravely and die in peace must be a certainty, so far as it professes to be a faith at all, or it is nothing" (Froude).

WHENCE CAME THE WORSHIP TEAM?

In churches committed to the change agenda, you will usually find a “worship team.” Our wandering brethren sometimes called these “praise teams.” Perhaps you, like me, have wondered, where did such ideas originate? In reading the book, **Pagan Christianity** by Frank Viola and George Barna, I found the following information regarding the origins of the worship team. He opens his discussion by noting :

- * “In many contemporary churches . . . the choir has been replaced by the worship team” (p. 164).
- * He continues, “The standard worship team includes an amplified guitar, drums, keyboard, possibly a bass guitar and some special vocalists” (**Ibid**).
- * “Words are usually projected onto a screen . . . There are rarely songbooks or hymnals” (**Ibid**).
- * “The worship team will . . . lead a lively, hand-clapping, body-swaying, hand-raising, (sometimes dancing) congregation . . . Typically the focus of the songs is on individual spiritual experience. First person singular pronouns –I, me, my–dominate a good number of the songs” (p. 164-165).
- * “The revolution (in Christian music) came when rock and roll was adapted into Christian music with the coming of the Jesus movement. This reform set the stage for the revolutionary musical changes to take root in the Christian church . . .” (**Ibid.**).
- * “The origin of the worship team goes back to the founding of Calvary Chapel in 1965. Chuck Smith, the founder of the denomination, started a ministry for hippies and surfers. Smith welcomed the newly converted hippies to re-tune their guitars and play their now redeemed music in church” (**Ibid**).
- * “Since the advent of contemporary Christian music, the ‘worship wars’ have begun constituting a divisive force that has balkanized the Christian church into ‘old styled-traditional-music’ lovers vs. ‘new-styled-contemporary’ music lovers. Not a few churches have been splintered right down the middle over what form of music is to be used during the church service” (**Ibid. ft. note**)
- * “The Vineyard (a contemporary charismatic denomination) . . . followed suit with the worship team . . . Since that time, the Vineyard has probably had more influence on establishing worship teams and worship music . . .”
- * “In due time the guitar replaced the organ as the central instrument that led worship in the Protestant church. Although patterned after the rock concert of secular culture, the worship team has become as common as the pulpit” (p. 166).

We recognize that not all congregations that have introduced praise teams have the instrumental band. Some however do. You should understand that those preachers and elders who have introduced worship teams into their worship did not discover them “after a long and prayerful study of the Bible.” They have borrowed them from various denominational sources, hoping to have the same kind of enthusiasm and growth they have observed in their mega churches. The wish to have something new and different preceded the implementation of worship teams and other new aspects of the progressive churches. Concern about the scripturalness of such things or the harm they might cause the church are of little concern.

We understand that the problem is not in having a committee or group of brethren to plan the worship service, nor is it in having more than one song leader before the congregation. The problem arises when such innovations are used as wedges to open the door for the use of instruments of music in worship (Eph. 5:19), to put Christian women in leadership roles in the worship (I Tim. 2:11-12), or other changes that do violate the sacred standard of Scripture (II John 9-11). The danger is seen when confusion and division occur (Rom. 16:18). By then, the damage is done and the church has suffered great harm. Think of it this way. Say for 10 years you had taken the same medicine for your high blood pressure and it had worked well. You go to a new young doctor and he insists that you need to change to a new kind of medicine. Against your better judgment, you take the medicine and become desperately ill. Thankfully you survive, although some did not. The young doctor was sure his prescription for a new medication would work wonders. In fact your old medicine was fully adequate for your needs. The new was a near disaster. So it is proving to be where the change agents insist on implementing their agenda in congregations that had done well prior to their coming. JHW

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8.

WISE MEN SPEAK SOUND WORDS

A distinguishing feature of our humanity is our ability to communicate. To do that our principal instrument is words. Paul urges us to use “sound” or healthy words when we teach God’s Word. To Titus he wrote, use “sound speech that cannot be condemned” (Tit. 2:8). Timothy was urged to “hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me . . .” (II Tim. 1:13). When a teacher uses wrong words, or those with dubious meanings, they can cause confusion or mislead the hearers. Peter encourages those who speak the gospel message to speak as the oracles of God (I Pet. 4:11).

With these divine exhortations in mind, our fathers in the faith shunned the confusing jargon of denominationalism that was current in their day. They resolved to “call Bible things by Bible names.” We would do well to continue this practice. Clarity in communication is essential if we hope to teach and influence others. Paul made it clear that it was better to speak five words with understanding that others can be instructed than ten thousand words unrecognized by our audience (I Cor. 14:19). Below are a few of the common terms and phrases that are often misused

* **Pastor.** This is the common term to identify preachers. In spiritual application the Bible only uses the word in when referring to elders (Eph. 4:11, I Pet. 5:1-2). Those who preach, the Scripture identifies as preachers, evangelists, ministers and men of God. We should note that distinction. Elders are overseers of the church; preachers are not.

* **Father.** This is used by Catholic and Orthodox believers to refer to their ministers. The Bible strictly forbids its use for religious teachers (Matt. 23:9).

* **Reverend.** This honorific title is given to and accepted by most religious leaders of the denominational world. We note that neither Jesus nor the apostles wore such exalted titles. We are to follow their examples (I Pet. 2:21; I Cor. 11:1). The Jews had a similar practice, calling their teachers Rab, Rabbi and Rabboni. Jesus said “be not ye called Rabbi” (Matt. 23:8). He goes on to explain, for “all ye are brethren.” Thus, we refer to each other as brother or sister.

* **Priest.** Catholics are taught to speak of their ministers as their “priests.” Only clergy are given this standing. But the Bible makes it clear that every Christian is a member of God’s “holy priesthood” (I Pet. 2:5, 9). There is no distinction between those who teach and those who are taught.

* **Clergy.** The world views all who devote themselves wholly to leadership roles in churches as clergy. The word is not found in our English Bibles. The Greek word *kleros* is used by Paul in Ephesians 1:11. It is translated “a heritage.” It refers to all Christians.

* **Called to preach.** All denominational bodies believe that to preach, a man must receive a special call from God instructing him to do so. This alleged call puts him in a separate class called clergy and he is considered reverend. Every Christian is “called to Christ” through the teaching of the gospel (II Thess. 2:14). Thus every man who preaches was called to be a Christian, just like every other Christian. The Bible does not indicate that God issues a supernatural call to individuals for preaching. This practice is much abused and those who think such a call is necessary are often tempted to invent exaggerated stories of their alleged call. Some men are born with speaking and leadership talents. God provides opportunities for them to use them. Churches invite them to serve them. But there is nothing supernatural about it.

* **Sacrament.** This term is used by Catholics to describe seven fundamental items of their faith, including marriage and the mass. The Bible does not use the term. Many Protestants use it to refer to the Lord’s Supper. Scripture describes the purposes of communion as a remembrance of Christ’s suffering and a proclamation of his death (I Cor. 11:26), but not as a sacrament.

* **Eucharist.** This term means thanksgiving or graces and is used by Catholics and many liberal Protestant churches to describe the Lord’s Supper. The term is not used in Scripture. We prefer to refer to the Lord’s Supper or communion in Biblical terms (I Cor. 11:20; 10:16).

* **Baptized in the Holy Spirit.** The apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) and so were Cornelius and his family (Acts 11:14, 17). The rest of us received the gift of the Holy Spirit when we were baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38). This gift does not empower us to work miracles. To say that we are baptized in the Spirit suggests that we should then be able to speak in tongues and prophecy, etc. Such is not the case.

* **Church.** Biblically, this term refers to God’s saved people, never to a building where the church assembles (Acts 8:1). Many denominational folks think their church building is holy. Better to refer to the building as “our meeting place” or “place of worship, etc.”

Every man who aspires to preach should concentrate on using sound, biblical terminology. Avoid the language of the denominations and the technical language of the seminary. Your lessons will be understood. People will profit therefrom. They will hold you in highest esteem as a good, faithful and effective teacher of God's truth. JHW

9.

SMALL GROUPS MEETING IN HOMES

A common practice of congregations in transition to a new way of "doing church" is to discontinue their evening assemblies while encouraging their members to meet with small groups in private homes. (By the way the "doing church" and "transitioning" phrases describe congregations evolving away from the New Testament pattern (II Tim. 1:13) toward one borrowed from some denominational teacher or movement). The small group meetings are promoted as a way to promote intimacy, fellowship and involvement . . . all of which are worthy goals.

Many conservative brethren, sensing some devious, unannounced motive in such activities, have strongly opposed them. We need to regularly remind ourselves that Christian leaders need the wisdom of discernment (Ezek. 44:23), lest they oppose that which is good or endorse what is bad. Also they need to be able to recognize that which may be innocuous in itself but can become wrong by abuse. The abuse we must oppose, but the innocuous deed we must tolerate.

To properly discern this matter we must have a clear vision of the role of the church building and homes in the development of our faith.

* For the first two centuries congregations met in private homes (Phile. 2), public buildings such as schools (Acts 19:9) and in times of persecution in caves, forest glades or other desolate places.

* Only with the ascension of Constantine as Emperor of Rome (312 A.D.) were they able to have their own public houses of worship. While Scripture precedent allows us to have our own houses of worship, it does not mandate them.

* Many of our existing congregations began in the home of some member and there they were nurtured until they were large enough and financially able to have their own meeting place.

* While the Bible clearly teaches us to assemble (Heb. 10:25) on the first day of the week to break the bread of communion (Acts 20:7), it does not instruct us to have multiple services each week. That we normally do so is not wrong. It is a choice made to encourage spiritual growth, fellowship and opportunities for learning. Thus if a congregation should choose to assemble together only once on the Lord's Day they have fulfilled their duty and we should be not critical of them for it. (In many mission fields such is common). If their elders encourage their members to meet in small groups they have violated no Scripture in so doing.

However, those who are skeptical of those calling for "small group meetings" have some basis for their concern! Experience is a powerful teacher. We saw the apostles of the "Crossroads, later called the Boston Movement," gain their foothold in congregations by separating their young disciples from the older members and especially from older, wiser leaders in order to instill their heretical views in their young minds. They were very successful in using this method. Charismatics who sought to gain a place among us did the same thing. For the last 20 years, those promoting their agenda of change have used this method with great skill and success. Thus, while we would not condemn the practice absolutely, we would encourage brethren to be careful and cautious when such a proposal is made. We are reminded that a thing can be wrong either by its use or its abuse. It is not the use of home Bible studies or devotions that we question, but the abuse of them by false teachers with evil intentions.

When change agents seek to implement small group meetings in homes we are certainly entitled to ask "And what do you propose to do in those meetings?" If they sing hymns, pray and study the Bible to learn and do God's will, no one should object. If afterwards they have refreshments and visit, no one cares. But if the home meetings are used to promote erroneous teachings (I Tim. 1:3), if they are used to undermine the conservative leadership of the congregation (Heb. 13:17), if they are occasions for sowing discord among brethren (Prov. 6:19), they are wrong. If they are used to allow women to lead the mixed group in prayer, or to teach the class, they are wrong (I Tim. 2:8-12). If in them instruments are used to accompany praise to God (Eph. 5:19; Rev. 22:18-19), they are wrong. If in them the Lord's

Supper is mixed with a common meal or observed in a disrespectful manner, they are wrong (I Cor. 11:17-22)! Some or all of these things are sometimes encouraged by promoters of change

If elders decide that home meetings will be good for their flock, they need to see that each group is overseen by one of the elders, or some other brother, well-rooted in sound doctrine (Tit. 1:9). To do less is folly. To exercise the oversight (I Pet. 5:2) means they should know and approve of the materials to be studied and the men chosen to lead the groups. Not to do so is to open the door for either irresponsible conduct by immature disciples or intentional harm by men whose goal is to capture the congregation and impose their own agenda upon it. Let each of us pray for discernment! JHW

10.

THE PROGRESS OF KNOWLEDGE

The search for and acquisition of knowledge is a never-ending quest. It was several thousand years before we determined such fundamental things as the rotundity of the earth, that the sun was the center of our universe, that our earth orbits the sun and spins on its axis and hundreds of other basic laws of nature and the universe. Every year new discoveries are made as the search for knowledge goes onward. We are often reminded that more was learned about life and the universe in the last century than in all those preceding. Our children learn more than we learned thirty or forty years ago, because the total sum of available knowledge has increased and many faulty assumptions of the past have been discovered and rejected. We do not fault our grand parents because they did not understand such things as space travel or atomic particles. They were intelligent and well informed for their day, given the knowledge available to them and the opportunities they had to learn.

The same lesson applies to our forefathers in the faith. As our change agents try to establish themselves a scholars and leaders of our people, they devote much time and energy trying to discredit our past leaders. Few of them, they note, had advanced academic degrees while many of our agents of change have their doctorates from the finest secular universities. They delight in pointing to views held by early generations of leaders that we no longer accept. They love to talk of Alexander Campbell's post millennialism and the premillennial views of David Lipscomb and James A. Harding. All of them love to cite Alexander Campbell's letter to the lady from Lunenburg, Virginia wherein he seemed to concede that the pious unimmersed were in good standing with God. He later revised his answer, which they rarely discuss.

The unstated goals of the change agents are as follows:

- * To discredit those great leaders of the past so they can supplant them as the thought leaders of our brethren.
- * By showcasing their misconceptions about their millennial theories, they hope to defeat our objections to their extending fellowship to those who today embrace and promote millennial speculations. This would include the "Premillennial Churches of Christ," Christian Churches and most Evangelicals bodies.
- * By bringing up Campbell's Lunenburg Letters, they seek to disarm those who are not willing to extend fellowship to Evangelical Protestants who preach salvation by grace alone and faith alone. Change agents are eager to do this.
- * To discredit the very concept of "restoration" as a misguided dream of primitive frontiersmen.

That those past brethren did not see everything as we do is really to be expected. The Bible remains the same, but our knowledge of it is continually expanding. Questions that were not burning issues in the 19th century exploded on the scene in the 20th century. Premillennialism was one of those issues. Others included theistic evolution, and the boundaries of fellowship.

We should not think less of brethren who never had occasion to study these matters as we have been forced to do. We should not fault them because they knew less than we know on some matters. We can see farther than them because we stand on their shoulders. Our path is easier because they labored long and hard to clear the way through the wilderness of theological ignorance and error.

Godly men, yet to be born, will know more about some issues than we do today. They will have the benefit of our research and attainments. They will have more and better tools than we have. Hopefully they will have more thorough training.

Godly men will not scorn devout men of the past. To do so reeks of arrogance and ingratitude. They will honor them and bestow credit on them for a job well done. Our fathers did not exhaust the well or knowledge nor shall we. JHW

11.

IMAGINE

Several years ago John Lennon recorded a song entitled "Imagine." His fame made it an instant hit. The song was a call for a secular/socialist revolution. Imagine no country, no god...closing with "I hope some day you'll join us...then the world will be one..." This article has nothing to do with that song, except to challenge members of Churches of Christ to imagine what they might well have to face and deal with in coming years.

Without dispute, a revolution is underway within our brotherhood. Because of their clamor for changes in the faith, worship and practice of the church they have earned the cognomen of "change agents" and their program, "the change movement." In the last quarter of the 19th century an identical moment occurred among our people with disastrous results. We lost some 85 percent of our members and churches when the Disciples of Christ and Christian Churches separated from us to follow their own agenda. The promoters of change are numerous. They hold positions of power and influence in our Christian schools and large churches. Already scores of our congregations have fallen to their agents. Our past experience and a keen awareness of what is daily transpiring among us makes it evident that the following kinds of situations will face many of our people in the near future. A wise soul will not assume such could never happen where he or she worships.

- * You will hear your young, or new preacher teaching things foreign to the Bible and repulsive to the convictions of your heart.
- * You will hear of activities within your youth group that surprise you. For example they may be using instrumental music in their worship.
- * Your complaints and protests will go unheeded.
- * As the situation develops you will discover that a sizeable and influential group in your congregation have decided to change the direction of the church.
- * If you continue your objections you will be rebuked and labeled a troublemaker.
- * Your options will be two: you can quietly conform or leave.
- * The handful who still wish to follow the simple way Christ has given in the New Testament will resolve to leave.
- * There may be no other faithful congregation left near you. So you have to start from scratch. You will have to meet in a home, or a rented facility as you try to rebuild.
- * The building you helped to build or pay for will be taken by those who now are the majority. The congregation will evolve into a full-fledged denominational church.
- * There will be few if any Christian Schools left for your children or grandchildren to attend. Of course the schools will still be there, but like your congregation, they will be in the hands of folks who hold, preach and practice a different doctrine that you learned and held all of your life in Christ.
- * The mission outposts that your contributions helped to plant and sustain will most likely be infiltrated and captured by the promoters of change. They always go for mission points . . . and are presently doing so.
- * You may have the bitter experience of seeing your family divided because of these issues. You may be so committed to Christ that you cannot and will not compromise with egregious error. Yet you may find that your mate no longer shares your views. Your mate may prefer to stay with his/her old friends and the entertaining preacher. The same may be true of your children or grandchildren.
- * If you choose to stay you will eventually be entertained by soloists or a choir for worship. Your ears will hear the sound of music made on mechanical instruments filling your auditorium. You will eventually see women filling leadership roles in your congregation. You will see denominational pastors invited to stand in your pulpit and teach

their message.

You will be frustrated, angry and heartbroken, but it will be too late at that point. Your congregation and perhaps a large portion of our brotherhood will have been swept away into apostasy. If such seems incredible to you, you have only to read our past history and then open your eyes to what the promoters of change are saying and doing today. If such angers you, then you need to join hands with us and help us work to block the spread of this heresy. To do nothing is to ensure their victory and our loss. Write or call us and learn what you can do to help. JHW

12.

EXCLUSIVISM IN RELIGION

Like their denominational brothers, the intellectuals of the change movement find it incredible that God would have only one true church when there are more than 2,500 different kinds of churches on the earth, all of them devoted to worshipping him and honoring his Son. When we present the case for one church and substantiate it with Scripture such as Ephesians 4:4 and I Corinthians 12:12, they resort to ridicule and sarcasm. We hear such lines as

“Do you really think that God would turn a deaf ear to millions of his worshipers just because they are not in our church?”

“It is so narrow, arrogant and sectarian to think we are God’s only church.”

“Do you know how foolish it looks to the world for you to claim that there is only one way to worship and serve God?”

“Why, such a claim puts you out of the mainstream of historic Christianity.”

Reflecting the postmodern world view, such folks find it impossible to pass judgment on those who choose to have their own churches that please them. They are blindly committed to pluralism which assigns equal value to all churches. They are not concerned with obedience to the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), they prefer to value things subjectively. If disciples of a given denomination are sincere in their efforts, that trumps doctrinal disobedience. Success in recruiting numbers is impressive to them.

These brethren, led by a small band of theologians from the advanced planet of Seminary, have decided that churches of Christ are but a narrow sect, with an obsolete, parochial outlook, better suited for the primitive frontier than for the 21st century. They wink and raise their eyebrows at our interpretation and application of scripture. They smile at the verses we offer for proof of our convictions. They discard the sermons and books of all who not have credentials equal to theirs. Rather than cite Scripture to prove or disprove a matter, they prefer to display their degrees or to quote some denominational scholar. They treat their brethren in Christ like the egoistic college sophomore might treat his rural cousins.

Their sarcastic remarks about our exclusive position tells more than they intended. It demonstrates that they know little about the history of Jehovah’s dealings with humanity. To secure man’s redemption, Jehovah chose one man (Abraham) of all the men on the earth. He wandered as a landless bedouin in a strange land. It was through him alone that all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12: 1, 4). Of Abraham’s several sons, God selected only one, Isaac, through whom he would work. Later, of the many nations in existence at the time, the Lord selected only one to be his covenant nation. He picked the Hebrews, a poor people enslaved by the rulers of Egypt. As the world saw it they had nothing to commend them at the time of their choosing, but they were God’s chosen people. He worked mightily in and through them to accomplish his plan and purpose in the earth. Later the Lord said, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos. 3:2). There were other nations more numerous, more ancient and with greater resources and renown, but the Sovereign God selected only one.

When he gave the Hebrews the Constitution and Law that would govern them He decreed that only the sons of Aaron the Levite would be allowed to serve as priests (Num. 18:1) and only the lineal descendants of Aaron would be eligible to serve as high-priest. No doubt there were many good and godly men among the thousands of Israel, but God excluded them from the priesthood.

When, after forty years of refining and preparation, Jehovah brought the nation into Canaan, he straitly warned them not to make alliances with or to intermarry with the Canaanite nations (Ex. 34:12-16). In her faithful days, Israel stood alone as God's covenant people. Rather than seek detent with the religions of their neighbors, they were at war with the religions of Baal, Chemosh, Astarte and Milcom. Throughout their history, when the Hebrews sought peace with the idolatry that surrounding them, their religion was corrupted and they suffered harm and divine displeasure.

Paul wrote that these things were our examples (I Cor. 10:11) and they were written for our admonition. They were written for our learning, (Rom. 15:4). To think that Jesus established only one church (Matt. 16:18) and that he expects all who wish to be saved to be in that church is throughly biblical. It is a continuation of the way God has worked for the salvation of mankind from ancient times. To be willing to stand alone with and for God is neither arrogant nor sectarian. It is called faithfulness (Luke 16:10). Only the faithful are promised the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). JHW

13.

THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

From the New Testament we learn not only that early Christians worshiped God, but we are told what they did in their worship. On the Lord's Day they assembled to partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). Unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine were taken in memory of the body and blood of Jesus, in his death on Calvary (Matt. 26:26-29). Through Christ, they offered up the fruit of their lips as a sacrifice of praise to God (Heb. 13:15). This, of course, was in their prayers and hymns. They sang and made melody in their hearts unto God (Eph. 5:19). They presented their freewill offerings to the Lord (I Cor. 16:1-2). The teaching of God's Word was an important aspect of their worship (Acts 20:7).

Justin Martyr was born in Samaria about 100 AD. In 132 he became a follower of Christ. In ca.152 he wrote, describing the worship of the church of his day. "...on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president (the one presiding, jhw) verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought (the strong wine was diluted according to Jewish custom, jhw), and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, though sickness or any other cause, are in want...But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead" (**First Apology** chapter 67). In his **Questions and Answers to the Orthodox**, Justin writes, "Simply singing is not agreeable to children, but singing with lifeless instruments and with dancing and clapping; on which account the use of this kind of instruments and of others agreeable to children is removed from the songs in the churches, and there is left simply singing," (**Question 107**).

Then came the apostasy predicted by Paul (I Tim. 4:1-3; II Thess. 2:1-9). Every aspect of faith and worship was corrupted over the thousand years of Catholicism's dominance. Courageous Protestants challenged Rome's authority in the 14th century and attempted to reform the faith and worship of the church of their day.

Here in America, Alexander Campbell, along with his father, Thomas, launched a "Back to the Bible" movement to restore the original aspects of Christianity. Sometime prior to 1835 young Campbell visited a small congregation of Christians in rural Virginia. In his memorandum book he noted the following things about their worship. After greeting each other in a familiar and cordial manner, they began with the hymn, Christ the Lord is Risen Today. Then a brother read the history of the crucifixion of Messiah. A brother was then called upon to pray. The congregation pronounced the final Amen. A brother then arose and read a passage from the Epistles. They then sang a hymn in preparation for the Lord's Supper. The brother presiding reminded the assembly of why they observed this memorial supper and then

offered thanks and distributed the elements to each member. After another brief hymn, a brother offered a prayer before and for a contribution was collected for the poor and the preaching of the gospel. After a few more readings and hymns they concluded the meeting with a benediction. (Alexander Campbell. **The Christian System** (pp. 290-292), Standard Pub. Co. Cincinnati, no date).

In 1956 the author confessed Christ and was united with him in baptism at the Woodbine Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee. On Sunday mornings we assembled for Bible study and worship. We usually sang two songs, had a prayer and then engaged in some 45 minutes of Bible Study. After a brief intermission, we took our places for worship. Bro. Aubrey Yearwood led us in hymns. There was a scripture reading and prayer. Bro. Parker French delivered a lesson from the Bible, followed by an invitation for any who needed prayer or who wished to confess their faith and be baptized. We then sang a hymn in preparation for the Lord's Supper. The brethren expressed prayers for the bread and the fruit of the vine and served us. Our gifts were given. With a closing prayer we were dismissed. It was not uncommon for there to be responses to the invitation hymn. Christians confessing sins were prayed for and penitent sinners who confessed Christ were baptized.

For some 2000 years churches of Christ have worshiped this way. There are no valid reasons for changes in the content of our worship. It is thoroughly biblical, practical and easily implemented in any age or society. Those who love the Lord are happy and content to worship him now as did their predecessors in the faith 50, 170, or 2000 years ago. JHW

14.

A MOVEMENT BASED ON A DREAM

Our nation was created and developed by men who had a dream. The American dream said, Give people personal and economic freedom and they will make the effort and sacrifice necessary to succeed and achieve prosperity and happiness.

The pioneers who launched our back to the Bible movement were all motivated by a dream. They desired to be disciples of Christ working for and worshiping the Master just as did that first generation of saints in Jerusalem. They called their dream a movement to Restore of New Testament Christianity.

As long as we can keep the dream alive, passing it from generation to generation, our movement will flourish. But should the day come that a generation allows the dream to die, to be distorted or replaced by a different kind of dream, our movement will wither and die.

To keep our dream alive, we need to talk about it and share it with those around us. It needs to be the frequent topic of sermons and class discussions. We need wise men who understand the dream and believe in it, to write books and articles that set forth the dream and advocate its principles.

When we evangelize our neighbors, after they have come to faith in Christ (Heb. 11:6), we must show them that to enter his kingdom they need to do just what the first converts did (John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38). As Christians they will want to believe, worship and serve just as the earliest saints did.

Congregational leaders need to schedule special workshops or lectures on the Dream. The names of our pioneers should remain fresh in the hearts of our people and the thrilling story of their victories should be recounted over again lest they be forgotten. We owe a great deal to those who blazed the trail for us. We should never forget the names of Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, Racoon John Smith, Jacob Creath, Jr. Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb, James A. Harding, Benjamin Franklin, H. Leo Boles and scores of other faithful soldiers of Christ whose sacrificial labors benefit us today.

A great boost to maintaining the dream is a visit to the historic sites associated with the early years of our movement. Tours can include the home of Alexander Campbell, the Campbell Cemetery, Bethany College and Barton Stone's Cane Ridge Meeting House, the Old Mulkey Meeting Place, David Lipscomb's home, the old City Cemetery at Lexington, KY and Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Nashville. At these cemeteries one can find the monuments of a multitude of noble men. The Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville houses a treasure trove of portraits and possessions of those early leaders.

A vast collection of biographies and histories of our brethren has been written over the years. Some of these are yet in print. Others are available in the libraries of Christian Schools. Fortunately, many of these studies are now available on the Internet.

Never be ashamed of our Dream. Do not let any false teacher persuade you that the dream is dead, or that it is flawed.

We worship and serve the Lord Jesus. We honor and respect those brethren who went before us. To have a true church of Christ we look to the Bible for directions. Our method is to conform ourselves and our congregations to what we find there (II Tim. 1:13). It is our duty to keep the dream alive and pass it to our children and grandchildren. Will the dream survive you? JHW

15

“CHRIST, EVER CRUCIFIED BETWEEN TWO THIEVES”

The unknown man who spoke these words, of course, spoke metaphorically. Just as Christ in the flesh was crucified between the two malefactors (Luke 23:33), so the body of Christ, his church is forever torn by two false systems, each striving to impose its mistaken views on the church. On the left is liberalism and on the right legalism. Each one does its evil work by stealing from Christ the hearts of those disciples they can deceive. Liberals throw open the gates of Christ's kingdom to the world and cast down rules and regulations the Lord instituted. Legalist try to shut the gates of the kingdom to those entitled to enter and cast out those who will not yield to their demands.

We see this truth vividly displayed in the history of the Churches of Christ of the Restoration Movement. In the last half of the 19th century liberal progressives turned their backs on the commitment to restore the church to her primitive purity. They swept some 85 % of the brethren and churches into that now known as the Disciples of Christ and Christian Churches. Their degeneration continues to this day. They dared to tamper with the doctrine, worship, the polity and the very nature of the church, changing anything they wished to their liking.

Liberalism is:

- * A lack of respect for the complete and final authority of the Word of God which Jesus said will judge us in the last day (John 12:48).
- * It is a rejection of what the Bible claims for itself. God calls his book, a “pattern of sound words” (II Tim. 1:13). Liberals vehemently deny this truth.
- * It is a lack of love and respect for the church as the sacred body of Christ (Eph. 1:21-22; 5:23-25) It is a willingness to take liberties with the sacred things of God. It holds no honor for the doctrines with which Christ adorned his bride.
- * It is a spirit that despises its brethren and that disparages great Christian leaders of the past. It treats with contempt those disciples who do not share their elitist views.
- * It is a desire to be something other than simple New Testament Christians.
- * It is a longing to be like the world, to find acceptance with denominational scholars, schools and leaders. It embarrassed by the exclusiveness of the Master's teaching (I John 2:15).
- * It is a willingness to exalt ones own opinions, ideas and feelings above the sacred Word of Christ.
- * It is a spirit of deception; pretending to be faithful members of the church of Christ, when in the secret recesses of their hearts they know such is not the case (II Tim. 3:13).

* Rather than strengthening Christians and building up the church, liberalism erodes faith and undermines the church.

Legalism:

* Legalism is the attitude that one can or must merit his own good standing before God by observance of legal regulations and good works (Rom. 3:20).

* Legalism is the imposition of humanly devised rules; multiplying requirements more than the situation warrants, thus causing people to lose sight of the more important principles of the faith (I Tim. 4:3).

* Legalism springs from a selfish heart that would force others to conform to self rather than tolerate them. It cannot imagine allowing others to follow their own ways and work out their own method of serving God, even in inconsequential matters (Phil. 2:12).

* Paul argues that the mark of a true disciple is to seek for and cling to the spirit or intent of God's message and not just the letter (II Cor. 3:6).

* God expects more than simple observance of ritual and negative restraint. He wants growth and fruit-bearing if we would be mature disciples (Eph. 4:15; John 15:16).

* The fact that Paul cites rules and prohibitions for Christians proves that legalism is more than having or keeping rules (Gal. 6:2).

* There is a lingering legalism hiding in the heart of most Christians. Of this we must always be on guard.

* There is a tendency in men and churches to wither away in lifeless ritual and works of human merit. This is often accompanied by fanatic loyalty to one's party and obsession with clichés and slogans.

Churches of Christ recovered from the damage liberalism did a century past but have had an endless struggle with legalists of various stripes who continually have torn at her garments, splintering away small groups of brethren over restrictive practices they have created. Today liberalism has reasserted itself and now we fight a struggle with attacks on both the right and the left. JHW

16.

DESIRE IS OFTEN THE MOTHER OF THE NEW INTERPRETATION

All have heard the old saying, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Its truthfulness is demonstrated daily. There is a religious variation of this proverb. "Desire is often the mother of new interpretations."

Our Protestant neighbors greatly desire salvation without baptism. Faced with the several verses that clearly link salvation and baptism, what can they do? They ignore them. They cite all the verses that link faith with salvation and pronounce that the Bible teaches salvation by faith alone. Some desire to have their infants baptized. Finding nothing in the New Testament about infant baptism, they discover the Hebrew ordinance for circumcising baby boys. Noting that the surgery made them members of the covenant nation, they conclude the New Testament must teach infant baptism. Then they discover that Lydia was baptized and all that were in her household (Acts 16:15) and voila they assume that means babies were baptized. They are free to proceed as they wished.

There was a time when any man who preached among churches of Christ understood this and exposed those who used this faulty method for their distortion of God's Word. Now a generation of exegetes have arisen among us who, because of faulty training, are using this same discredited method to achieve the approval they seek for their doctrine, worship and congregational activities. They need authority for such things as women in church leadership roles, instrumental music, infant dedication, interpretative dancing in worship and similar practices. These things they desire to have, but no authority is found for them in the New Testament of Christ. Refusing to accept that as the final word (Matt. 28:20), they search the Old Testament and find just what they are looking for. But there stands Colossians 2:14 as an impediment to their desires. Paul says that Christ blotted out "the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross... Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in a new moon or a sabbath day...." (2:14-16). Not to be deterred, they reinterpret the passage to mean

that Christ merely took away our condemnation, nailing it to the cross. Now they can claim those verses from the Hebrew Scriptures and offer them as justification for their innovations.

The desire to be free to add anything they wish to the worship of the church drives them to deny the oft repeated principle that God's silence is prohibitive. It is respect for that principle that caused our brethren to reject instrumental music, choirs, solos, communion on other days than the first day and a host of other practices of denominational bodies. Positively stated, we must "not go beyond that which is written" (I Cor. 4:6 ASV). The example is seen in Hebrews 7: 13-14. There, the writer notes that since the priesthood was reserved to Aaron's sons, of the tribe of Levi, and since Moses said nothing about men of Judah serving as priests, there had to be a change of the law before Christ could be our High Priest. Other citations commonly given are the cases of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-4) and Noah's instructions for building the ark (Gen. 6:14-17). We now see our promoters of change laboring long and hard to find a new way to interpret God's Word that will eliminate the idea of a law of prohibitive silence.

Wishing to preach new and different doctrines and yet remain among Churches of Christ, change agents labor to find a new meaning to II John 9 which says, "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God..." After much hard labor they bring forth a new interpretation, "Behold, it means the teaching about the divinity of Christ." Now they can teach and do as they wish and this verse cannot be used to reprove them.

To escape the binding authority of the New Testament of Christ, these brethren have employed their exegetical skills and concluded that the New Testament is not the law of Christ. It is a love letter from the husband to his bride. The epistles are friendly letters to churches, but not to be considered as of binding authority. It is hard to do, but their system allows them to neutralize those many verses that speak of the law of Christ (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:3; Jas. 1:25; I John 3:4, etc.).

Desiring to be accepted by their local ministerial alliance and their Evangelical theological peers, these brothers have had to reinterpret the role of baptism in salvation. Since our religious neighbors flatly reject the idea that baptism is necessary to salvation and since they tend to scorn those who think it is necessary, the masters of creative hermeneutics have restudied the matter and concluded that baptism is a declaration or testimony of one's salvation. So much for Acts 2:38 and 22:16.

Thus is fulfilled the ancient saying, "Desire is mother of the new interpretation." JHW

17.

COME LET US BLAME THE CHURCH

Something about liberalism tends to make its victim hypercritical of the Lord's church. Just as many liberals seem to hate America and blame her for every wrong in the world, so do our religious liberals blame the church. They see nothing commendable in her, but they can point to a hundred flaws, real or imagined.

One area where this twisted spirit is seen is in the discussion of **why the Church of Christ is not growing as she was 50 years ago**. The liberal is sure the fault is all hers. As a friend of the church I acknowledge her shortcomings but I can also see a number of other reasons for her decline in growth.

* The world in which we now live is vastly different from that of half a century ago.

* **Prosperity and affluence** have had a smothering influence on the lives of Christians and those about us. That has affected the church. Historically, the church has thrived best when life's struggle was harder and men were more inclined to look to God for their needs. Jesus noted that it is hard for a rich man to enter heaven (Matt. 19:23).

* The **materialism**, rampant in our society, has made our generation so happy with life on earth that they have little interest in heaven. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the sacred word in many hearts (Matt. 13:22).

* The triumph of **secularism** in the Western World has convinced millions of people that Christianity has nothing to offer them. The capture of America's public educational system and most of her higher education by this anti-Christian mind set has closed the minds of vast multitudes. When eyes and ears are closed to the gospel the number of converts declines (Matt. 13:15).

* The rise of the **Postmodern world view and philosophy** has made it far more difficult to persuade men to turn to Christ and his church. With this alien philosophy has come **subjectivism** which rejects an objective standard such as the Bible and encourages decisions made on impulse and feelings; **relativism** which teaches people that nothing is absolutely right or wrong; **individualism** which says that each person decides for himself what is right or wrong; **pluralism** that says that all belief systems are of equal value thus Christianity is not superior to Islam, etc. nor is the Church of Christ superior to the churches founded by men; **multiculturalism** which teaches that all cultures are of equal merit, hence there is nothing commendable about the Christian ethic and life-style; **hedonism** which makes personal pleasure the ultimate good. This false philosophy now dominates our culture and its effects are blighting in every way. A disciple of postmodernism has little interest in the things of Christ.

* **Political correctness** has intimidated and throttled many people. They are afraid to speak boldly to others about the merits of our Lord, his Word and his Church for fear of offending others.

* The detrimental influence of much of **television, movies and music** has corrupted the hearts and minds of millions of people leaving them jaded, blinded and unable to appreciate the claims of Christ.

* The massive influx of some **20 million immigrants**, most of whom are of Hispanic origin and generally Roman Catholic. They are not easily persuaded to abandon the religion of their homeland. They push our national population figures upward but we struggle to interest them in the Lord's church.

* There has been a broad **failure of our Christian Schools in the training of our preachers and missionaries**. While they have received a good liberal-arts education they have not generally been equipped to be good soldiers of Christ. Our "Senior Ministers and Pulpit Ministers" are rarely effective soul-winners. Being a good CEO or counselor does not necessarily equate with being a good evangelist.

* The chaos and confusion now **wreaking the church**, caused primarily by **change agents in our schools and congregations**, has diverted the attention of many brethren from the important work of evangelism to the defense of the kingdom and repairing the damage they have caused.

Yes, there are other internal reasons for our decline in growth, but the things mentioned above are real and have played a major role in our current lack of growth. Rather than blaming the church, let us work for her revival and success. After all she is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25,33)! JHW

18.

QUAIL SPRINGS CHURCH ADOPTS INSTRUMENTS FOR WORSHIP

The headline read, "**Quail Springs Church of Christ will add service with musical instruments.**" This congregation is located in Oklahoma City. In an interview with reporter, Carla Hinton (01/27/08), Quail Springs minister, Mark Henderson, answered questions and explained why he and his elders decided to introduce instrumental music into the worship for their congregation. The full article is posted at <http://newsok.com/article/3197304/?print=1>. Reading the interview, several interesting facts emerge to help us understand why the preacher and elders of a Church of Christ would want to introduce instrumental music into their worship.

I note that Bro. Henderson is the preaching minister of the congregation. It is reasonable to conclude that one reason for this major decision is the preaching and teaching he has done on the subject. That his elders went along with his desire to have instruments, reflects badly on them. They are supposed to be the older, wiser shepherds of the flock who hold to the faithful word which is according to the teaching and able to exhort in the sound doctrine (Tit. 1:9).

Bro. Henderson's defense of their decision is pathetic for a man who has been preaching some 20 years. He explains that our reason for rejecting the use of instruments is because they are without divine authorization. He acknowledges

that they are not found in the New Testament of Christ. He concedes that Churches of Christ have universally considered the use of man-made instruments of music in worship to be sinful and out of step with God and refused to fellowship those who use them.

He tells us that he and his elders made the decision to use instruments after a lengthy period of discussion, prayer and study. One must wonder if they used the New Testament of Christ as a reference point in their studies? Did they weigh Christ's command that we "observe all things whatsoever he commanded" (Matt. 28:20)? I have observed in at least two other statements by preachers and elders announcing their embrace of instrumental music that they used these identical words. I wonder who recommended the terminology to them?

We learn that this event is the result of a carefully executed incremental process. Note the progression:

- * "We, for a number of years, have treated this as a nonissue."
- * They first indicated to their members a year before that they were looking in that direction.
- * In the past they had on Saturday night an activity that they "called Worship Night...so we already had kind of a band."
- * "We've tended toward more contemporary Christian worship music."
- * From the church's website we can see they have been using a praise team in their worship.
- * "We were just developing what we have done before."
- * Their preacher prepared the members by his sermons beforehand.

The preacher reveals their primary reasons for their change. "We wanted to keep more of our people that were leaving to go to instrumental churches." Rather than teach them God's will for our praise worship, they sought to solve the problem by making theirs an instrumental church. There are many of these churches here in America. They are called Christian Churches. Their decision obviously had nothing to do with the practice being scriptural or unscriptural. It was purely a pragmatic decision. Let's do it to keep or gain members! Not a worthy motive for leaders of Christ's church.

Bro. Henderson speaks much about their freedom to use instruments if they wish to do so. Historically, false prophets have often promised their deluded disciples freedom from the boundaries and restrictions of God's law. Peter depicts them as "uttering great swelling words of vanity...promising them liberty, while they themselves are bond-servants of corruption..." (II Pet. 2:19).

The interview closed with these revealing words from Bro. Henderson, "We don't make any judgments about any other congregations about what they should or shouldn't do." This reveals the postmodern basis for their actions. This new secular philosophy refuses to pass judgment on the beliefs or practices of others. Of course our Master taught us to judge righteous judgment." (John 7:24). I suspect by depicting the Quail Springs leaders as non-judgmental about others, they hope it will silence those who view their decision as a departure from God's truth and disloyalty to Christ.

When the decision to add instruments to their worship was made, Henderson reveals that a full third of their congregation felt obliged to leave and go elsewhere. So in their desire to be relevant and appealing to sinners, they drove away 350 of God's children. Such is the story in virtually every church where change agents have gained control and imposed their unscriptural agenda. The change agents' call for unity rings hollow when we see them sowing discord and causing division on every hand. We remind them that God hates him that soweth discord among brethren (Prov. 6:16-19). Bro. Henderson assured Ms. Hinton that his congregation has "received very little direct feedback" or mail from other congregations concerning their decision. Perhaps you would like to let them know how their decision affects you. The address is Quail Springs Church of Christ, 14401 N. May Ave. Oklahoma City, OK 73134. Email at info@quailchurch.com

Now that the preacher and elders have changed their worship, perhaps they should also change their name to Quail Springs Christian Church. They would surely be welcomed among those whose faith they share.

Bro. Gary Bruce is the minister of worship at the Quail Springs church. He teaches music at Oklahoma Christian University.

Truly this is a time to mourn (Eccle. 3:4) JHW

*“A liar begins with making falsehood appear like truth, and ends with making truth itself appear like falsehood”
(Shenstone).*

19.

DID ALEXANDER CAMPBELL FOUND THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

Jesus promised to build his church (Matt. 16:18). In his death on the cross he purchased the church with his blood (Acts 20:28). He fulfilled that promise, for we read in the Book of Acts of the Apostles that the church existed in Jerusalem (Acts 8:4). The author of the Book of Acts relates how sinners were saved and added to Christ's church (Acts 2:14-42). It also reports the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome in the lifetime of the apostles. The Epistles of Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude provide instructions on the faith of the church and how they worshiped and served God. The New Testament was given by Christ to be a pattern by which his church would be ordered in every age and nation (II Tim. 1:13).

Historically, we know that the church prospered and flourished for the first three centuries, even though she faced severe persecution at the hands of the Jews, pagans and the Roman government. With the ascension of Emperor Constantine as head of the Roman Empire (313 A.D.), the church finally was freed from official persecution. Given power and privilege by the emperor, many unconverted people rushed to join the church. Soon signs of corruption were seen. Depending on the support of the government rather than on God, the church began a long journey away from the teaching of Christ. In time, the church of Christ was supplanted by the Church of Rome with her popes and their supporting hierarchy of lesser officers. The Roman priesthood not only dominated the church, but also the souls of the people. They persecuted all who did not submit to Rome's dictates. While most conformed, individuals and small groups scattered throughout the empire refuse to do so. They sought to be true Christians, nothing more. They suffered for their faith, but steadfastly refuse to compromise themselves.

This sad situation continued from some thousand years until the birth of the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500s. Martin Luther, John Calvin and Huldreich Zwingli were the most notable leaders of that protest against Rome's corruption and domination. Their noble efforts were soon thwarted by internal strife and controversy that resulted in the creation of the many Protestant denominations. Although Protestantism greatly reduced the power of the Roman Church its adherents did not enjoy the pure and simple Christianity of apostolic times. Doctrines and commandments of men still ruled the day. After some 300 years of conflict, competition and confusion, Many people began to question the concept of denominationalism. With easy access to the Bible, they began to study it with a desire to go back to the fountain head of Christianity. These men were found in virtually all denominations in Europe, Great Britain and America.

As early as the 1600s scattered disciples in England were protesting against the sad state of the various denominations and calling for a pure church. Among the early voices pleading for a return to New Testament Christianity were James and Robert Haldane of England (ca.1765-1850). It was from Greville Ewing, one of their disciples, that young Alexander Campbell learned about restoration of the ancient faith. Small groups known as Glassites, Sandemanians and Scotch Baptists were scattered throughout Great Britain. All of them preached restoration. From Northern Ireland, Thomas Campbell, a Presbyterian preacher, and his family immigrated to America (1807-1809). His son Alexander eventually became a famous preacher there and a leading voice for restoration of the ancient faith.

Here in America, before Campbell arrived, others were pleading for a return to Biblical Christianity. In North Carolina, James O'Kelly launched a restoration movement among the Methodists as early as 1793. He had great success and his followers were found from Georgia, north to New Jersey and inland. In the opening years of the 19th century, up in New England, Dr. Elias Smith and Dr. Abner Jones left the Baptists and began a back to the Bible Movement. In Kentucky, in 1804, Barton Stone launched a similar movement among the Presbyterians. Several other smaller movements were also pleading for a return to the original faith and worship of the church. The Campbells left the Presbyterians and for a while worked among the Baptists. Young Alexander emerged as a brilliant and capable student of God's Word,

preacher, writer and leader. The Campbells eventually left the Baptists and proclaimed themselves to be Christians only.

Enemies of the church accused Campbell of founding a new denomination. This he vehemently repudiated and denied. Some of those who make this charge do so out of ignorance, others out of malice.

While we are deeply indebted to Alexander Campbell for his tireless and sacrificial labors, and while we greatly admire his knowledge of Scripture and skill as a preacher, writer and debater, we do not consider him or any other human being to be our founder. Jesus founded his church. Our stated goal is to be that church, nothing more nor less. JHW

20

THE CHANGE AGENT'S CREDO

We live in a day of change. Politicians are clamoring to be recognized as change agents. The denominational world has its change agents. Evangelicals are overrun with them. Even the Catholic Church has a change movement within its ranks. In this piece I have in mind change agents within the Church of Christ. They are at work in every state and of the Union and in many of our mission outposts. Pockets of them are in several of our schools. Some they now control. Having read some 40 of their books advocating their new agenda I think we can safely say that their credo is "Give me anything but the Church of Christ and old fashioned biblical faith, worship and practice."

- * They can tolerate Pentecostalism, Calvinism, ecumenism, mysticism, theological liberalism and other man-made beliefs and practices. They are more than ready to embrace in their fellowship those who hold such views.
- * They choke on the old-time gospel and gag at the idea of calling bible things by bible names (Tit. 2:8) and doing bible things in bible ways. The vocabulary of the denominational seminary is preferred.
- * To offer up prayers to God in the name of Christ is so trite to them (John 14:13). They must have labyrinths, mantras and candlelight.
- * To merely sing praise to God is so boring (Heb. 13:15). They crave performers and instruments of music to entertain their jaded souls.
- * To preach a message of truth from Scripture is downright oppressive (II Tim. 4:2). They insist on a story-teller who entertains well (II Tim. 4:3).
- * To commune in memory of the Master's death is insufficiently spiritual (I Cor. 11:23-29). Some of them want a feast for the belly to accompany it.
- * To insist on immersion for every member of the body of Christ is so narrow (Rom.6:3-4; John 3:3-5). They must make allowances for those nice people not prepared to go that far.
- * To have only Christian men lead the worship is so patriarchal (I Tim. 2:8-12). They must grant to women an equal opportunity to lead and teach the church (I Cor. 14:34).
- * To think or say that there is only one true church is so parochial (Eph. 4:4). They recognize all denominations who believe in Jesus as their fellow-Christians.
- * To say that Christ founded the Church of Christ is so juvenile to them (Matt. 16:18). They prefer to have Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell as the founders of their church.

Come to think about it, there is little or nothing they care for in New Testament Christianity. They snuff at the idea and scorn those who are determined to worship and serve by the ancient standard. Why do they wish to stay among us? What is it that they want from us? JHW

"Remember, even in Jesus's day some went back and walked with him no more (John 6:66-68). There was Judas who betrayed him for money. Paul wrote of Demas who left because he loved this present evil world and Hymenaeus and Alexander, Phygelus and Hermogenes who had turned away (II Tim. 4:9; I Tim. 1:19-20; II Tim. 1:15). In the 21st century we still have such apostates with us. They have access to the Internet and express their hatred for

the Lord's Church in their "Why I Am Not a Member of the Church of Christ" site. This just reminds us that Satan is real and successful in capturing and leading away captive some who once followed Christ (I Pet. 5:8). We must ever be sober and watchful for our own souls. We must not be shaken by what is said by the bitter enemies of Christ and his church" JHW

21.

BLESSED ARE THE COMMANDMENT KEEPERS

We who are members of the Church of Christ, have for two hundred years held the conviction that to please God, we must obey him. This conviction was universal. It was taught us by those who led us to Christ. We heard it in our Bible classes and our pulpits. We learned it first hand by reading the Scripture (Heb. 5:9).

Then some 25 years ago a small band of preachers and academics associated with our Christian Schools discovered the gospel of Martin Luther and John Calvin. They began to teach their students and auditors that salvation was by grace through faith, and concluding that the role of God's grace was such that if a sinner truly believed in Jesus, grace would save him even if he failed to obey plainly stated commands of Scripture. These being Paul's words (Eph. 2:8-9), they are obviously true, but they are but a part of God's message about man's response to God's grace. So clear and frequent are references to God's grace and the necessity of faith on the part of man that we need not debate them. What is necessary, in this day of change, is to restate and reemphasize the necessity of demonstrating our faith by obedience to God. This is necessary because of overemphasis on grace and faith and lack of emphasis on the necessity of man's obedience.

Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Peter instructed believers to repent and be baptized for remission of their sins and in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Saul of Tarsus had to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins, even though he already believed in Christ (Acts 22:16). Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him (Heb. 5:9). Sinners in Rome "were obedient from the heart to that form of teaching...and made free from sin" (Rom. 6:17).

Given the forgoing scriptures, we should not be surprised to hear God's angel say, "Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7). Not only must we obey his command to be baptized, God expects his children to obey him in all matters wherein He has spoken. When our Master departed for his throne in heaven, he instructed his apostles to teach their converts "to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Paul teaches us that salvation is received when faith works through love (Gal. 5:6).

Two choices are set before humanity: obedience to Christ's will or disobedience. Obedience, coupled with faith, opens the door for the reception of God's saving grace (Heb. 5:9). Faith without works is dead in itself (Jas. 2:26). Hence with the angel we can say to all men, Blessed are those who keep God's commandments. JHW

22.

TEN WAYS TO INSURE THE SUCCESS OF THE CHANGE MOVEMENT

Many brethren have been rudely wakened and shocked by the challenge presented by the promotions of the change agents. If asked, few would say they actually want to see the innovators victorious in their efforts. Most however seem unwilling to lift a hand to help stop them. While pondering this situation, I thought of ten ways such folks can insure the success of the change movement.

- * Pretend there is no problem. As some ancient sage observed, “There is none so blind as those who will not see.”
- * Refuse or neglect to inform yourself of the danger that is before us.
- * Refuse to warn your congregation of the imminent danger facing them.
- * Allow personal friendships, family connections and school loyalties to influence your actions regarding this crisis.
- * Pretend to be so pious that you must stand aloof from the strife.
- * Continue to lend you influence, encouragement and financial support to those who are zealously working to undermined and destroy the church Christ died for.
- * Allow those who promote the change agenda to use your school, your congregation, lectureship or paper as a forum to spread their ideas.
- * Refuse to cooperate with others in the common defense of the Cause of Christ
- * Discourage and undermine the efforts of those who are carrying the battle to the enemy.
- * Fight against those who share your faith, rather than the real enemies of the church.

Any or all of these ten suggestions are recommended by Satan as effective ways to weaken congregations and make them vulnerable to the advances of the promoters of unscriptural changes. All volunteers for his program are welcomed by Diabolos. JHW

23.

LESSONS FROM THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Traumatic events have a way of branding lessons on the minds of people. Lessons were learned by the entire American population when the Muslim terrorists attacked and destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. When the massive walls surrounding the old city of Jericho collapsed, lessons were evident that are valuable to this day.

The facts of this event are recorded in Joshua 6:1-21. It was an ancient city, a stout fortress in a favorable location. The people were aware of the danger before them and prepared for the coming assault.

They faced an enemy unlike any they had ever encountered. They were a nation of migrants, formerly slaves in Egypt. They had been hardened by forty years of wandering in the wilderness. They possessed no modern weapons of war, just a mixed band of men and women, the aged and children with their livestock and baggage.

In the camp of the Hebrews, Joshua, the newly appointed leader, was facing a new challenge. How would they breach a walled fortress city? While pondering his challenge, a stranger with his sword in hand, visited Joshua. So commanding was his presence and his message that Joshua fell down and worshiped him. We know it was the mysterious Angel of Jehovah who often appeared to help the Hebrews in their trials. The instructions he provided were strange but clear. Select seven priests and arm them with ram’s horns (shofars). Other priests would bear the ark of the covenant. Have them follow the men of war around the walls of the city once daily for six days. Then on the seventh day, the process would be repeated seven times. (This tells us the circumference of the city was relatively small). On the seventh circuit, the priests would blow their horns and the people would shout with a mighty voice.

Had we been in the camp of Israel and heard Joshua’s explanation of the battle plan, it would likely have strained our credulity. How can marching and shouting bring down powerful stone walls?” But Joshua was fully confident in the strategy and undeterred. At the appointed hour the strange exercise began.

Skeptics might have doubted, when after six days of marching nothing had happened. The tension would have heightened on the seventh day when the tired men completed their long march five and six times. No fissures were visible in the great walls. The gates still stood, securely blocking entrance to the city. Then as the seventh circuit began the signal was given, Blow those trumpets and shout with all your might! Suddenly the massive walls shivered and collapsed just as Joshua had promised they would. The armed men rushed upon the defenseless city and did their job.

Victory was theirs.

With this great lesson before us, consider the following questions:

- * What if Joshua had decided to march his men around the city only five days, or perhaps eight days? Did the Angel say they should not do so?
- * What if the people thought it made more sense to shout every day as they encompassed the walls? Joshua warned that they should not do so even though the Angel had not stated the prohibition (6:10).
- * What if the slingers and archers had taken the opportunity to pick off a few of the defenders from the walls as they marched? They were not specifically forbidden to do so.
- * What if they had included drummers along with the trumpeters as they marched? Such was not clearly prohibited.

When God's Angel told Joshua what to do, that excluded any other additions or changes to the strategy. We call that God's law of silence (Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19). God's commands authorize only what is mentioned, never things not mentioned. That is why we do not add instrumental accompaniment to our singing (Eph. 5:19). JHW

24.

UNEXPECTED RESULTS

When a congregation invests the Lord's money in a missionary undertaking, they do so on the assumption that the results of the man's labors will be Bible Christians and congregations of the Church of Christ. They assume that the faith, worship and activities of the newly planted churches will bear a strong likeness to their own.

If the missionary soliciting their assistance should say, "Now I am going to a particular country in Africa or South America for the purpose of planting Christian Churches, or Baptist Churches, he would not get a dime of support. Unfortunately, many congregations who assist missionaries have no knowledge of the work being done save that provided by the missionary. The integrity of his reports depends on his honesty. I say this because some men dare not report to the sponsoring churches all that they are doing because they know the home churches would refuse to continue their support if they were fully informed.

This article is prompted by information derived from the book, **Together Again** by Rick Atchley and Bob Russell. Atchley preaches for the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Texas and Russell for the Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY. Their book is a call for unity between the two groups with numerous suggestions on how to accomplish that goal. On page 96, they say, "This is, no doubt, the reason why missionaries from our two fellowship have practiced for years the kind of unity we are calling our churches in America to embrace." They then mention mission works in Moscow, Russia, Uganda and Kenya and Mozambique where representatives of Churches of Christ are working hand in hand with those of the Christian Church. Workers in some of our Latin America outposts have followed the same course. **(Note: we should not conclude that all our workers in these places are thus compromising).**

Suppose the elders of a congregation that has invested thousands of dollars in a particular outpost should eventually decide to visit the field and survey the good work that had been done. Imagine their shock when they find the brethren accompanying their singing with instruments, or women leading the church in worship, or members accepted without scriptural baptism. These possibilities could be extended, but the point is clear.

Wasted funds, wasted effort, a sense of betrayal would be the first emotions experienced. Discouragement toward future involvement in missions might well follow that. Elders, know who you are sending. Ask hard, pointed questions when interviewing the brother who asks for your support. Make it clear what your expectations are. Demand regular and full reports on the work. Send one of your own to occasionally visit the field. Good stewardship of God's treasure demands that we make sure it is used to advance His cause, not to harm it. The same care should be exercised when

you are asked to provide support for young people going on short-term mission campaigns.

Let no man think we are opposed to missionaries. God forbid that we should ever oppose or hinder a faithful worker who wants to carry the gospel to a distant land. Our purpose is to remind brethren to be careful lest their generosity be abused by those with a hidden agenda. JHW

25.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT WE ARE UP AGAINST?

As I ponder the situation now facing our churches of Christ and the tepid response of the majority of our preachers and elders, I am forced to conclude that most of our leaders really have no idea of what we are up against. Some who are stirred to action are fighting against shadows, not having seen the real enemy. Our change agents are getting much of their ammunition from the leaders of the Emergent Church movement. Consider the following lines:

“My goal is to destroy Christianity as a world religion and be a recatalyst for the movement of Jesus Christ. Some people are upset with me because it sounds like I’m anti-Christian. I think they might be right” (Emergent Pastor, Erwin Raphael McManus, interview with the Christian Examiner).

Erwin McManus is a leader of the Emergent Church movement and a frequent head-liner at seminars and conferences promoting the Emergent agenda. According to McManus’ book, **An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind**, he believes that the church must adapt to the world in order to become more culturally relevant. This faulty, anti-scriptural idea is the heart of the Emergent Church movement and message. As McManus sees it, “The church must acclimate to a changing world, or she will destine herself to irrelevance or even extinction. What this means for the pastor as spiritual environmentalist is that he must understand the changing environment in which the church has been called to serve. One of those dramatic changes in our environment is the shift from words to images. To do church in a way that is entirely text driven is the kiss of death.” Erwin McManus, (**An Unstoppable Force**,” p. 17). (“Text-driven “ means Bible driven jhw).

Several sources merging together constitute our change movement.

- * From Fuller Theological Seminary and its Church Growth Center comes one stream, a strong mixture of denominationalism and neo-Pentecostalism
- * From Rick Warren and his Purpose Driven Church and Bill Hybels and his Willow Creek project comes yet another. They contribute the concept of church growth by most any means and that bigness proves rightness.
- * From the neo-pagan New Age movement is yet another....much of which is borrowed from Hinduism and Buddhism.
- * From Catholicism comes the contemplative spirituality aspect of this movement.
- * In the Emergent Church movement ancient mysticism, and New Age paganism are homogenized
- * From the Postmodern philosophy and world view, we get the basic framework for the new religion.
- * From traditional theological liberalism, we get a low view of the Bible which allows men to feel free to tamper with and change any aspect of the Christian message not to their liking.
- * From the ecumenical movement comes the call for denominational unity accompanied by a low view of the Lord’s one true church.
- * Mix with this a fair amount of arrogance and presumption on the part of the promoters of these new systems.
- * These are flowing into some of our “Christian” universities where certain aristocratic academics drink this heady brew. Under its influence they feel empowered to change the faith and worship of churches of Christ to bring them into compliance with their mongrel faith. To make it acceptable to brethren, they sprinkle the mixture with a few scriptures and wrap it in our familiar terminology. By their smooth and fair speech they deceive the innocent (Rom. 16:18).

This is a toxic mix of error that will poison and wreck the faith of all who embrace it. A congregation overtaken by it, will no longer be a true church of Christ. Already we have reached a crisis situation. Three of our major universities have now embraced this approach. Perhaps as many as 200 of our congregations, among them some of our

largest and most influential, are already in the change camp. No one who loves Christ, His church and His Word can sit on the sidelines and watch this conflict from afar. Either you will stand up and oppose it or you by default will fall victim to it. As it was in Egypt, there are no neutral sanctuaries. Either the doorposts and lintels of your congregation are marked by the blood of the Lamb of God, or it and those within will be like the unmarked homes of the Egyptians (Ex. 12:13). Quit ye like men! Close the gates to these deceptive false teachers. They have neither part nor lot in the kingdom of Christ. They need to go to the waiting arms of their denominational kindred. There they belong. JHW

26.

OBSERVATIONS ON A PROPOSAL BEING MADE TO CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN GHANA

Christ established but one church (Matt. 16:18). We refer to it as the Church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), because it belongs to him. He purchased it with his blood (Acts 20:28). It is his bride (Eph. 5:23). Christ's church is worldwide in its outreach and existence. While the church of Christ in different nations will speak a different language, its members might wear a different style of clothing, its meeting places may conform to local architectural styles, the message, worship and organization of the church must of necessity be the same in every nation. The only way that can occur is if all Christians in every nation subscribe to and honor the same sacred blueprint and pattern for the church (II Tim. 1:13).

Christ is head over all things to his church (Eph. 1:22). His Apostles were chosen and empowered to set the church in order in her beginning days. They were guided by the Holy Spirit which brought to their remembrance all that Christ had taught (John 14:26). The things they taught were the commandments of the Lord (I Cor. 14:37). When the Apostles died, there were no divinely chosen successors to take their place. Instead, the churches had the inspired writings of the Apostles and prophets to guide them (Eph. 2:19-21). Today, we like them, have no other authority or guide save the teachings of Christ and the Apostles recorded in our New Testament. We need nothing else as they are sufficient to guide us into all the truth (II Pet. 1:3-4).

From that inspired and authoritative Word we learn that no human organization was provided for his church beyond that of elders, deacons and preachers in each local church (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1). With the New Testament to guide them, each congregation is fully sufficient and able to conduct its own business. We need no citywide, statewide, national or international organization to manage our congregational affairs and govern our churches. To create such an organization is wrong on several counts:

1. It is presumptuous to attempt to change the government of Christ's church. Woes are pronounced on those who add to or take from His Word (Rev. 22:18-19).
2. To do so is to act without divine authority. Christ told the apostles to teach converts to observe all things that he had commanded (Matt. 28:20). But he did not order any government greater than that of the local congregation.
3. We have no right to do that which Scripture does not authorize. When Jewish Christians sought to make Gentile brethren be circumcised and keep the ordinances of Moses' Law, the Apostles and elders wrote, "We have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls; *to whom we gave no commandment*" (Acts 15:24). There is not commandment for any governing organization beyond the local church.
4. History demonstrates that when such an organization is created, in time it will come to dominate and control the churches that fall under its influence. We remind you that only Christ is the head of his church (Eph. 1:22).
5. Efforts to create governing bodies larger than the local church will result in division among God's people. For those who honor and respect the Bible can have nothing to do with such a human organization. Those who create and promote it will bear the responsibility for this harm to the cause for which our Lord died (Rom. 16:17-18).
6. Misguided brethren in America created a similar organization in 1849. At first they called it the American Christian Missionary Society. It caused division. When you read of or see Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ, they were once our brethren, but they preferred their Missionary Society to the fellowship of those who would not for Scriptural reasons accept it. In time, the society gave birth to a benevolent society, a society for building church buildings, one

to provide for aged preachers, one for Bibles, tracts and literature, one for Sunday schools, societies for women and others for children, a temperance society, and one for higher education. Today, it has grown into an international governing body that owns and controls Disciples of Christ churches. We must learn from the mistakes of the past lest we repeat them.

7. This desire to have a larger governing body, in the third century, led to the eventual development of the Roman Catholic Church with its pope who claimed to be the universal head over all the churches.

This does not mean that our congregations cannot cooperate with each other on a voluntary basis and accomplish goals that are too large for one church to do. Remember the congregations cooperated together in supporting Paul's missionary endeavors. He was sent by Antioch and was assisted by the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:15). The Gentile churches cooperated in a project to send financial relief to the suffering churches of Judea (I Cor. 16:1-3).

1. A congregation can choose and send a missionary and other congregations can assist them.
2. A congregation that has been successful in its work could offer to train other congregations in their methods.
3. A strong church could provide funds to a weak church to help them get a meeting place.
4. A strong church could adopt and care for a sick or aged gospel preacher.
5. A strong church could invite leaders of other congregations to discuss ways to carry the gospel to unevangelized sections of your country or other nations.
6. A strong church or a brother of means could publish materials suitable for Bible study. They could offer these lessons to others who could purchase what they need.
7. A strong church or an individual could publish a newspaper for the churches in Ghana that would carry news reports that would help brethren keep in touch and up to date on what was transpiring in other places.
8. Elders and preachers can have a weekly or monthly fellowship meeting. They can encourage each other and inform each other of what is being done in their work. But they have no right nor business in making rules for others to keep or trying to exercise authority over anyone.
9. All of these items can be done efficiently and scripturally without creating an organization that would be over the churches . . . and without God's approval. This we know for we have been doing it successfully for generations.

Some things we have no right to do if we wish to please our Lord Jesus.

1. No one has a scriptural right to demand that all Christian women or young people must wear a certain kind or color of clothing, whether for worship or for daily life. Leaders of cults have such rules as they lord it over their flocks. We are not to lord it over the sheep of God (I Pet. 5:2-3). We should teach them to dress modestly as Paul instructed, but beyond that we cannot go (I Tim. 2:9).
2. No Christian or congregation should be fellowshiping with denominational bodies or encouraging others to do so. Amos rightly ask, "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Paul asks "what communion hath light with darkness?" He then says, "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord" (II Cor. 6:14, 17). John teaches us that "whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching Christ, hath not God . . . If anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works" (II John 9-11). Those who fellowship with those who teach and practice error are like those who go into the presence of a man who has a contagious disease. They are easily infected with the disease of error.
3. No faithful preacher of the gospel will seek to usurp the authority of the elders of Christ's church. God has ordained that elders, not preachers, are to oversee the flock (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:1-2). Our job as preachers is to teach the gospel to Christians and sinners alike (II Tim. 4:1-2). We are servants, not rulers (Matt. 20:26-27). We serve under the oversight of our elders. We must beware of those men who like Diotrophes love to have the preeminence among the brethren (III John 9).

I encourage every child of God to remember the brethren who first brought the gospel to you. They taught you truth and righteousness. Remember the lessons you have learned from God's Word about the matters discussed above. Paul marveled that Christians in Galatia were "so quickly removing from him that called (them) in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel; which is not another gospel . . ." It was a perversion of the true gospel (Gal. 1:6). Remember Paul's warning, "the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith . . . through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies . . ." (I Tim. 4:1-2). Fifty years of sacrifice and success can be swept away in a few years if brethren compromise their faith and allow men to introduce changes to the faith, worship and organization of the church which Jesus did not authorize.

May God bless each one of you and the churches you serve and may you be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (I Cor. 15:58). John Waddey

27.

OBITUARIES OF JERRY JENSEN AND THE PLEASANT MEADOWS CHURCH OF CHRIST

Mr. Jerry Jensen* died today after a longer period of illness. Seven years ago Jerry first experienced symptoms of disease. For four years he insisted that nothing was wrong. He refused to see a doctor. When his symptoms grew more serious he finally visited a physician, but he rejected the prescribed treatment and refused to take the medicine. He believed he could overcome his problem by prayer, positive thinking and vitamins. As the disease progressed, Jerry's friends and family tried in vain to persuade him to submit to the doctor's directions. They could see the deterioration in Jerry, but he insisted he was getting better. His friends at the health club insisted he was looking good. Last month Jerry collapsed. They rushed him to the emergency room and found his body was riddled with cancer. His physician gravely informed him the situation was now beyond treatment. He only had a few months to live. Jerry inquired about surgery. He was ready to take the medicine, anything the doctor prescribed. Unfortunately Jerry had waited too late. He wanted to live, but he died today. Cancer killed him but neglect was a contributing cause.

Last Sunday the Pleasant Meadows Church of Christ* expired. The congregation was 68 years old and in good health until three years ago. Upon the retirement of Bro. B. J. Perkins,* their former minister, the elders sought out a young man who had received his education at a Christian university with a degree in Ministry and Church Growth. Within six months the first symptoms of trouble appeared. The new minister was determined to change just about everything about the church. When some of the members approached him he was indignant and suggested that they had a problem. The elders seemed to be under the preacher's spell. Strong families began leaving for other congregations. Many new folks began attending who seemed to know or care little about the Bible. Some of the deacons resigned as did two of the older elders. Bro. Perkins met with the elders and tried to explain what was happening. He warned them of the danger he saw. The young preacher insisted he was jealous of his success. He was meddling in things not of his concern. After a series of lessons on traditions and legalism, the youth group began using a guitar in their devotionals. A few months later instruments were allowed in the midweek classes. The young man insisted that women had been unfairly restricted and he began to call on them for public prayers. Soon they were making announcements and serving communion. He poked fun at the name Church of Christ and called those who insisted it was a biblical name "Church of Christers." He exchanged pulpits with a Christian Church minister and dismissed their evening services so all could attend the city-wide campaign with other Evangelical churches.

Last Sunday the disease reached crisis proportions. At the morning worship hour, the preacher announced that after much prayer and fasting the elders and he had decided that the ladies would be allowed to teach the mixed adult bible classes and speak to the assembly on special occasions. Also, effective next month, the congregation's name would be changed to Community Church of Grace. A piano was being installed to assist their singing. Half of the congregation left, vowing never to return. Two additional elders resigned after their protests were rejected. The Pleasant Meadows Church of Christ breathed its last breath. The group now meeting in its facilities is, for all intents and purposes, a Christian Church. Many tears were shed by those who had known the church in days past. Early treatment might have saved both Jerry and the church. JHW

* The names of the individuals and the church are fictitious.

"Falsehood is never so successful as when she baits her hook with truth,, and no opinions so fatally mislead us, as those that are not wholly wrong" (Colton).

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY: DID YOU KNOW?

One of the major factors in the rending of our brotherhood a century ago was the American Christian Missionary Society. Today, most members of the church have no idea what is under consideration when the term "missionary society" is used. Worse still, most of the men now preaching have no understanding of how it came to pass and why our brethren rejected it. Because of this lack of knowledge, we are vulnerable to those who would like to create similar organizations today.

Most of those who supported the missionary society in the early days did so thinking they were promoting the evangelism of the world. But men like Alexander Campbell, David S. Burnett, W. K. Pendleton and Isaac Errett understood that they were laying the foundation for a broader brotherhood organization. They reasoned that the church universal could not act without organization and cooperation of all its member churches. Burnett had already organized a brotherhood Bible Society and Tract Society. Once the missionary society was viable, in quick succession they organized a Benevolence Society, a society to provide for aged ministers and a society to assist churches in building houses of worship. They had a Sunday School Society and a Ladies' Aid Society. Missionary Societies were organized in each state and efforts were made to involve every congregation in them.

The men responsible for creating the Missionary Society and promoting it did not begin by finding a scriptural foundation for it. Rather they created what they wanted and when challenged, they sought for some way to justify it. Resorting to expediency as the basis for the organization, they argued that there was no law against it. This same argument was used for each new innovation they desired to have. W. K. Pendleton acknowledged this saying, "We fall back upon the combined wisdom and piety of the church, and adopt by general consent, a human expedient" (*Millennian Harbinger*, Vol. 37, Nov. 1866, p. 505. In earlier days they had viewed the silence of the Scripture on such things as reason to reject them. But their love for the society they had created caused them to reject that biblical position and argue that if the Bible did not condemn a thing, they were free to do it.

The question of the Missionary Society wracked the brotherhood from 1849 until the division was finally realized in 1906.

- * The heart of the debate was not about mission work. All agreed it was the duty of the church to preach the gospel to the lost.
- * It was not about cooperation in preaching the gospel. All believed that two or more churches could cooperate in doing a good work beyond the capacity of a single congregation.
- * It was about people who were convinced the congregations of the church were incapable of doing the work of evangelizing the world.
- * It was about people who believed they could create a better organization for doing His business than God himself had done.
- * It was an attempt to imitate the missionary organizations of various denominational churches.
- * It was the creation of men who believed that the many congregations of the brotherhood needed a national organization to handle, not just missions, but every phase of church life. They wanted to organize the churches by locality, state, region and nationally. They wanted power to regulate fund-raising, ministerial appointments and retirement, etc.
- * Our brethren rejected the missionary society, primarily because there was no scriptural authority for such an organization.
- * They believed the church was fully capable of doing the work Christ had commissioned her to do.
- * They foresaw that such an organization could become an oppressive master over the churches and thus rejected it. Their fears came true. The Disciples of Christ denomination is now governed and controlled by such an organization that steadily evolved from the Missionary Society.
- * Never forget that the church of Christ is thoroughly capable of doing any task that God has given her. Let her do those jobs and may the glory be to her and her Lord. JHW

29.

HUNGRY WOLVES

In days past, wolves were a serious threat to folks living on the frontier. Wolves could destroy ones livestock and thus wreck his hope of future prosperity. When hungry, wolves could attack a person who was alone in the night. The Holy Spirit guided the sacred writers to use the metaphor of wolves to describe certain enemies of the Lord's church. Thus Paul said to the elders of the Ephesian church, "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock..." (Acts. 20:29). To appreciate his illustration and understand his warning, we must keep in mind the nature of wolves.

- * Wolves are dangerous. This fact is contrary to modern environmentalists and animal rights groups who paint them in a romantic way as a persecuted minority.
- * Wolves are destructive. They can destroy the livestock that provides a farmer or rancher his livelihood and even his food.
- * Wolves are elusive. They do not operate in the open.
- * Wolves hunt their prey under the cover of darkness.
- * Wolves do not work alone. They hunt in a pack and are thus able to overwhelm their victims.
- * Wolves prey on other animals that are weak, vulnerable or isolated.
- * Wolves are merciless. When they hunt, they spare neither the young or the old.
- * Wolves will attack anyone who seeks to keep them from their prey.
- * Wolves will attack anyone who disturbs or threatens them.

Jesus warns that false teachers are like wolves in sheep's clothing. They are as dangerous as ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15). Such teachers are dangerous to the health and welfare of the church. They destroy souls of men and wreck congregations where they gain an inroad. False teachers are elusive. They blush not to use subterfuge and deceit to win a following and gain control of a church. False teachers rarely work alone. They network so they can help each other. They prey on Christians who are weak in faith, young and impressionable. They seek out churches with weak leadership that they can quickly subvert. They are merciless when they make their move to capture a church. They rend and tare it and will see it destroyed rather than allow it to escape their control. Like wolves, false teachers lash out, attacking any person who exposes their schemes or interferes with their intentions.

Rightly does the Spirit warn us against false teachers. The disciple that ignores the warning will suffer harm and may well lose his soul. So also will a congregation suffer. JHW

30.

PARABLE OF PROCRASTINATING PETE

Pete was a fine fellow. He was moral, honest and hard-working. He loved his family and would do nothing to harm them. He did however have one weakness. He tended to put off repair jobs around the house.

One spring day Pete noticed the tell-tale traces of fiber on the wall of his house. He looked and found a few tiny transparent wings in the window seal. He knew those were signs of termites. But being, the kind of fellow he was, Pete decided to think about it a few days before taking action. He weighed the cost of the exterminator. Could he do the job himself? Would there be large repair bills? What would the neighbors say if it became known that he had termites? Being a busy man, Pete forgot about the problem until the following spring. Once again he spotted the signs. Again

he pondered the situation. Finally in September he called the exterminator.

The inspection report was not good. Not only did Pete now have a major termite infestation, his house had already suffered serious damage. It would cost several thousand dollars to repair the problem. His wife was upset. Pete was embarrassed and mad at himself. Their family budget was shot. All of this because Pete had put off dealing with the problem in its early stages.

Pete is like a lot of preachers. They see the early signs of error creeping into their congregation. They know that spiritual termites are swarming and attacking other congregations. Yet, like Pete, they postpone dealing with the problem. They ponder it and pray about it, but do nothing about it. Sooner or later serious problems will break out in that congregation and that brother or his successor will have a huge job trying to salvage the church. If too much time has elapsed, the congregation might be destroyed or swallowed up by error. Learn the lesson, don't be a like procrastinating Pete! JHW

31.

WHAT IS "HOLY READING"?

Dear Bro. Waddey: I attended a Ladies' Inspiration Day program and the woman who taught it spent her time talking about a new way of reading the Bible which she called "Holy Reading." This was new to me. Can you help me understand what she is promoting? Rena

Dear Rena: The Holy Reading exercise that your teacher introduced is a derivative of the Lectio Divina practice of Roman Catholic mystics. This unfamiliar practice did not come to us directly from some Catholic monastery. It has been brought into the Lord's church by the teachers that we commonly identify as change agents. We use this name because they themselves use it to describe their efforts and because they are working to reshape the church after a denominational pattern and thus to make it a denomination. These misguided teachers are numerous, and scattered throughout the nation and in some of our mission fields. They control Abilene Christian University, David Lipscomb University, Pepperdine University and Rochester College. They have a foothold in a few other schools, but have not yet gained control of them. The change agents have borrowed their mystical methods from a denominational movement called "The Emergent Church" which is promoted by Fuller Theological Seminary and Church Growth Center in California. The Emergent leaders have blended Hindu and Buddhist mysticism with the Medieval Catholic mysticism, New Age religious practices and Postmodern philosophy. To this mix they add a sprinkling of Bible to hide its true anti-Christian nature and make it look and taste like, to the unsuspecting, a Christian movement

First of all let me point out that it is never wrong to read the Bible whether in a group or privately. It is in no way wrong to read it silently to one's self. Nor is it wrong to concentrate on a verse or a paragraph until one has memorized it. It is not wrong to have a favorite passage that we return to with frequency. Nor is it wrong to call to mind an important promise or command when you are being tried or tempted.

That said, there is still something to be faulted in this and other similar mystical practices currently being promoted by our change agents.

* They claim that those who pursue such methods as Lectio Divina will be more spiritual, therefore better Christians. They think that by repeating a verse, even a phrase or word repeatedly, that your mind will be emptied of normal thoughts and God might speak to you in the quietness. If this were true we would wonder why the apostles, led by the Holy Spirit, did not instruct the first Christians to use the method? Why did it take several hundred years to be discovered and that by Roman Catholic disciples of "St." Benedict? It implies that the person who participates in their Lectio Divina method will be more spiritual and holy than the Christian who reads and studies his bible, prays fervently and serves Christ in his daily life, but chooses not to follow their method.

* Lectio Divina is but one of several mystical practices being promoted by these false teachers. From the same pagan and Catholic sources they advocate such things as Taise worship, labyrinths, centering prayer, lighting candles when

praying, retreating to isolated places to find God, mantras and other methods to “discover the voice of God within.” Of course, the Bible knows nothing of such practices.

* This “holy reading” practice was not used by the early church, meaning the church of the first century. It is more honest to say that it was a practice that developed and was used by Catholic mystics from the fourth century onward.

You were right to be concerned about the events of the Ladies’ Day program. Those who are pursuing such practices are generally denominational in their thinking. Many of them think that the Church of Christ is really a denominational body. Many of them have very weak ideas about the essentiality of baptism for salvation (Acts 22:16). They teach baptism, but many of them will not say the devout denominationalist who was sprinkled for baptism *must* be immersed to be saved (Rom. 6:3-4). Many of them think we have unnecessarily oppressed our women by not allowing them a leadership role in the public services of the church (I Tim. 2:11-12). Virtually all of them see nothing wrong with denominationalism. I do not charge this particular lady teacher with any or all of these views, but they are very common among those promoting this mystical kind of worship.

Remember the words of Peter, “Be sober, be watchful: your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour” (I Pet. 5:8). JHW

32.

ANTICIPATING A SMALLER BROTHERHOOD

When I became a Christian in 1955 every congregation’s expectation and goal was growth. Our brotherhood was flourishing here at home and expanding abroad. Young men entered the ministry understanding that soul-winning was vital and a reasonable aspect of their work. We had our brotherhood issues but still the church was growing.

Slowly and imperceptibly changes worked their way into the hearts of our people. Over half a century their impact on our congregations was widespread and destructive. In our most prestigious schools there arose a spirit of intellectualism and elitism that despised our back to the Bible movement as too simplistic and unsophisticated. Those professors had tasted the heady brew of the great secular universities and liberal seminaries. Their heads were swollen with ideas that they held to be superior to the old biblical ways held by their forefathers. They instilled their liberal ideas in the minds of their students. They weakened their convictions in the faith and undermined their respect for the complete authority of the Scripture. They also changed their understanding of the church. Rather than seeking to be the one, undenominational church established by Christ, their students were led to assume we were a denomination among denominations. Rather than looking to the New Testament as their pattern they looked to denominational leaders who had built great mega-churches, as their exemplars. Today these disaffected preachers are driving the change movement at work among us.

In response to the drift to the left, there arose a small, noisy band of men whose vision was to defeat the liberals, drive them from our midst and keep the church on the path they viewed as proper. While their desire to oppose and defeat liberalism was noble, their method was faulty. Lacking maturity, discernment and good judgment, these brethren launched a holy war against not only the liberals, but any and everyone who did not comply with their perception of things. While liberals tended to be “sweet spirited” and subtle in their approach, those on the far right were shrill, harsh and abrasive. Men who had served faithfully for many years were accused of compromise. Our finest gospel papers were declared to be unsound. Our most loyal and respected schools were found wanting. Godly missionaries were branded as unfaithful. Only those preachers, congregations and schools of preaching controlled by them received their approval.

The remaining portion of our brethren, who eschewed both the liberals and the extremists, found themselves in an untenable position. If they attempted some new outreach for Christ, those of the right excoriated them. If they had a meeting, or a lectureship with even one speaker not acceptable to the protectors, it was the same. Their choice of

preachers or missionaries was scrutinized by the self-appointed vigilantes of the faith. If the choice was not to their standard, accusations and letters would fly. The response to this hostile environment has been devastating to the church.

* Many congregational leaders, fearing such attacks, ceased to undertake anything of consequence for Christ. They lay low, staying quiet, spending all their energies in their local community. Numerous preachers have done the same thing.

* Many congregations quit inviting guest speakers for special programs, fearing shots from their critical neighbors. Any man they considered inviting was questioned by someone.

* Some congregations elected to back away from mission work, unsure of who could be trusted.

* Some of our schools either chose to go with the liberal tide or else developed a bunker mentality, keeping a low profile to avoid being attacked.

* Some of our publishers joined the change agents while others tried to avoid anything controversial, becoming virtually useless to the church.

* Many young men who desired to preach have not pursued their dream because of the hostile environment they faced.

* Like a sailing vessel caught in the doldrums, the church ceased to grow. Inertia took control of preachers and elders's hearts. Their goal, instead of growing, has become "just hold on" and try to ride out the storm.

With the change agents recruiting our young adults to the left and ultraconservatives attacking from the right, many have become disillusioned and numbers have actually left the church. A deadening malaise has settled over the middle. What can the future hold? Those electing to follow the sirens of change will eventually leave the Church of Christ for denominationalism. Those on the far right will likely be our next splinter group. The result will be a much smaller brotherhood. Just how great our losses will be is yet to be seen. Even if we could stop the hemorrhaging and those disaffected should depart, we would lose no less than 25 percent of our congregations. Sadly, neither extreme yet wants to leave. They aspire to capture as many preachers and churches as possible. Only God knows what will be the end thereof. We cannot yield to either extreme. We cannot afford to stay in the doldrums. We must stand up for Christ and advance with sword and trowel in hand. With the one to fight against every foe, with the other to rebuild the battered walls of Zion. JHW

33.

PARABLE OF THE INCREDULOUS TOURIST

A certain couple left America for a vacation in Cancun, Mexico. They were strictly advised to avoid drinking tap water or eating uncooked fruits and salads while there. As the bus driver drove them to their hotel, he sang the praises of the resort and assured them that the water and food were completely safe for consumption...."as good as in America" said he.

The wife was skeptical of his words and took the safe route of bottled water and no salads. The husband was more easily persuaded. He ate and drank all they put before him. By the last day of the vacation, he fell ill with digestive problems. He suffered all the way home. It took a trip to his physician and a regimen of strong medicine to restore his health.

This parable contains a lesson for leaders of Christ's church. Throughout the nation, the virus of change is spreading among our congregations. Faithful watchmen are sounding the warning. Elders who are wise will heed the warning and refuse to employ workers who are promoters of the change agenda. They will allow no class literature that advances the cause of "change." They will not bring in guest speakers who are agents of change, nor will they encourage their members to attend their forums and seminars.

On the other hand, careless elders will ignore the warning. They will believe the propaganda. They will foolishly open their classes and pulpit to those whose goal is to capture their congregations. Like thoughtless children, they will drift along until one day, the blow is struck. The change agents snatch control of their flock and they will either have to submit or resign. He that hath ears let him hear the warning. JHW

A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO TRUTH

Truth is abstract but very real. It is the standard in every realm of existence. There are true or genuine products and there are those which are false and counterfeit. There are true and false friends. We are confronted daily with true and false information. There are true and false answers to questions. There is also true and false religion, true and false doctrines and practices, hopes and promises. It is of this category of religious truth of which we write.

The illustrious Bohemian reformer and martyr, John Hus (1369-1415), is credited with the following lines. "Seek the Truth, Listen to the Truth, Teach the Truth, Love the Truth, Abide in the Truth and Defend the Truth unto Death." This was his personal credo. For God's truth he lost his life to the fiery flames of the executioner's stake.

Truth exists. It is within our reach but **we must seek and find it** (John 5:39; Acts 17:11). God's truth is bound up in a remarkable book of sixty-six units. It is time-tested and universally applicable to the needs of man. The message contained therein renovates ruined lives and makes men acceptable to their Creator and Judge. Truth is attainable. It can be known (John 8:32).

To profit from God's truth, we **must be willing to listen to it**. Not all are willing to do so. Some harden their hearts and close their ears to truth (Matt. 13:14-15). Truth cannot save or benefit those who will not listen to it.

The true servant of Christ will **teach the truth of God** (Acts 20:26-27). Paul liked to say, "I speak the truth, I lie not" (I Tim. 2:7). In a very hostile environment, John Hus believed and taught that the Sacred Scripture was the sole and final authority in all things moral and religious.

For truth to be fruitful in our lives **we must love it**. Some do not have a love for the truth (II Thess. 2:10-11). Their faulty attitude leaves them vulnerable to delusions and lies. Truth can easily slip through their fingers and be lost or forgotten.

For truth to do its perfect work in our lives, **we must abide in it**. Those who go onward and abide not in the teaching of Christ have not God. Only those who abide therein have the blessings of the Father and the Son (II John 9-11). Abiding in truth means to live by its precepts, to abstain from that which truth forbids and to keep truth ever in our minds and hearts (Eph. 5:18-19).

We **must be willing to defend the truth** at any cost. Paul understood this. He was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:16). In the 2000 years of Christian history, thousands of believers have paid the ultimate price for defending God's Truth. Weak, cowardly men quail before the enemies of truth. They flee when the hateful champions of error appear. The very thought of suffering for truth enervates their fickle hearts. At best they are peacetime soldiers, short-timers hoping to avoid the enemy

John Hus searched for the truth. When he found it, he loved it and abode in it. He preached the truth throughout Catholic dominated Bohemia. He shook the foundations of error and struck fear in the priestly tyrants. They responded with deceit and violence. On July 6, 1415, the Catholic authorities declared Hus an obstinate heretic and ordered him burned to death. May it never be said of us that we failed in our duty to God's Truth. JHW

"Half a fact is a whole falsehood—He who gives the truth a false coloring by his false manner of telling it, is the worst of liars" (E. L. Magoon).

IN SEARCH OF SPIRITUALITY

Man intuitively knows there is another realm beyond this physical, material one in which he lives his daily life. From the primitive pagan to the sophisticated intellectual in the great metropolis, man yearns for something more than physical nourishment and human relations (Matt. 4:4). The Creator hath planted eternity in their hearts (Eccl. 3:11).

Satan, fully understanding this innate appetite of man, exploits it to his advantage. For the primitive ones he provides animism or spiritism. For those more advanced, he provides paganism with a pantheon of gods made in the image of man and beasts. Along with these he supplies a multitude of myths and legends. For modern man, born and raised in a semi-Christian environment, he provides denominationalism in which a person can believe and worship God as he himself chooses. For those still needing images, sensual impressions and legends, he offers Catholicism.. For materialistic, educated hedonists, he supplies New Age mysticism. This appeals especially to Hollywood elites and other celebrities. It has a strange appeal to those who have rejected Christianity as too simple or perhaps too demanding for their lifestyle.

Recently I saw an interview with Garth Brooks, country music superstar. As he mused about his concerts with 50,000 or more screaming fans, he commented, "It was the most spiritual movement" I have ever had. Such description of things, events and experiences as being spiritual is a trademark of the New Age devotees. While they reject Jehovah's marvelous gift of Jesus and Christianity, they rummage through the ruins of paganism in search of something, anything that can satisfy their spiritual appetites.

New Age mysticism is a Western adaptation of Eastern, Hindu mysticism. It appeals to a category of ecologists who worship and love the creation rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). In their vain hearts they imagine the universe and all the things within it to be the body of some great unknown spirit of the universe. It appeals to the proud intellectual who feels too educated to believe and submit his life to the simple teaching of the carpenter from Nazareth. Those who live lives of indulgence in every sin and vice are drawn to mysticism. By manipulation of their jaded minds and bodies they can find some tingling experience and convince themselves it is a connection with the Great Spirit. This they can get without repentance and submission of their stubborn wills to Jesus the Son of God (Acts 2:38; Gal.2:20).

Strangely, mysticism is now sweeping through Evangelical Protestant churches. Led by notable mystics like Richard Foster, Brian McLaren, Ruth Haley Barton and promoted by Rick Warren and Robert Schuler, this is the new wave of "spirituality" designed to give substance to the "Emerging Church" and Purpose-Driven Church movements. The salesman's packet includes contemplative spirituality, breath prayers, labyrinths, icons, candles and chanting. A vast number of books on the mystic approach are now available, properly sprinkled with holy water to make them acceptable to ignorant followers of Jesus.

As would be expected in this day of the revival of Athenianism, some change agents within the brotherhood of Churches of Christ, looking for something new and different, are toying with mystic approaches to worship. There is the promotion of Zoe methods of worship by teams from Abilene and Nashville. There are evening mystical worship experiences provided at Abilene Christian University's Lectureship, led by "spiritual" faculty members. Those who prefer the apostleship of Rick Warren over that of Paul are eager to try anything new and different. Such exotic approaches to spirituality are most alluring to them. Mysticism is not a new thing in the history of Christianity. Mysticism has a long permanent place in the faith and practice of Roman Catholicism. The shame of the matter is that members of Christ's church would import and promote these semi-pagan and Roman Catholic practices among God's people. JHW

The ancient Hebrews went to mountain top shrines to find spiritual excitement in Baal worship. Some postmodern Christians are rummaging in the closets of Hinduism hoping for some spiritual thrill.

17TH WORLD CONVENTION OF CHRISTIAN -CHURCH OF CHRIST AND DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

From Abilene Christian University we have received an attractive brochure announcing the convention mentioned above. *“Together in Christ”* is the theme of the 17th Convention of the three branches of the Stone-Campbell Movement. This grand gathering will be held in Nashville in 2008.

This World Convention is unique in several ways.

- * It will be the first where members of our brotherhood participated. The Disciples have been hosting such gatherings since 1930.
- * Representing Churches of Christ are **Rhonda Lowry, the wife of Randy Lowry, President of David Lipscomb University** and **Mike Cope minister of the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene** and co-editor of Wineskins magazine. He teaches freshmen Bible at Abilene Christian University.
- * **One of the Convention’s sponsors is Abilene Christian University**
- * Dr. Cynthia Hale, founding pastor of Ray of Hope Christian Church and billed as one of the greatest black women preachers in America will be a featured speaker.
- * A special feature will be to hear some of the Christian song writers and musicians of Nashville.

More interesting information about the World Convention of Christian-Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ is found on their website @www.worldconvention.org.

- * **Dr. Rubel Shelly**, associated with **Rochester College**, is an executive member of the board and **Dr. Douglas Foster of Abilene Christian University** is a Vice President of the organization.
- * Information on the Convention website credits the **Jubilee** lectureships held in Nashville and guided by Rubel Shelly and his Woodmont Hills Church; **The North American Restoration Forums** hosted by the Independent Christian Churches in which a number of our ecumenical-minded preachers participated and **Lubbock Christian University**, who hosted one of those sessions, as proof that our acappella churches are receptive to reunion.
- * In their “Our Story” article, they write, “In the 1960s a further division in the Christian Church occurred culminating in the **more liberal and ecumenical group** restructuring as the Disciples of Christ...”
- * It states, “**Our family (i.e., Disciples of Christ jhw) have played a major part in the ecumenical movement.**”
- * In the early 1980’s in the United Kingdom, “the majority of our cooperative churches (Disciples) joined the United Reformed Church” which consists of Disciples, Presbyterians and Congregational Churches.

What shall we who love the Church of Christ make of all of this?

- * It shows us the wellspring from whence our change movement is flowing. Rubel Shelly and the administration and bible department of Abilene Christian University are leading the pack.
- * It shows us the degree to which our progressives are willing to go in their quest for unity with the Christian Churches. At first all the participants swore there was no place for the liberal Disciples in their movement. Now they are welcomed as brothers.
- * It shows us that our change agents really have no problem with fellowshiping the most extreme of the skeptical, religious liberals which are dominant in the ranks of the Disciples of Christ.
- * It shows us the ultimate destination of their unity movement. First it was with the Independent Christian Churches. Now it is with the Disciples. Already some are fellowshiping the Evangelical denominations. Next will be with the Disciples in the Ecumenical Movement in groups like the World Council of Churches where doctrine doesn’t matter at all. Eventually it will reach out to embrace any willing religion, Christian or not. Such thinking is imbedded in the Emergent Church Movement which some of our change agents are already embracing.

Keep the above information in mind when you hear the folks at Abilene, Pepperdine, Lipscomb University and Rochester College proclaiming their loyalty to the Bible, to the church and to our Restoration Movement. When you

hear or read works of the promoters of change, keep in mind what they really have in mind and where they are headed. Let no man deceive you (II Thess. 2:3). JHW

37.

HEARTFELT RELIGION

In the postmodern world of the 21st century emotion is in and reason is out. Feelings trump facts as wandering, famished souls reach out for something spiritual and eternal to cling to.

The latest fad in the world of denominationalism is “contemplative spirituality.” Those who are children in mind and faith are seen in darkened rooms with lighted candles hoping to find God. Others are heard chanting their one word mantras such as “Jesus” repeated 300 times. They are searching for “silence” or the “thin line” where God might be found. Others are strolling through their labyrinth with heads bowed, reaching for the unknown God. Some are sitting on an isolated hill or in a deep forest glade hoping to find God. Multitudes are reading books on Contemplative Spirituality, flocking to Emergent Churches, attending seminars and lectureship to hear speakers weave new a tapestry of faith made up of Hindu and Buddhist, New Age and Medieval Catholic practices advertised to make a postmodern soul find God in his heart.

Across town a small band of Christians go about their worship and daily activities rejoicing in their faith which is truly a heartfelt experience.

- * They love the Lord God **with all their heart**, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30).
- * From the day of their conversion to the present they **obey from the heart** that form of teaching given by Christ (Rom. 6:17).
- * When they sin and fall short of God’s expectations their **hearts are filled with godly sorrow** which works repentance in their lives (II Cor. 7:10).
- * When they assemble to worship on the Lord’s Day, they “**make a joyful noise unto Jehovah**” and serve Him with gladness (Ps. 100:1). Their mouths **praise God with “joyful lips”** (Ps. 63:5).
- * When they present their gifts and offerings to God, **they cheerfully do so** (II Cor. 9:7) and are blessed.
- * When they pause to remember the great sacrifice of their Savior on Calvary, their hearts are filled with tender memories and thoughts that often **stir their deepest emotions and bring tears to their eyes** (I Cor. 11:23-25).
- * When sacred Scripture is studied and taught they **rejoice in the way of His testimonies** (Ps. 119:14). **His Word they lay up in their hearts** that they might not sin against Him (Ps. 11:11). They are **quickened and strengthened by His Word** (119:25, 28). They **long for His precepts** (119:40). **His Word provides them spiritual light and guidance** for their life’s journey (119:105, 130).
- * They **experience the “peace of God** which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7), not only while in worship, but in every day and experience of their lives.
- * They **rejoice in the Lord always** (Phil. 4:4).
- * The Holy Spirit in their lives **sheds the love of God in their hearts** (Rom. 5:5).
- * The indwelling **Spirit provides them moral and spiritual strength** (Eph. 3:16). They find they can do all things required of them through him that strengtheneth them (Phil. 4:13).
- * They come to **know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge** and are **filled unto all the fulness of God** (Eph. 3:19). This enables them to love humanity including their enemies (Matt. 22:39; 5:44). They love their families and their fellow-Christians and live to serve them.

They don’t need a contrived “heart-felt experience.” They don’t need someone to manipulate their minds and hearts. They don’t need to borrow practices from paganism, New Age practitioners, or medieval Catholic mystics to stir up their hearts. Their spiritual happiness is derived from being children of the Living God and by believing and practicing the faith once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). We plead with all those who have been enticed to seek happiness in the mystical fountains of paganism to come back to Jesus, the only reliable source of “living waters” (John 7:38).

REACHING FOR GOD THROUGH CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY

A half century ago C. S. Lewis, the Don of Oxford, observed that the hearts of all men seem to incline toward pantheism. In his day the average conservative Protestant would have thought his observation fanciful, even outlandish. Most members of the church of Christ would have thought it absurd. But if we flash forward to the present, Lewis' observation is no longer outlandish or preposterous. While the denominations of mainstream Protestantism are lost in the swamp of skepticism and unbelief, many evangelical preachers are leading their flocks into the misty twilight of contemplative spirituality borrowed from pagan Hinduism and medieval Catholicism. These practices have come into those churches via New Age practitioners of contemporary America.

Weary with worship prescribed by the Holy Spirit and jaded with their humanly devised methods of worship, many folks are hungering for a soul-tingling mystical experience. Postmodern evangelicals are offering them all kinds of mystical exercises. They use ancient mystical practices to induce altered states of consciousness (often described as *the silence*). While the current version is dressed in Christian terminology, the basic premise of contemplative spirituality is pantheism which asserts that "God is all" and all is God. The next step is called *panentheism* which means "God is *in* all," including those pursuing Him through this medium of meditative prayer.

Among the mystical experiences being promoted are:

- * Taize Worship. A candle light service in a darkened room design to stir the soul to high emotion.
- * Zoe Worship. A program special songs, prayers and meditations considered to be superior to traditional worship.
- * Breath Prayers. These are brief prayers repeated over and over to oneself.
- * Mantras, a word or phrase used in meditation to induced an altered state of mind.
- * Centering, efforts by contemplation to discover the center of your soul in relation to God.
- * Prayer Labyrinths. Labyrinths in which one walks or contemplates while in deep prayer and meditation.
- * Lectio-Divina. The repeated reading of a single verse of scripture seeking for some new or different meaning than would normally meet the eye. A word or phrase of the verse might be chosen and repeated endlessly in hopes that the Holy Spirit will speak to you.

Change agents operating among churches of Christ are eagerly following the promoters of the Church Growth Movement, the "Emergent Church" program and similar movements. (The Abilene Christian University Lectures (9/16-19/07) promotes many of these themes). In these, contemplative spirituality is the fad of the day. Some are already utilizing contemplative methods to enhance their withered spiritual lives. Without doubt, there will be more experimentation in various forms of contemplative spirituality as they seek for some new experience with or from God, outside of and without his written Word. What they find is not a revelation from God. Rather, it is the ruminations of their own minds and hearts. They find justification for the desires of their hearts. God paints an unflattering picture of the human heart. It is depicted as "deceitful above all things, and it is exceeding corrupt..." (Jer. 17:9). Alienated from God, the thoughts of man's "heart are only evil continually" (Gen.6:5).

One cannot help but wonder what will be the final destination of those on the mystical road of contemplation? How long will it be before we hear of pilgrimages to sacred sites, solitary vigils in the wilderness, sackcloth and fasting, prayer beads and incense, monasteries and nunneries? They can't be too far behind since they are part of the contemplative spirituality package. JHW

"Falsehood often lurks upon the tongue of him, who by his self-praise, seeks to enhance his value in the eyes of others" (J. G. Bennett).

MANIPULATED WORDS DECEIVE THE UNPERCEPTIVE

For two hundred years, members of the Church of Christ have eschewed denominationalism. They judged it to be a sinful division of the body of Christ and a thing to be avoided. They defended the church and her faith against denominational assaults. They wanted to be Christians, nothing more or less (I Pet. 4:16). They stoutly denied they were denominational. Now a new generation of teachers and preachers has arisen among us who yearn to be accepted as respectable equals by their denominational neighbors. To achieve their wishes they must confess that they too are denominational. To keep their jobs and their standing among Churches of Christ, they must convince them that such is not a bad thing. To do this, they have set about to convince us that we actually are a denomination, even though we might not have realized the fact. If they are successful, then we cannot condemn them for openly claiming themselves to be the same.

Their ploy is a selective use of the word “denominate” which is defined “to give a name to.” The deception is expressed thusly:

1. To denominate means to name.
2. But the Church of Christ has a name,
3. Therefore the Church of Christ is a denomination.

The flaw is in the conclusion which does not logically follow from the premises. To see the absurdity of their reasoning, consider the following:

1. To denominate means to name.
2. But Mr. & Mrs. Smith named their son William,
3. Therefore William is a denomination.

In the definition of “denomination” we have a more meaningful explanation. It is “a religious sect or body having a common faith and organization, and designated by a distinctive name” (**Oxford English Dictionary**). This partially describes a denomination. The practical usage of the word by leaders of the many denominations demonstrates the real meaning. Each separate denomination considers itself as only a part of the universal Church of Christ. All who know and respect the Bible find the idea in conflict with the prayer of Christ (John 17:20) and condemned by Paul. To the divided Corinthians he wrote, “Each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?” (I Cor. 1:12-13). To separate from other Christians and identify oneself with certain men or practices, Paul condemns as walking “after the manner of men” (I Cor. 3:3-4).

Denominationalism is wrong on many counts. It is divisive. It confuses those who need to hear the simple, unadulterated gospel message of Christ. They are in competition with the true Church of Christ. They promote teachings and practices foreign to those of Christ (II John 9-11). They bring derision and contempt on the name of Christ by their conflicts and competition. It is this that we reject as sinful. Change agents know this. But they crave acceptance by their denominational peers. To make their pursuit of that worldly prize less contemptible, they use trickery to mislead careless souls and convince them that they are already a denomination.

Shame, Shame! Shame for their deception. Shame for their desire to be that which Christ’s Word condemns. Shame for their lack of respect for the Church of Christ which is his precious bride (Eph. 5:23). Never forget that, “Deceivers are the most dangerous members of society—They trifle with the best affections of our nature and violate the most sacred obligations” (Geo. Crabbe). JHW

Jehovah hates the person who soweth discord among brethren, such is abomination unto him (Prov. 6:16,19).

PARABLE OF SPARKY THE DOG

I once had a neighbor who had a pet dog named Sparky. Sparky was a Yorkshire terrier who loved to bark. When anyone or anything came down our street Sparky charged to his fence yapping, growling like a ferocious beast. In fact he barked so much he was a nuisance to all the neighbors. But if a stray dog rushed to the fence and returned the challenge, Sparky would run and hide. For a few moments at least he was stone silent. If a person opened the gate and entered the yard Sparky fled to the back of the house. The fact is Sparky was a cowardly little canine who only barked when he was safe inside his fenced yard. His courage melted when his challenge was met.

Sparky was a like a lot of preachers. They too bark loudly in their own pulpits, their bulletins, or to fellow-Christians who share their views. But put them out in the world, where real live adversaries can respond, or where false-teachers can answer them and they lose their voices. They prefer the safety of their pulpit and their circle of friends. Isaiah blasted some of his fellow prophets saying, "they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark..." (Is. 56:10). As change agents press their campaign to capture Christians, congregations and schools throughout the land, we have a dearth of preachers willing to stand up and confront them. Some will bark loudly, privately, at their home church or at lectureships of like-minded conservatives, but beyond that they are silent.

We desperately need good men who will take the message of defending and preserving the fundamentals of the faith beyond their meeting house walls. Courageous men are needed to respond to the attacks of the promoters of change.

- * Use the mail to send your response to the leaders of other congregations, especially those who might not share your point of view.
- * Use the email to send your responses to fellow-Christians around the world.
- * Use your phone to converse with those who might be weakening. Encourage them. Give them reasons for the faith we hold. Show them the fallacies of the change agenda.
- * Write well-researched pieces for our gospel papers that set forth the ancient truths of New Testament Christianity as well as responding to the errors of the change agents.
- * Write quality books that analyze and expose the follies of the change agenda and declare the old-time gospel.
- * Write thoughtful letters to fellow-preachers, elders and brethren who are dabbling with the change program, pointing out the dangers of so doing.
- * Write letters or make phone calls to the presidents of our Christian Schools who are leaning toward the change movement.
- * Write letters to editors of gospel papers, encouraging them to be steadfast. Kindly reprove them in a brotherly way if they are giving aid and comfort to promoters of change.
- * Speak up at your local preacher's meeting and in a kind but firm way, let your brethren know what your convictions are and that you will never abandon the old paths.
- * When you go to a college lectureship or any other gathering of Christian friends, don't hide your light. Look for opportunities to encourage others to stand fast in the faith. Let them know you are not about to yield. Try to involve them to get involved in the struggle to save the church from apostasy.
- * When you encounter a brother or sister who has been influenced by agents of change, be sure to grasp the opportunity to speak with them and try to win them back to the solid foundation of biblical truth.
- * When you find yourself in the presence of a champion of change, don't be like Sparky. Speak up. Don't bite your tongue. You need not be a champion debater, you need not be a scholar. But you can speak up and confess you faith in the Master's authority, his holy Word and his blessed church. Like Paul, be set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:16). Remember the hymn we often sing, "I'm Not Ashamed to Own My Lord, nor to defend his cause." Let this be your daily commitment. JHW

COME LET US BUILD US A MISSIONAL CHURCH

The sophisticated philosophers of Athens “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). A similar state of mind prevails in some preachers and teachers of God’s Word. A church, a faith or worship that is upwards of 2,000 years old cannot satisfy their postmodern hearts and minds. They yearn for a new kind of church, new worship and new doctrine, more pleasing to them. Even the vocabulary of the Bible and traditional Christianity is far too narrow for those with this neurosis. They must find new words to express their new faith. The latest fad among these folks is the quest for a *missional church*.

Just what is a missional church? Jason Zahariades defines “A missional community is a group of Jesus’ apprentices who so trust his brilliance and mastery of life, that they learn from him how to be like him for the sake of the world.” He goes on to say, “In a missional community, the church is God’s sent people. That means when everything is stripped away...the people are the church and the church is the people” (**What is a Missional Community?**)

If from this we strip away the peculiar terminology of this new movement it says, “A Christian community is a band of Jesus’ disciples who believe in and trust him and wish to become like him so they can serve the world on his behalf.” Again it says a true church of Christ is an evangelistic body of Christians. They understand that to be his disciples we must go into all the world with the gospel to save lost humanity. With this message we have no quarrel. It is that we have always believed and taught. But this is just the logo on the package. It is what is inside that we question.

Ken Hammond, in **Characteristics of a Missional Church**, sees the missional movement as “an emerging community rising or breaking away from Christendom...Some are calling this the second reformation. I call it a revolution.” Such a reformation is no doubt needed for the staid, stale denominational bodies that have long since lost their faith and abandoned their heavenly mission. Likewise it would be of some value to those Churches of Christ that have lost their faith in the authority of God’s Word, corrupted their worship and abandoned their sacred mission. The problem is, it is not a back to the Bible reformation, it is an adaptation to and embracing of postmodernism

Hammond shows that the missional concept is really the union of postmodernism with Christianity. “...the missional church is (on a) journey with a postmodern culture that says “which god?” “Postmodernists recognize the world had changed and that you have to adapt and flow with what’s happening. It’s about niche needs in a cosmic growing world” (Hammond). “Postmodern preachers don’t populate the pews; they connect people to the living Christ. Postmodern evangelism doesn’t say to the world, ‘come to church.’ ...It is not I have Jesus and you don’t. How can I get you here so that I can give you my Jesus? But rather you already know Jesus. How can I help you see and know what you already know...”

Hammon says, “The missional church is normally messy, unpredictable and creative in its content and presentation.” This is his perspective from inside the missional camp. Such a situation describes a church that has lost its way and is trying to travel without the guidance of God’s Word. This sounds more like the situation the Corinthian church fell into. Paul reminded them that all things should be done decently and in order (I Cor. 14:40) because God is not a God of confusion (I Cor. 14:33).

A missional church “requires leadership from within the community rather than from above it.” (**Zahariades**). By this they mean a congregation in which leaders have no authority save the will of the flock. Leaders (elders and preachers) demonstrate this “by yielding to community members as Christ ministers through them.” (**Ibid**). To the missional mind the sacred writer had it all wrong when he said, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls” (Heb.13:17). To them it is not a matter of what saith the Lord, but what do we think and want? This aspect of the missional concept is especially appealing to immature young adults who resent leadership

from those older and wiser than themselves.

In the missional world “the popular model of pastor as CEO is brain dead...This philosophy will only hurt the church in the long run” (*Ibid*). “A missional church is not a place where “professionals” are hired to do all the work of the church.” (*Friend of Missional blog*). “The missional church believes in the priesthood of all believers...” (Ken Hammond. *Characteristics of the Missional Church*). Since our promoters of change are strong on senior ministers with support staff, these observations by professional missionalists make it clear that churches employing senior ministers with a large support staff are not genuine missional churches.

A missional church eschews “marketing, promotion, advertising, consumerism and selfish materialism. (*Zahariades*). Missional is “not about big programs and organizations to accomplish God’s missionary purpose” (*Friends of Missional*). This tells us that the typical congregation caught up in the change movement cannot be missional for they depend on the marketing, promotion, advertising, consumerism and big programs and organization to reach their goals.

Alan Hirsch writes, “the word ‘missional,’ ...was quickly co-opted by those wishing to find new and trendy tags for what they themselves were doing, be they missional or not.” Me thinks he has correctly tagged our brethren who are proclaiming themselves to be a missional church! It is highly regarded by their denominational neighbors, and most of their brethren haven’t a clue what it stands for! JHW

*Jason Zahariades: www.theofframp.org/missional_comm.html

* Ken Hammond, John Mark Ministries

* Friend of Missional Blog by the Blind Beggar

42.

WHO IS HAVING AN IDENTITY CRISIS?

The March 2007 issue of *The Christian Chronicle* featured an article by Bobby Ross, headed, ‘**Churches Face ‘Identity Crisis.’** To prove his point he interviewed a number of people associated with churches caught up in the change movement. They do have an identity crisis. Comments from those of traditional Churches of Christ, suggest they don’t seem to have the problem.

Among the painful doubts that must be faced by Christians who are caught in the currents of change are the following:

- * Am I a member of the church which Christ built and will save, or am I a member of a church established by Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, neither of whom can save me?
- * Am I a Christian in the biblical sense of that word, or am I a Protestant Evangelical?
- * If the Church of Christ is actually a denomination, as our change agents say, then what right do we have to exist?
- * Must my loved ones be baptized to receive God’s saving grace, or will they get to heaven without baptism?
- * Are Protestant and Catholic Churches equally pleasing to God as the Church of Christ? If so why should I stay with the Church of Christ?
- * Has my previous faith and worship been Bible centered or has it been all a matter of human tradition?
- * Can I trust my Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, or does it contain mistakes and contradictions?
- * Was the Christian faith once for all times delivered to the church (Jude 3), or does it have to be changed and adjusted when new world-views arise?
- * Are the commands and prohibitions of God to be understood as absolutes or are they all relative and left up to me to accept or reject?
- * Were my grandparents and parents true Christians when they heard the gospel, believed it, repented of their sins and were immersed for the forgiveness of their sins?
- * If a Christian woman insists that the prohibition against women teaching or having authority over men (I Tim. 2:11-12) does not apply to her and proceeds to do that, is she defying God? Is it a sin to defy God?
- * If the congregation of the Church of Christ in which I grew up and was baptized should change its name, change its

worship and faith, is it still a Church of Christ?

* If the preacher and elders of my congregation are introducing new and strange teachings and practices that I cannot verify by scripture, do I sin by staying with them?

* If we can use the Old Testament to justify the use of instruments in music, could we not also use it to justify the burning of incense and candles, having a separate priesthood and special garments for them?

* If, because God does not say, "Thou shalt not use instruments" we can use them, could we not baptize babies since He does not say "Thou shalt not baptize babies?"

* If the New Testament is not the law of Christ, how should I understand those verses that speak of the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)?

* If we borrow mystical practices of meditation and contemplation from pagans, does that make us in some way pagan?

* If the Church of Christ is so terribly flawed, as my change teachers insist, and if denominational churches are so wonderful and good, why should I stay with the bad rather than go to that which is better?

* Am I being honest and truthful if I accept a position with a traditional Church of Christ when my intentions are to change them into a contemporary, denominational church?

Disciples who are forced to wrestle with such profound questions are going to face an identity crisis. If they have unseared consciences they might even feel shame, guilt or remorse. We can expect to see many of them leave the Church of Christ and gravitate to denominational bodies. Some will drift into churches with "New Age" tendencies and mystical practices. Those who know the truth of God and believe and act upon it will have no such conflict (John 8:32). They will continue to strive to practice in their lives and discipleship the teachings of Christ as revealed in the New Testament (Matt. 28:20). They will know they are members of Christ's one true church (Matt. 16:18) and they will seek to bring others to the Savior and his church. When all around them is change and decay, they will hold to God's unchanging hand. They will look to his unchanging Son and chart their course by His unchanging Word (Matt. 24:35). JHW

43.

THE DANGER OF DECADENCE

To be decadent is to be "marked by decay or decline." The term is derived from the word "decay" which means "a gradual decline in strength, soundness, or prosperity, or in degree of excellence or perfection." "A wasting or wearing away, or ruin" (Webster).

Decadence is seen in many dimensions of life. Moral decadence occurs when people abandon the higher, accepted moral, ethical standards of their society and conduct themselves in a way that is morally inferior. Decadence occurs first in the minds of people as they mentally embrace that which is forbidden or frowned upon by the moral and spiritual leaders of their society and the population at large. They then reflect this embrace of lower standards in their conduct. Decadence is generally invasive. The impetus comes to folks from without, from sources beyond themselves. The vices of other nations, communities or social groups have a way of gradually affecting those beyond their borders. Like some deadly virus that a traveler brings back from a distant land, some bring home attitudes and conduct that previously were viewed as unfit and unsuitable for citizens.

When sufficient numbers of a community embrace decadence it becomes evident in their literature, music, theater, movies and a coarsening of public conversation. That which was hitherto considered shameful is now tolerated. It is observable in personal conduct of people of all stations in things such as lying, cheating, stealing, drunkenness, use of illicit drugs, homosexual and heterosexual immorality, idleness, wastefulness and violence. In the past they would be scorned and deemed unworthy citizens for such behavior, now their conduct is accepted. Decadence advances slowly. Usually it takes a generation or two before it finally reaches and establishes its new, lower standards of social conduct.

Decadence can also be observed in the realm of religion. It occurs when religious folks abandon the spiritual standards

to which they or their ancestors once pledged themselves. Having done that, they embrace that which is base and inferior in quality and value. Medieval Catholicism was decadent as was the Anglican Church in the days of the Wesleyan revolution. To a lesser degree, other denominations have experienced this kind of decay. When spiritual leaders fail to lead their people to higher planes of righteousness, they sink deeper into depravity. Frequently their leaders gradually embrace the lower standards of conduct for themselves. This decadence can be seen both in the abandonment of their doctrinal standards and those of personal piety and devotion.

Normally the trend of conduct is downward. Over a period of time a people spiral downward from the high and noble ideals and standards of their ancestors. A people who were once committed to Christ, and loyal to his word, can forfeit that commitment. People whose lives were once noted for sober, righteous and godly living can turn to a life of indulgence and sin.

When decadence becomes the common, prevailing standard, an entire nation or society is decadent. This happened to ancient Israel on several occasions. It happened to virtually every nation of the past. It is happening all about us today. In Noah's day, the entire human race became so decadent they had no choice but to destroy them (Gen. 6:6-7). Sodom and Gomorrah were sunken in decadence and for it they perished (Gen. 18:20; 19:24).

Decadent people bring judgment on themselves. The moral reprobate often destroys his health. He loses the respect of his family and decent neighbors. He puts himself in jeopardy of God's eternal judgment (Gal. 5:21). Decadent churches lose their standing before God, even if they enjoy popularity and success in the eyes of their decadent neighbors (Rev. 3:1-3). They too will face the God they have dishonored by their departure from his holy standards.

Since the normal tendency is toward decay, individuals and congregations must "strive to enter in by the narrow door" (Luke 13:24). We must stretch forward to the things which are before us, and press on toward the goal of the high calling of God in Christ (Phil. 3:13-14). We must discipline ourselves lest we be rejected (I Cor. 9:27). Only those who are faithful unto death will receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). JHW

44.

A REFRESHER COURSE FOR A CHALLENGED CHANGE AGENT

Dear Brother Anonymous: Thank you for writing and sharing your progressive views with me. After reading your diatribe, I wonder if you might be on some strong medication? Your comments make it evident that you neither understand the message of the New Testament nor the danger of the doctrine you have embraced. Neither do you understand the history of our back to the Bible movement and you certainly do not understand what I am saying or doing in these weekly lessons.

You say that neither Jesus nor the apostles addressed any of the issues on which we now waste our time. "They were concerned about those that were distorting the fabric of the gospel, but rarely addressed mechanical issues of worship." As a brief refresher course, **I remind you** that :

* Jesus said that acceptable worship "must" be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

* Luke wrote that the first congregation continued steadfastly in the "apostles" teaching." (Acts 2:42).

* Paul wrote of singing and making melody in your heart (Eph. 5:19)

* He devoted much attention to the proper way to remember Christ's death in communion (I Cor. 11:23-34). He pointed out that there are some things that make our worship unacceptable to God (I Cor. 11:17-22).

* He made it clear that women are not to teach nor have authority over men when they assemble (I Tim. 2:11-12).

* He wrote about proper decorum in worship in I Corinthians 11-14. This included women recognizing the male leadership, avoiding confusion in worship and forbidding women from expressing themselves in the assemblies.

* He pointed out that the things he wrote were the commands of the Lord (I Cor. 14:37) and that we are not to go beyond the things that are written (I Cor. 4:6, ASV).

All of these things are applicable to the innovations being introduced by men such as yourself.

I oppose the denominational teachings and practices of the change agents because Jude told me to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered (Jude 3) and because Paul urged me to fight the good fight of the faith (I Tim. 6:12). I question their innovations because they do not measure up the pattern of sound words given by the apostles (II Tim. 1:13).

Promoters of change insist they are freeing Christians to worship as feels good to them. This spirit reminds me of those teachers of whom Peter wrote: There were “promising them liberty, while they themselves are bond-servants of corruption” (II Pet. 2:19).

As to traditions, may I remind you that there are three kinds of traditions. There are those handed down from the apostles (II Thess. 2:15). There are those that are traditions of men that make void the word of God (Matt. 15:6-9). There are harmless traditions that we adopt for the orderly implementation of spiritual duties. In this category are such things as times for assembly, length of time allotted for each service, etc. The problem with our change agents is that they do not perceive these distinctions in the various kinds of traditions. They challenge or ignore some of the traditions handed down from the Apostles...claiming they are traditions of men. They are determined to cast out our commonly accepted, harmless traditions while imposing their own traditions in their place. The first case is sin, the second is arrogance.

No one but change agents attribute to Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone a position of spiritual eminence in the church. They like to say that we are the “Stone-Campbell Movement” and that those two men are the founders of the Church of Christ denomination or sect. Neither of those godly men made such a claim. Campbell is on record refuting it. No faithful member of the Church of Christ has ever made such a foolish statement. They were great men of God. They escaped the errors of denominationalism that change agents are eager to embrace. They and other faithful servants of the past deserve our respect for the work they did that paved the way for us. It is shameful for small minded, ungrateful men to cast aspersions on them.

In first century Judaism there were the ultraconservative , legalistic Pharisees and the liberal Sadducees. Jesus aligned himself with neither. He was opposed by both. Both he rebuked. In contemporary Christianity there are legalists and liberals. Both are wrong. Faithful Christians will avoid either ditch, as they march onward on the straitened and narrow road of truth (Matt. 7:14; Prov. 4:27). I pray that you will walk that straitened road of truth. Remember that only the few who do so will reach the desired destination of eternal life!

As was the practice of our brother Paul, I sign my name to letters I write (II Thess. 3:17).
With best wishes in Christ, I am your brother, John Waddey

45.

DESTRUCTIVE EPIDEMICS

Our generation is keenly aware of the meaning of “epidemic.” The destructive power of epidemics has been demonstrated by the AIDS virus that has brought death to hundreds of thousands. As this epidemic has swept around the world, it has reminded us of the causes, progress and end results of such plagues.

First there is the infection and incubation. Then the Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection appears, followed by the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. There is the fitful struggle of the body to escape the clutches of the disease. Then comes death. Hundreds of thousands of graves proclaim the importance of understanding this plague and the need to avoid situations where it might be contracted.

This sad story is remarkably similar to an epidemic now sweeping through the Churches of Christ. It has been given the label of “Change Movement.” Certain identifiable factors leave people vulnerable to this virus of change. Most

prominent among them are man's ancient and universal tendency toward pride, arrogance and rebellion against the authority of God and the standards set by Him.

Another is the acceptance of a new world-view as a basis for life's decisions and a new way of interpreting the Word of God. This world-view is called **Postmodernism**. While only recently has it come to dominate our society, many of its integral parts have been around a century or more. Among its fatal factors are its teachings that all truth is relative, that there are no absolute moral or spiritual truths, and that decisions are best made subjectively rather than by some objective standard. Thus, per this doctrine man, not God, is the final determiner of truth. This false system now is dominant in secular schools of higher learning and in some of the seminaries where preachers seek higher education. Like some vile disease, this system has spread into some of our schools and congregations; brought back by teachers and preachers who were infected in their pursuit of advanced education.

When the deadly virus of change sets in, it breaks down and destroys respect for the standards set forth by Christ, the founder of the church (Matt. 16:18). The boundaries he set for his people are trampled down as the people rush toward forbidden pastures.

Symptoms of those infected with the change virus are loss of humility and worldly pride (I Tim. 3:6). Victims find it difficult to process and understand simple instructions. They have trouble obeying rules. Those infected eventually come to despise Christ's church. They no longer want to wear his name or be identified with his people. They seek aid, comfort and pleasure with other religious bodies. They depart from the faith (I Tim. 4:1-4). They turn away from the holy commandments delivered unto them (II Pet. 2:21). With spirits wasted by their destructive disease, they wander off and eventually die spiritually.

Some of the victims of this infection, (primarily preachers and professors), have knowingly embraced it and have only themselves to blame for their condition. However, many others, namely students in Christian Schools and members of congregations where such carriers preach, are unaware of the danger they are exposed to. They suffer because of the deceitful work of their spiritual teachers (Rom. 16:17-18). It is for them that we pursue this **Christianity: Then and Now** project. Hopefully we can immunize many before they are exposed to this disease and thus save them from the deadly infection. JHW

46.

THE CONVICTION IT TAKES TO WIN

Before this generation passes one of two things will have occurred:

- 1). The change agents will have been met, defeated and routed, or
- 2). They will have prevailed and the church we love will be left a broken and scattered remnant.

The victory will not be easily won, nor will the conflict be won by armchair soldiers. It will only be gained if a courageous and dedicated band of Christian soldiers commit themselves, without reservation, to their Lord and the welfare of his kingdom.

When the patriot fathers launched the revolution that gave birth to this nation, they pledged their "sacred honor, wealth and lives" to that cause (Declaration of Independence). It will take that same degree of dedication and commitment to save the church from the juggernaut of error that now threatens to destroy her.

Paul was willing to spend and be spent for the Cause he loved (II Cor. 12:15). Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it (Eph. 5:25). To win this battle that spirit must take hold of our hearts.

- * Truth must take precedence over error, no matter how popular the error may be.
- * Loyalty to Christ must take priority over loyalty to men and institutions, no matter how strong the bonds of friendship and affection may be.
- * The authority of Scriptures must preempt the will of men in all matters relating to our faith, worship and practice (Gal.

1:10). To preach, to accept, to tolerate another gospel is more than a simple choice it is to be alienated from and anathema to God (Gal. 1:8).

* The kingdom of Christ must be cherished more than jobs, brotherhood recognition, popularity and worldly success. If we are striving to please men (we) should not be servants of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

* "The old paths" of Scripture must be valued more than the new paths of the "change agents" (Jer. 6:16). The old came from Christ; they are plainly set forth in Scripture. They can be followed in full confidence. The new paths of the professors of change have as their authority the uninspired assertions of men who aren't sure about the inerrancy of God's Word (See *God's Holy Fire*, By K. L. Cukrowski, M. W. Hamilton and J. W. Thompson of Abilene Christian University, pub. By ACU Press, pp. 39-44). Nor are they sure of the primacy of the new Covenant of Christ over the Old Covenant of Moses.

The battle being thrust upon us will be intense. It will result in the rise and fall of many in the Israel of God. False teachers who have already attained positions of power and influence are not likely to meekly surrender and walk away. It will require spiritual warfare on a large scale to dislodge them. As in Gideon's day, many will have no stomach for the conflict. The outcome will depend on a Gideon's band of 300 brave men to meet and rout them. The most pressing question of the day is where will you be found in the day of battle? JHW

47.

PARABLE OF THE BEES AND THE BOXER

Here in Arizona, we have those fierce Africanized honey bees you have heard about. They love to build their hives near where people live. Yesterday's news told of an attack by a swarm of killer bees. They first attacked two young boys playing in their yard. Although they were stung, the kids were able to get inside their house and survived. Unfortunately their two pet dogs were left to fend for themselves. One of them was a Boxer breed. One or two bees would have only been a nuisance to the big Boxer. But when several thousand swarmed over him, the poor creature died a painful death.

The lessons we draw from this story are two: First, one kook or crank in a church is a nuisance. But if there are a multitude of them, they can overwhelm the congregation and destroy it. One false teacher can be kept at bay but when they recruit a large following they can capture and take control of a once-faithful church. Our brotherhood can deal with a few scattered heretics, but when their numbers increase or they unite their efforts, they are as dangerous as a swarm of Africanized bees. Second, one Christian will not have a very big impact on sin and error in his community or church, but if many Christians band themselves together in a common cause they can defeat a powerful enemy and drive him from their midst. Today the church at large is troubled by a bold and brazen band of false teachers who would corrupt her faith, worship and practice. To defeat them, every faithful child of God must unite to oppose and defeat them. With God's help we can recapture that which already has been lost and drive these promoters of error from our ranks. JHW

"When I hear of applauding at baptisms or during worship, I attribute this practice not so much to malice as to ignorance and being led down the wrong path by youth workers and college teachers who crave something new and different for their religious experience.

I ask those trying to justify this practice if they would applaud at their mother's funeral? If not why? Would they have applauded at Christ's death and burial? Why not? A baptism is a sacred, symbolic re-enactment of the death and burial of Christ. Is that an appropriate time for applause?" JHW

48.

SHOULD CHANGE AGENTS BE COUNTED AS OUR BROTHERS IN CHRIST?

Dear Bro. John: Should we address as brothers, those who are creating problems by trying to impose their changes on the church? Cotter

Dear Bro. Cotter: The change agents in our midst are erring brothers. Think of them just as you would a member of your immediate family who had turned to a life of sin and rebellion. Both of them are wrong, both of them are harmful, both are not in good standing, but both are still our brothers. One can be a brother in Christ and be out of fellowship. Still he is our brother because he has been born into the same spiritual family (John 3:3-5) and he has the same spiritual Father as do we. When Paul instructed the Corinthians to withdraw their fellowship from the immoral man, note that he said, "If any man that is **named a brother** be a fornicator," etc. (I Cor. 5:11). To the Thessalonians, after instructing them to withdraw from the person walking disorderly (II Thess. 3:6), Paul concludes by saying, "yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (II Thess. 3:15). JHW

49.

A COUNTER-CULTURAL CHURCH

"Counter-cultural" is a popular buzz word in the circle of change agents. Exponents of change use this term when criticizing the Churches of Christ that have not embraced their new agenda. (See this expressed in **Kingdom Come** by John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine, 2006).

Counter-cultural is a term with imprecise meaning. It can mean different things to different people. Culture is the world-view, the values, mores and customs of the society in which we live. It includes a common language, a common loyalty to one's nation and laws. It is expressed in art and music and transmitted to children and immigrants through parents, schools and churches. As the ocean is to the fish, so his culture is to a person. In a nation such as ours, there are hundreds of sub-cultures within the larger America culture. These are based on such things as ethnicity, religion and vocation. No one living in a particular country can completely escape the prevailing culture. He can reject objectionable aspects thereof. He can find or develop his own sub-culture to be a part of. He can renounce and fight against it. But his culture is as pervasive as the air he breathes. This is also true of Christians and the Church of Christ.

There is a sense in which every congregation reflects the culture in which it exists. Should the church absorb the sinful aspects of its cultural environment it will stand condemned. If, however, it reflects culturalisms that are good or harmless, no charge can be laid against it. This can be seen in the following. A church of Christ in America will most likely speak English. It's members will reflect America hair and clothing styles. The food they eat will be typical US fare. The church's meeting place will reflect the contemporary style of American religious architecture. It will be evident in the transportation we use and our business methods. It will be seen in the businesses where we shop.

Even the style of our worship will reflect the culture in which we live. The time of day and length of our services are culturally determined. The kind of hymns we sing and the way our sermons are delivered are influenced by our culture. One need not go abroad to see this truth. If you are of Anglo-European descent, just go and visit a congregation whose membership is predominantly Black. A person from the deep-South can see it when visiting a church in New England or California and vis-a-versa. Members of an affluent congregation can visit a congregation in a poor neighborhood or a rural setting and see my point. So we all are part of our particular culture and reflect that in our personal and congregational life. These same points hold true for Christians in other nations of the world.

There is a sense in which every congregation and every Christian should be counter-cultural. In any and all areas where our culture is sinful we must refuse to embrace it. We must even stand against it (Eph. 5:11). Our citizenship in Christ's heavenly kingdom must always take precedence over our citizenship in the nation where we live (Phil. 3:20; Acts. 5:29). We must not be conformed to the world's sinful standards (Rom. 12:1-2). We live by the higher standard of King Jesus (Matt. 28:20). In some cultures the church finds a reasonably congenial environment. It has been thus here in America. In others she will be hard pressed. We must always remember that we are sojourners and pilgrims in this world and that we must abstain from the fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (I Pet. 2:11).

Being counter-cultural has nothing to do with wearing sandals, or primitive apparel. It has nothing to do with uncut hair for women and bearded men. It does not mean driving a buggy or living in a long cabin. It means being a genuine, dedicated Christian as we live in the midst of our culture. It means to be faithful to Christ in our teaching and worship. It means being busy advancing the kingdom of Christ as we go about our daily lives. It means loving our fellow-Christian as Christ loved us which will cause all men to know that we are His disciples (John 13:34-35).

It often happens that those who talk most about being counter-cultural are most like postmodern American culture and least like the church of which Christ is head and savior (Eph. 5:23). JHW

50.

THE GREATEST GENERATION

Tom Brokaw's best-selling book, **The Greatest Generation**, chronicles the story of the Americans who came to maturity in the 1930-s and 40s. They had survived the Great Depression. They fought and won the titanic struggle with Japan and Germany. They helped to restore the nation to a peacetime economy and built the greatest economic power in human history. They not only achieved great personal prosperity for all who were willing to work for it, they shared their wealth with the people of virtually all nations. They did this while maintaining a high level of personal morality and faith.

In this article I want to recognize, praise and honor a great generation of Christians. I speak of those saints who lived their lives in 20th century America.

- * These brothers and sisters were true to their faith in the face of a massive avalanche of apostasy. They saw some 85 % of their fellow-Christians and sister congregations abandoned the old paths of New Testament Christianity to embrace the golden calves of denominationalism.
- * From the ashes of that disaster they came back to recover what had been lost and rebuild the shattered walls of the kingdom. With dedicated zeal and sacrificial labor, by mid-century they had surpassed those who had chosen the broad road of denominationalism (Matt. 7:13-14).
- * They set their eyes on every community without a congregation of the church and set about to plant one in each of them.
- * They sent out a numerous and dedicated band of missionaries following World War II, circling the globe and planting thousands of congregations in over 175 nations. In many lands they have found great success, notably in India and Nigeria.
- * They utilized the mediums of radio and television to send the gospel message winging around the world.
- * They fought the combined forces of digression and denominationalism and claimed the field. So successful were they that by the middle of the century scarcely anyone could be found who would publicly oppose them.
- * They successfully engaged the champions of atheism and skepticism and proved the superiority of the Christian faith.
- * They established and nurtured to maturity a half dozen major schools that eventually reached university status and another half dozen quality colleges. In addition to those schools of higher learning they founded and operated more than a hundred successful elementary and secondary schools. They created a dozen schools of preaching that offered free ministerial training to worthy men.
- * They created campus programs and Bible Chairs to minister to students in state and private colleges and universities. They created numerous prison ministries.

- * They established and maintained numerous homes for widows, orphans and unwed mothers. They provided millions of dollars in benevolent assistance to those in distress, both at home and abroad.
- * They wrote and published an extensive and respectable body of literature that helped to shape the thinking of fellow-Christians, especially young ministers and new converts. Some of this circulated far beyond their own borders. In this category were the writings of Batsell Baxter, Jr., Burton Coffman, Jack P. Lewis, Neil Lightfoot and Homer Hailey.
- * They withstood the several varieties of legalists who tried to impose their narrow systems on the church.
- * They believed the restoration of the original aspects of Christianity to be valid and workable. They respected the Bible as the final and complete authority for the church and rejected the skeptical views of the liberal theologians.
- * They were satisfied to stand alone in their work and did not seek a compromise with denominationalism.
- * They hammered out their internal differences with pen and discussion.
- * They knew who they were and what they believed and were not ashamed of it.
- * From 159,658 members in 2,649 small, struggling congregations in 1906 they grew to 1.5 million in 9,500, congregations, many of them large and flourishing and most of them in attractive, well-situated houses of worship.

Churches of Christ of the 21st century are indebted to this great generation that preceded them. May we not forget their labors, their sacrifices and success, lest we prove ourselves unworthy of the treasure they bequeathed to us. May we not give credence or reception to those ungrateful souls who denigrate that great generation. JHW

51.

.SPOILED TREASURE

One of my favorite television shows is **Antiques Road Show**. Watching it I have marveled at the immense value of some old pieces of furniture, paintings, weapons, etc. I have also learned that the value of a rare antique can be greatly diminished if the owner should seek to modify or modernize it. The value of an ancient gun was reduced when the owner scrubbed away the patina. A rare chest lost much of its values when new knobs and handles replaced the originals. A set of china was lessened because a few pieces were missing. The value of a rare chair was reduced when the original cover was replaced. Hundreds of examples of this have been observed. This provides a valuable lesson for Christians living in the 21st century.

Christ's church is 2,000 years old. Her worship, doctrines and organization seem strange and obsolete to proud citizens of the 21st century. We can understand men of the world, whose carnal minds cannot appreciate the antiquity of the church. We are not surprised that in their arrogance they think they can improve on her by their schemes of modernizing. However, we are astonished at members of the Church of Christ who follow their shameful example.

The antiquity of the church is her glory, not her weakness. The church was founded in Jerusalem by the resurrected Lord in 33 A.D.(Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:1ff). The head of the church is Jesus who was enthroned 2,000 years ago (Eph. 1:22). The terms of entrance into the membership of the church are 2,000 years old. It was faith, repentance and baptism then and these essentials yet remain (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38). They have not been rescinded. The worship of the church was instituted two millennia ago by the direction of the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:12-16; 14:37). Man's needs are yet the same and the ordinances given have served the church well for 2,000 years and are still in force.

Just as the value of an antique is diminished when its possessor attempts to improve its substance or appearance, so a congregation of the Church of Christ loses its worth and even its identity when men try to improve her faith, worship or practices. The church in Thyatira had some in her midst who felt they could produce a better worship and lifestyle for the congregation. Jesus explained that he would deal harshly with the change agent and those who followed her. However, he would reward those who keep his works unto the end (Rev. 2:20-26).

Some think they can improve nature of the church by remodeling her after the pattern of Evangelical denominations.

Some think to improve her worship by adding instrumental music to her praise and using women in to lead in conducting worship (I Cor. 14:33-34; I Tim. 2:11-12). Some would renovate her communion by making it part of a common meal and observing it on weekdays and during marriage ceremonies. Some would improve her terms of membership by placing less emphasis on the divinely given terms of entrance and extending membership to some who have not met the terms announced by the apostles of Christ (Mark 16:16). Some wish to modify the biblical forms of church government.

Those instituting these changes may be sincere, yet their impact on their congregations is no less misguided and destructive that the fellow who refinished his piece of colonial era furniture or took it upon himself to touch up the valuable paint of a master artist.

I implore you to accept the church as Christ made her. Worship as he ordained. Faithfully teach the message he gave us. Then you will truly be his disciples (John 8:31). JHW

52.

NEW HYMNAL WILL MEET THE NEEDS OF CHANGE AGENTS

Andrew J. Schleicher, in the United Methodist News Service bulletin of Aug. 29, 07, announced that a new hymnal is being proposed for the Methodist Church. The proposed "new hymnal would include musical styles such as jazz, spirituals and contemporary harmonies and a greater variety of accompaniment settings for guitars, keyboards and percussion instruments. It also would draw more music from racial/ethnic communities and *would better serve contemplative settings such as Taize Worship* and special services for baptism and communion." Such a hymnal would be perfect for change agents who are experimenting with mystical worship and contemplative spirituality. It would be very helpful for those who are already using instrumental music in their worship or are planning to do so.

Actually it would be more beneficial for the church if those who are determined to pursue such a course would move on to the Methodist Church. There they would not have to worry about defending their innovations. Our congregations would no longer be troubled by them. JHW

"I distinguish between those scholars who are God-fearing, Bible-believing scholars who love and serve the Lord's church and those who tremble not to question, discount or discard the clear and simple teachings of God's Word, who reject any teaching their skeptical reason cannot accept. Surely you know that the latter description fits many of the scholars of the great universities. This is not the first generation of the Church of Christ that has produced PhDs. In my life time, I have known many brethren who attained their doctorates while retaining a strong biblical faith and loyalty to Christ and His Church. W. B. West, Hugo McCord, James D. Bales, Rex Turner and Thomas Warren were such men. They blessed the church. They could communicate the gospel intelligently to the ordinary man and lead him to the Master." JHW

"As to the change agent's bitterness, there is no more hateful enemy than the turncoat..or apostate. Their pride demands that they try to destroy that which they have abandoned...to prove to themselves it was truly unworthy of their loyalty" JHW.

"I have seldom known any one who deserted truth in trifles, that could be trusted in matters of importance" (Wm. Paley).

REMEMBER THE POOR

Those who are striving to remodel the church according to denominational standards, labor long and hard to find something about her to criticize. Among the most recent imaginary flaws they cite is that Churches of Christ have failed to minister adequately to the poor. They ignore the many children's homes, homes for the aged and homes for unwed mothers our brethren have provided and funded. They close their eyes to the great Disaster Relief program of the Nashville churches and the many efforts to alleviate suffering in foreign nations. They forget the millions of dollars spent on benevolence by individual congregations and private Christians. To acknowledge such would spoil the negative image they wish to create.

In their book, **Kingdom Come** (Leafwood Pub. 2006), John Mark Hicks (Professor of Theology at David Lipscomb University) and Bobby Valentine (M.A. Harding Graduate School of Religion) make the following statements:

"We also share in a mystical communion with him because he is somehow present and identified with the oppressed" (p. 100).

"Others mistook the primary mission of the church as evangelism. This is certainly a high priority but not the first and highest object of the church" (p. 106).

"We find fellowship with Jesus because he is present in the oppressed. Sharing with the poor is a means of grace in which the presence of Christ is mediated to us, transforming us into the image of the Son" (p. 108).

These ideas might qualify as creative fiction, but serious biblical exegesis they are not! Such non-biblical statements are borrowed from denominational sources.

While we grant that benevolence is a definite obligation of the church (Gal. 2:10), it is imperative that we discern between the types of poor people around us.

* There are **the righteous poor**. In this group are Christian and innocent children. We have an obligation to them because they are fellow-members with us in the family of God (I Tim. 3:15). We are plainly told to do good to them of the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10).

* There are **those who are honorable poor**. Even though they are not Christians we are to assist them (Gal. 6:10). Their poverty is no fault of their own. They are willing to work but because of circumstances beyond their control they are reduced to poverty. This might be the result of illness, or injury, poor job opportunities or displacement. It would include the working poor.

* There are those who are **poor because of their laziness, wastefulness or lack of ambition**. God's will towards them is, "If any will not work, neither let him eat" (II Thess. 3:10). Such people prefer to live off the labors of others. To them we have no obligation.

* There are **the irresponsible poor**. They consume their assets on drugs, alcohol, gambling, pornography, etc. They are of the same category as the lazy person. They have no right to expect those who have worked to earn their bread by honest labor to provide their needs. For the church to finance such people is to enable them and encourage them in their irresponsible and sinful life style.

No knowledgeable Bible student will deny that caring for the poor is a duty of the church. Paul makes that clear. But it is presumptuous to deny that evangelism is the primary mission of the church. Christ, the head of the church, settled that in his parting charge. "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..." (Matt. 28:19). Paul understood it that way. He said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16). This same error is seen in those who say that our assistance should be extended without attempting to teach to the recipients. J. C. Bailey once said, "In India, I could hand out food and clothing 24 hours a day, seven days in the week and still there would be no end to the line. Doing that, I would not be able to teach them the gospel. They would be fed for a day or two, but still lost." Adjusting his methods, he preached Christ and won tens of thousands to the Savior. He supplied their physical needs as he was able.

We have no obligation to listen to or support those whose primary purpose is to criticize and belittle the Lord's church.

THE NEW DIOCESAN CHURCHES OF CHRIST

'Tis a true saying, that a small step off the correct path can take one miles from his desired destination. Some 25 years ago a few fearless souls associated with the Church of Christ began a bold experiment with a revised version of Christianity.

* The first small step was to launch a sustained program of criticism of the church, pointing out and magnifying every perceived weakness and failure.

* Then the criticism was extended to include our noble ancestors whom we oft describe as our restoration pioneers. Since ninety-seven percent of our people know little of our history and those who preceded them in the kingdom, that criticism was received without serious cross examination.

* They then began to float theoretical challenges to those principles of faith and worship held sacred among us. Questions were raised about our a cappella praise and our belief that baptism is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16). Doubts were created about our belief that denominationalism is sinful. They challenged our claim that we are not a denomination and that should we ever become such we would forfeit our standing with God. They questioned our understanding of the New Testament as a divinely given pattern by which we are to order our spiritual activities (II Tim. 1:13). They questioned our attempts to restore the ancient faith and worship of the church. They wondered if we had been too restrictive in not granting our women a public leadership role in the church (I Tim. 2:11-12). They speculated that we were far too strict in the moral standards we deduced from God's Word.

After sowing abundant seeds of doubt, they concluded the time was right to begin implementing the changes they envisioned and desired.

1. In stealthy increments they began to change our musical worship. First came the vocal bands such as **A Cappella**. Then came the praise teams. Next were the soloists and special singing groups.

2. When these were firmly entrenched, they launched their campaign for their real goal, the use of instrumental music in their worship. This is now established in several congregations.

3. After undermining the faith of many in the ancient and simple gospel plan of salvation, they can now boldly preach salvation by grace through faith before and perhaps even without baptism.

4. After many years of poking fun at what they perceived as our narrowness and praising the sweetness and respectability of our Evangelical neighbors, they now openly declare us to be a rather poor sectarian version of a denomination. They can now openly pursue a new station within denominational circles and acceptance by their Protestant neighbors.

5. Having weakened the convictions of their followers in the sinfulness of instrumental music in worship, they are now openly pursuing reunification with Christian Churches. They are attempting to revise our history in order to blame our fathers for wrongly protesting and refusing instruments a century ago.

6. Having raised sufficient questions about the exclusive male leadership of the church, they are now ready to allow women a place in the public teaching ministry and congregational leadership.

7. Having rejected the concept of the Scripture as a heaven-given pattern for the church, they have now taken another major step away from the path of truth. Following the lead of their religious neighbors with an episcopal form of government some have begun what they identify as "multi-site" or satellite congregations. They no longer accept that each congregation is separate, independent and self-governing. They no longer believe that elders have authority only over the flock among them (I Pet. 5:1-2) and are thus limited to feeding the church over which they have been appointed (Acts 20:28). They no longer think that there should be elders in every church (Acts 14:26). We now see evolving a repetition of the error of diocesan bishops that occurred in the second century and eventuated in the Roman Catholic Church "and what shall be the end thereof?" "A diocese is an ecclesiastical administrative territory subject to the jurisdiction of a bishop" (**Westminster Dict. Of Church History**). Following the apostles, in the second century, powerful and influential church leaders rose to dominance over the other elders of their congregation. The more ambitious of them aspired to manage other churches in their cities. Hence they were called metropolitans. As circumstances allowed, they claimed administrative control of other congregations, especially those they planted. This post-apostolic form of government is known as "episcopal" which is the governing form of the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist and other churches. When a strong dominant preacher leads his elders to pursue such a course,

he is repeating the sinful mistake of those early metropolitans.

Paul observed that evil men and impostors wax worse and worse (II Tim. 3:13). Our experience demonstrates that false teachers likewise wax worse and worse. The first step off the Biblical path of truth has in one short generation led a multitude into the camp of denominationalism and away from the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. JHW

55.

MAINTAINING OUR RESTORATION MOVEMENT

The Restoration of New Testament Christianity is a continuing quest and goal for all who love God. We have the tendency to forget mistakes of the past and to lose our way. History demonstrates that departures have occurred and such will continue to plague us.

Within 40 years of the time that Alexander Campbell began his work, he and his co-workers had forgotten their objections to human organizations and ecclesiastical structures over the church, thus they organized the American Christian Missionary Society. In another forty years some of the heirs of those men (the Disciples of Christ/Christian Churches) had gone full circle back into denominationalism.

• To Maintain Our Restoration

God wants us to maintain good works (Tit. 3:14). Surely we should strive to maintain the noble cause of the restoring the primitive Church of Christ. Such will not happen by accident. It demands much thought and determined effort on our part..

* We must know, understand and appreciate the history of our movement. We need to be acquainted with the great men who blazed the trail before us. Not only do we need to know of their sacrifices and labors, but also the problems and controversies they faced. It is beneficial to see the mistakes they made, lest we repeat their errors. A historian once noted that he who does not learn the lessons of history is doomed to repeat the mistakes of history.

To gain the above information, we must read the history and biography of the Restoration Movement. Every saint should read Earl West's **Search for the Ancient Order**, Homer Hailey's **Attitudes and Consequences of the Restoration Movement and Christians Only** by J. D. Murch. All would be blessed and strengthened by reading the **Memoirs of Alexander Campbell** by Robert Richardson; the **Life of Elder John Smith** by J. A. Williams; **The Life and Times of David Lipscomb** by Earl West; **The Life of Elder Barton Stone** by John Rogers; **Ben Franklin, the Eye of the Storm** by Earl West; **J. D. Tant, Texas Preacher** by F. Y Tant; and **W. W. Otey, Contender for the Faith** by Cecil Willis. Of course there are numerous other excellent biographies. They should be placed in church libraries, called to the attention of the congregation and highly recommended.

* Preachers need to present sermons on the concept of and our commitment to restoring original Christianity. Without this our people will soon be destroyed by their lack of knowledge in this area (Hos. 4:6). Lessons are needed that tell brethren about the heroes of the faith and the price paid to bring us where we presently stand. Thus did Paul in Hebrews 11. We must help today's disciples to know the sacrifices made and the debt we owe to those who fought and won the good fight of faith (I Tim. 6:12). Buy, read, and use the classic books of Restoration sermons of men like Ben Franklin, T. W. Brents, N. B. Hardeman and others.

* Congregations should plan series of lessons on the Restoration Movement using knowledgeable men to lead the discussions.

- * Bro. Bill Humble's video series **Back to the Bible: How We Got There: How We'll Stay There**, should be purchased and frequently used in classes and with new converts to help them see where we came from, how we got where we are and the necessity of sticking to God's word if we expect to get where we hope to go.
- * We need special, in-depth lectureships and workshops on Restoration history such as that conducted annually by the elders of the North Lexington Church in Lexington, KY. Ideally there should be programs conducted throughout the land. Each could lay emphasis on the origins of the church in their own region.
- * We need writers to carefully research and write the biographies of great Christians of the past lest the stories be lost. Likewise we need to publish books that recount the history of the rise and progress of the Restoration Movement in the various states and in the nations of the world. The Disciples of Christ have done this for many states, but their presentations give a very slanted view of Restoration history.
- * Our schools that train preachers should include a course in Restoration History as a requirement for graduation for all such students. Just as teachers need to know the history of education, so our young men need to know their roots.

Self Examination

Every Christian needs to examine himself to determine if he is yet in the faith (II Cor. 13:5). Erosion of faith is a slow but steady experience and at first, imperceptible. By the time it is seen, it is hard to stop the destructive process. Elders need to refresh their minds as to just what it means to restore the first century church, then ask the hard question, "Is our congregational program loyal to that idea?" If not, "What steps must we take to remedy the situation?" Preachers need to carefully review their sermons and Bible classes asking, have I given adequate attention to "the old paths?" Have I taught and led the people to walk therein? (Jer. 6:16). Moses charged Israel to:

"Remember the days of old, .

Consider the years of many generations:

Ask thy fathers, and he will show thee

Thine elders, and they will tell thee?" (Deut. 32:7).

We who are heirs of those who made their exodus from the bondage of sectarianism would be blessed beyond measure if we would likewise ponder our past.

Let us hold fast to the ancient gospel. Let us preach it boldly. May we never be ashamed of our heritage. What a tragedy if we forget and lose all that has been won by the blood, sweat and tears of a past generations. Rather, let us "be... imitators of them who through faith and patience inherited the promises" (Heb. 6:12). Let us maintain the restoration! JHW

"When you read Jesus' promise to build his church (Matt. 16:18), what church do you suppose he had in mind? When you read in the book of Acts that God added daily to the church those who were being saved, to what church do you suppose he added them? When Paul wrote that all the churches of Christ salute you (Rom. 16:16), did he have in mind a denomination founded by men, or the church established by Christ himself? Had you lived in Jerusalem in 33 A.D. and wished to be a follower of Christ, which church would you have chosen? The answer of course is the church of Christ, the one which he built, which he purchased with his blood (Acts 20:28), over which he is head (Eph. 1:22) and which he is the savior of (Eph. 5:23). That is the church we strive to be.

We have no earthly head, nor do we have an earthly headquarters. Our only creed book is the New Testament of Christ. American churches are often involved in assisting Christians in other nations, but we do not try to control them or make them submit to our supervision. Each congregation is independent and answers only to God. JHW

DECODING THE MESSAGE OF THE CHANGE AGENTS

In times of war, governments and military leaders use coded language to communicate vital information. The reason is to keep the enemy from understanding their situation and intentions. In spiritual warfare, those whose goal is to capture the church and bring it under their control also use coded language. Never will a false teacher stand up and boldly, clearly state, "I have come to destroy your faith," or "to capture your congregation." As Paul warned, "by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent" (Rom. 16:18). Today the naive member of the Church of Christ can easily be deceived by change agents using their coded language. Note the following examples:

* Rather than speak of "the Lord's church" or the brotherhood, they like to say "**our fellowship**" believes, teaches or practices thus and so. This subtle shift implies that we of the Churches of Christ have our way, the Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ have their way, the Baptists, etc. have theirs. All the different fellowships do their own things as they desire. None has priority. Taken together they make up the real universal Church.

* Rather than say, "the Bible teaches" certain practices such as weekly communion, acappella singing, baptism as essential to salvation, they prefer to say, "**Our tradition**" is this or that. By this they mean, although it may be our "Church of Christ" way of doing it, we do not claim that it is necessarily Biblical or the only correct way of doing it.

* When they speak of **the Church of Christ**, they do not exclusively mean that body of people scattered around the world who are known by that name and who are identifiable by a common Bible-based faith and practice. They have in mind what they like to call "the historic church" that stretches from the first century to the present. Their definition includes the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and all the Protestant bodies as well as the Church of Christ of which they happen to be members. Of one thing we can be certain they never use the term to mean that Churches of Christ are *the Church of Christ* we read of in the Bible.

* Change agents are fond of saying, "**I respect the Bible message.**" To us those words mean we view them as our divinely given standard, our pattern for the church, her faith and worship. To them, they mean they are more like a nice note from ones parents. They most certainly deny that they are a binding pattern for the faith and practice of the church.

* Promoters of change are frequently heard to say, "**We must set our women free.**" We surely do not believe in slavery. We agree that women have the right to vote and hold public office. They should get equal pay for equal work, etc. Men have no right to be tyrants over their wives and daughters. But they mean we must allow our women to take public leadership roles in the worship of the church. Some will settle for allowing them to lead public prayers, lead singing or assist in the ministrations of the Lord's Supper. Others want them free to teach men in classes and in the pulpit.

* Some are heard to say, "**I believe in male leadership in the church.**" We would naturally accept that to mean, men are to serve as our elders, deacons, preachers and teachers of mixed gender classes. By that they mean that elders can give women permission to teach those mixed classes or fill other public positions of leadership.

* Agents of change frequently protest, "**I am conservative.**" We hear those words and think of a man who wishes to conserve the faith as it is revealed in the New Testament, as it was held by those brethren who went before. But he means, I am not a theological liberal like a Unitarian preacher. He believes in the inspiration of the Bible, the divinity of Jesus, the miracles, the resurrection. But he does not believe the Bible is a binding pattern for the church nor does he feel the Church of Christ is Christ's church.

* Those of the change movement often say, "**we need a new paradigm.**" The average fellow may scratch his head and wonder what is that? But the change agents mean we need a new way of looking at the Bible, the church, our worship, our faith. They want a new way because they judge the old way to be faulty. It limits their ability to change things.

* "**I believe in the concept of restoration,**" some say. To our ears that means restoring the church to her original faith and practice. But to the change agent it means we need to return people to Jesus. His definition does not include the church, her faith and worship.

* Champions of change frequently speak of "**our faith heritage.**" By this they mean they have chosen to be part of the Church of Christ "denomination," just like the convert at a Billy Graham crusade is told to go to the church of his choice. To change agents, "our Church of Christ faith heritage" is no better than the Presbyterians' faith heritage.

* They all declare, “I love our acappella tradition.” They can not afford to say otherwise while their attempt to capture and change a congregation is incomplete. They mean that our acappella singing has no scriptural basis and is the product of our rural frontier origins. They have no real objection to those who wish to use instruments in their worship.

* They tell us, “The church of the 21st century must change if she is to survive.” We might think of changing our location, our time of worship, our hymnal or our method of outreach. But they mean we must change the nature of the church, our worship and our faith to be acceptable to 21st century sinners. In their thinking, we must allow them to lead us to the green pastures of denominationalism if we are to survive. JHW

57.

WHAT IF ANOTHER CENSUS WAS TAKEN?

In 1906 Mr. S.N.D. North of the U.S. Census Bureau went to Nashville, Tennessee to speak with David Lipscomb. He wanted to know if he were correct in assuming that there was a division within the ranks of our brethren? North was not a member of the church, but he detected significant differences between those who styled themselves “progressives” and those who wished to continue in the same way and manner their predecessors had served the Lord. Bro. Lipscomb sadly confirmed his suspicions. Plans were then made for a more discriminating census to determine the specific numbers for each camp. Bro. J. W. Shepherd was commissioned to supervise the project for our brethren. He found that only 149,658 members, gathered in 2,649 congregations, could be found within the churches of Christ. Those who preferred to worship with instruments of music and have societies to do the work of the church numbered 982,701 members in 8,203 churches. That was a sobering day for those of our people who did not think the problem was all that severe; those who felt it would eventfully fade away if just ignored; for those who could not bring themselves to stand up and fight for the truth of the gospel; for those who felt the issues were not all that important.

A few brethren had seen the flood approaching, they knew it was sweeping all before it. They had warned and pleaded but many turned a deaf ear, some even thought they were alarmists, or narrow mossy backs who were not keeping up with changing times. Some blamed them with being troublemakers.

Churches of Christ of today are greatly indebted to Bro. David Lipscomb and the little band of men who stood with him in the face of that flood of apostasy. They saved the day by their determined stand for the ancient gospel and for the purity of the church. We now see them as heroes, but it took a few years before folks realized that they were the true and faithful knights who had risk all to save the kingdom of Christ from those who were bent on capturing it and distorting it into something other than what Christ had ordered.

Since the 1960s another band of progressives have been busily at work among us. At first there were just a scattered few of them. Some of them found a fertile breeding ground in the tolerant environs of certain of our Christian schools. There they quietly labored to strengthen their grip on the schools and to influence the young men and women who came under their influence. Now that second generation has arisen to leadership posts in our churches and schools. We know them as change agents. No longer are they a small minority, working quietly behind the scenes, they are numerous and bold. They have ensconced themselves in many of our largest congregations and in several of our schools. Their advocates are on the lecture circuit among our schools and churches, spreading the doctrine of change. They are openly calling for a change in our worship, our faith and our practice. They want women in leadership posts in the church, they want choirs and special singers in our worship. They want to change the terms of salvation and membership in the church of Christ. They want a different atmosphere in worship, despising the worship of the past they want entertainment and excitement. They want a new approach to preaching. No more of the old book, chapter and verse proclamation. They want story telling and drama. Some of them want instrumental music in their worship.

As dangerous as this band of rogue change agents is, another danger confronts us of even greater magnitude. It is the

lack of concern, the unwillingness to address the issue, the failure to take a strong stand against these innovations that affect large numbers of our brethren. Peace at any price is another name for surrender to the enemy. For at least 30 years this spirit has prevailed among us. If tomorrow a census were taken to determine which congregations are willing to tolerate and go along with the change agenda and which are determined to continue in the old paths of the gospel, I tremble to think what the results would be. If such a poll were taken in your congregation, what would the finding be? Brethren, our situation is just as critical as that of our brethren a century ago. While so many sleep, the enemy is sowing tares of error in the fields of the kingdom (Matt. 13:24-30). I plead with all who love the church to awake to the danger. Arm yourselves and man the walls while you can. To tarry is to invite disaster. JHW

58.

WHAT CONSTITUTES LIBERALISM?

The word "liberalism" is often used to describe the teaching of those who trouble the Lord's church. Some are confused as to just what the term means. The word takes on different shades of meaning when used by different religious bodies. For example a liberal among us would probably be a conservative among Episcopalians or Methodists. A conservative Catholic would be a liberal among us. Even among our own brethren the word is used with different shades of meaning. It would mean something quite different to a change agent who teaches in a Christian University than to the preacher who is struggling to build a local congregation. This article will seek to clarify the meaning of liberalism as used among our brethren in this present generation.

What Liberalism Is Not:

- * It is not the use of newer or different translations of the Bible. All translations are the products of uninspired men. They vary in quality. Each has strengths and weaknesses. One can use a different translation and still be faithful to Christ.
- * It is not just a different interpretation or understanding of a verse or section of Scripture. Every student of the Bible will occasionally find a new understanding of some portion of Scripture.
- * It is not just a new or different idea we have not previously heard or held. None of us have fully mastered every thing in God's Word. All will on occasion find that he had misunderstood something of God's message.
- * It is not just the questioning of some fondly held view. God wants us to prove all things and hold fast that which is good (I Thess. 5:21). Like the Bereans we should always be ready to search the Scriptures to see if a teaching is true (Acts 17:11).
- * It is not just trying to honestly understand our past history. Much of what is repeated by word of mouth becomes distorted or embellished. To seek out the facts of what our forefathers did and believed is a noble endeavor.
- * It is not just using words or expressions unfamiliar to us. Anyone who has traveled among our churches in other nations knows there are dozens of ways to express a commonly held truth. The same is true here at home, although we don't always understand that.
- * It is not just doing the things relating to our faith and worship in a different manor or way than we are use to. For example when we pray we might kneel, or sit or stand, bow with our face to the ground or lift up holy hands and be praying in an acceptable manner so long as we petition the Father through Christ the one mediator (I Tim. 2:5). There are numerous ways to participate in the Lord's Supper; but so long as we gather on the first day of the week and partake of the bread and fruit of the vine in memory of the Savior's death, we have properly obeyed God.

Rather, Liberalism is:

- * A lack of respect for the complete and final authority of the Word of God which Jesus said will judge us in the last day (John 12:48).
- * It is a rejection of what the Bible claims for itself. God calls his book, a "pattern of sound words" (II Tim. 1:13). Liberals vehemently deny this truth.
- * It is a willingness to take liberties with the sacred things of God. It is a lack of love and respect for the church as the sacred body and bride of Christ (Eph. 1:21-22; 5:23-25). It holds no honor for the doctrines with which Christ adorned

his bride.

- * It is a spirit that despises its brethren and that disparages great Christian leaders of the past. It treats with contempt those disciples who do not share their elitist views.
- * It is a desire to be something other than a simple New Testament Christian.
- * It is a longing to be like the world, to find acceptance with denominational scholars, schools and leaders. It is embarrassed by the exclusiveness of the Master's teaching.
- * It is a willingness to exalt one's own opinions, ideas and feelings above the sacred Word of Christ.
- * It is a spirit of deception; pretending to be faithful members of the Church of Christ, when in the secret recesses of their hearts they know such is not the case.
- * Rather than strengthening Christians and building up the church, liberalism erodes faith and undermines the kingdom of Christ.

This brief portraiture of a liberal is also an apt description of the change agents at work among us. They espouse and practice all the points mentioned above. For this reason they should be rejected even as all other liberals are rejected.
JHW

59.

WORTHLESS PHYSICIANS

Churches can and do die. The church at Ephesus was seriously ill (Rev. 2:4-5). The church in Sardis was already dead (Rev. 3:1). Scattered across the land are empty meeting houses that once housed flourishing bodies of Christians. For various causes those congregations died. Their empty buildings stand like burial monuments proclaiming their demise.

God gave his church teachers to minister and guide them to spiritual health and strength. Unfortunately, preachers are sometimes "worthless physicians" (Job. 13:4 RSV). Too often it is preachers who contribute to the death of congregations they are paid to build up and strengthen. In 51 years of observation I have seen the following lethal practices by those who should be builders, not destroyers of God's kingdom:

- * Factious preaching. God hates those who sow discord (Prov. 6:19) and churches should reject them (Tit. 3:10).
- * Pleasing sinners, both in and out of the family of God. Such men are unworthy to be servants of Christ (Gal. 1:10).
- * Preaching another gospel, a false one. Such preaching incurs the anathema of God (Gal. 1:8).
- * Preaching an unbalanced message. Solomon advised his students stay in the middle of the road of truth and avoid the ditches of the right and left hand (Prov. 4:26-27). Preachers need to heed this point.
- * Failing to lead the way in evangelizing. God leaves Christians here on earth that they might take the message of salvation to the lost. It is incomprehensible that some preachers see no need to seek and save the lost. They prefer to pet or paddle their brethren.
- * Preaching a partial gospel. Only the "whole counsel of God" will keep a congregation strong and healthy (Acts 20:27).
- * Failing to teach sinners what to do in order to be saved. It is shameful when sinners come and set through numerous services and never hear what they must do to be saved. Do preachers expect God to whisper the magical words of salvation in their ears?
- * By neglecting the more important, needed subjects. Just as a person needs a balanced diet to be healthy, so does a congregation. I once saw a baby that suffered from milk anemia. The mother had neglected to give it other needed nutrients. To be healthy a church must have more than milk for its spiritual diet.
- * Failing to make sharp distinctions between right and wrong, truth and error. God has always expected his teachers to "make a distinction between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean" and to teach that difference to his people (Lev. 10:10-11).
- * Casting doubt on the faith and preaching of our spiritual forebearers and the validity of the Restoration Plea. This seems to be a popular past time for some of our contemporaries. If our fathers' plea to go back to the Bible and restore pure Christianity was faulty, then what is the purpose of our continuing to perpetrate that which has so faulty a beginning?
- * Being problem-causers rather than problem solvers. If a physician makes your condition worse you don't need his

services. Nor does a church need a problem-causing preacher.

May God give his churches good physicians, faithful men of God who love the church and dedicate themselves to serving her well, doing no harm, but only good. JHW

60.

IF YOU MUST, STAND ALONE FOR CHRIST

Throughout the course of human history there have been many saints who had to stand alone for God and His Cause. They were heroes of the faith precisely because they refused to surrender in the face of great opposition, hardship or danger.

Noah stood alone against a world given over to sin. His neighbors did that which was evil, continually. God laid upon Noah two huge tasks, one to undertake the enormous project of building a ship that would be a haven for a remnant of all earthly life (Gen. 6:5-14). The other was to preach repentance to those plunging recklessly into destruction (II Pet. 2:5). We who live today owe a great debt of gratitude to that solitary saint who stood alone and committed himself and his family to serving God in that dismal situation.

Elijah stood alone in Northern Israel when wicked Ahab and Jezebel made war against the prophets of Jehovah. Hundreds of godly men perished (I Kings 18:4). Others survived by exile and seclusion. Decadent Baal worship was enshrined throughout the land. There were seven thousand good men scattered about in hiding, but Elijah knew nothing of them. He thought he was the only one of God's servants left to fight the good fight of the faith (I Kings 19:10). Alone, he confronted 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of Asherah. On the top of Mt. Carmel he met, defeated and destroyed them, dealing a mortal wound to the religion of Baal (I Kings 18:19-40). Alone, he stood in the presence of wicked Ahab and bluntly told him that it was he that was causing great grief to the nation (I Kings 18:17-18). What a great example he has left us.

Three hundred years past and Daniel was challenged to stand alone before the pagan tyrant, Darius of Persia. A cabal of conspirators laid a trap for the man of God by engineering a scheme that every person must pray to no god but Darius. Devout Daniel never flinched in his dedication to Jehovah. He prayed as always, fully willing to face the consequences (Dan. 6:5-7). When it was reported that he had defied the king's ordinance, the penalty to be torn apart by hungry lions was imposed. With a heart full of faith and trust in Jehovah, he accepted the penalty rather than disobey his God (Dan. 6:10). The Lord's angels restrained the hungry beasts and preserved Daniel from harm and death (Dan. 6:22). Millions have been inspired by his noble example.

Since the beginning of the Christian era, there have been countless occasions where godly men and women were forced to stand alone for Christ. Christ himself faced the wrath of his Jewish adversaries by himself. Alone, Stephen denounced the leaders of the Jews (Acts 6:7-15). Alone, Paul made his first defense (II Tim. 4:16). Many brave reformers were forced to stand alone before powerful Catholic authorities, risking their all to give their testimony. When Martin Luther was ordered to desist from his preaching, he replied that he was constrained by the Word of God, he could do no other...so help me God. His courage inspired a revolt that broke the iron shackles of Catholicism with which the popes had enslaved Christendom.

Today the Church of Christ is faced with a determined band of false teachers who would capture and convert her into a worthless denomination of their own making. In hundreds of congregations, these people have or will assert themselves. In some cases it may be left to one faithful man or woman to stand up and say, you are wrong and I will not yield to your erroneous teaching. If you must stand alone! Commit your heart and soul to Christ. Be willing to endure their scorn and wrath. Speak the appropriate words of reproof (II Tim. 4:2). If they are determined to trample the teachings of Christ under foot, be sure they will have to do it without your participation. Stand alone! If necessary go where you can worship our God with faithful saints. Start a new congregation. We must never surrender! Never! Never! So help us God! JHW

FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS OF CHANGE AGENTS

On every hand we are bombarded with the message from those among us who are agitating for changes in Churches of Christ. As I read through the stream of books being issued by the proponents of this movement I am struck by the many false suppositions under which they labor.

* They falsely assume that Churches of Christ (other than themselves), do not believe or accept the Old Testament as a part of God's divine canon of scripture. This is one of the principal theses of the book, "God's Holy Fire" by Bros. Cukrowski, Hamilton and Thompson of Abilene Christian University. We have long heard uninformed people of the world make similar unfounded charges, now these men who teach in one of our Christian schools are repeating the falsehood. They should know better. In the same vein, they falsely assume that gospel preachers do not teach and preach the stories of the Old Testament. While some may have neglected the Old Testament and others may have failed to incorporate all of its rich treasure in their preaching, none reject it and none refuse to preach from it. Perhaps they could find just one specimen of their misshapened and misinformed preacher and put him on display for all the rest of us to see. He would indeed be a rare and exotic find for in 52 years of preaching and circulating among our people I have yet to meet one who held such views of the Old Testament.

* Another faulty assumption is that preachers in "traditional" Churches of Christ do not understand or preach the great truths about God's grace. If they should say that none of our preachers teach salvation by grace alone, we could agree with their charge. But again I challenge them to find even one man who does not believe in salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Such is preached today in every pulpit in even the most conservative congregations. Of course some emphasize the topic more than others, just as some might emphasize faith, baptism or prayer more than others. But such is a matter of degree, not of rejection.

* They falsely assume that our preachers don't understand or preach about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christians. While there are some who don't give enough attention to this glorious theme and there are some who have a limited understanding of the benefits the indwelling Spirit provides God's people, the vast majority are not so. All believe in the separate existence of the Holy Spirit; all believe he works on behalf of God's people. But none, save perhaps among the disciples of change, believe that the Spirit of God yet works in miraculous ways, or that he reveals any additional truth to God's people since apostolic times.

* It is mistakenly held that the average preacher, outside of their change fellowship, does not know how to correctly interpret God's Word. The arrogance of this claim is seen when we observed that from the beginning of our American Restoration movement, till some 20 years ago, all the conversions, growth, programs and accomplishments of our brotherhood were made by men who never heard of the "new hermeneutic." Be they college professors, college-trained or self-made preachers, they all believed that God's Word should be read just as we would read any other serious book containing history, instruction, poetry, regulations and promises. They all understood that God revealed his will to man through generic and specific commands, approved examples and necessary inferences. All understood that while the entire 66 books were inspired of God and inerrant, the will of Christ, found in the New Testament, regulates the faith, worship and practice of Christians. They understood that the Old Testament was profitable for our study; that it revealed important and essential truths; but that the ordinances of the Mosaic system were not binding on us today. Those enlightened by the "new Hermeneutics" have planted few, if any churches, no schools, nor have they opened any new mission fields. They, like parasites, prefer to invade healthy bodies and draw their life and energy from them. The end result, if they prevail, is decline and eventual death to their victims.

Positing these faulty assumptions regarding these and other points, the promoters of change proceed to beat their straw man as they present themselves as the deliverers of the church. Those who are informed know that their assertions are just as faulty as their assumptions. JHW

LET NO MAN ROB YOU

Robbery is a foul deed. Those who take the possessions of others are despicable in every way. There are several kinds of robbery. One can steal his neighbor's earthly possessions. He might steal his intellectual property by plagiarism. Some thieves steal the legal identity of others. One can steal his neighbor's reputation by slander. Some steal the affections of another person's mate. There are those who would rob us of our spiritual treasure. The Master warned us, "Take heed that ye be not led astray..." (Luke 21:8). Those who would lead us astray from Christ, rob us of our salvation since there is no other way to the Father (John 14:6). Thus we warn you:

*** Let no man rob you of your faith in Christ or God.** Sceptics, atheists and infidels will do that. They seek positions in classrooms where they can subvert and destroy the faith of their students. Don't allow them to rob you of your faith, for without it you cannot please God (Heb. 11:6), nor will you be able to spend eternity in heaven (John 8:24).

*** Let no man rob you of your faith in the Bible** as the divinely given word of God and the authority for all matters relating to Christianity. That book provides the light that will guide us in right paths (Ps. 119:105). It reveals to us the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:13-16). It alone is inspired of God (II Tim. 3:16) and provides us with all things pertaining to life and godliness (II Pet. 1:3). It is the divinely given pattern to which we are to conform (II Tim. 1:13).

*** Let no man rob you of your conviction regarding faith, repentance and baptism** as the God-given means to receiving salvation by His grace (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Eph. 2:8-9). Denominational preachers are masters at this kind of deception, but so are some in our own ranks who have embraced a new agenda.

*** Let no man rob you of our purpose for our Lord's Day assembly.** It is clearly said to be to commemorate the death of the Savior (Acts 20:7). Most Protestant bodies do not appreciate this. It is not a time for entertainment or promotion of self. It is time that is holy unto Jehovah.

*** Let no man rob you of the familiar and beloved hymns of the faith.** Some young disciples feel driven to replace the grand old hymns of the faith with their novelty songs and round-robin choruses. Just as there is a place for new hymns, there is a place for those hallowed by long years of use. To know that we are lifting up the very songs our parents and grandparents offered up to God is a consoling thought. We have every right to expect them to be used in our worship. Ditties will soon be forgotten. **Amazing Grace** will live on through the ages.

*** Let no man rob you of your faith in the possibility of restoring the church to her original purity.** It is a noble ideal and one worthy of our best efforts. It is one we can commend to every man who loves Christ and wants to please him. There are some at work among us who have abandoned this goal. They scoff at the idea of being first century Christians in the 21st century society. Let them depart and pursue their own fantasies, but do not allow them to rob you of your ideal.

*** Let no man rob you of your confidence in and loyalty to the Church of Christ** of which you are a member. We are not a denomination, nor a cult. We are not a splinter of the Disciples of Christ. We are a people who are striving to be no more nor less than the church that Christ built (Matt. 16:18). Our head is Jesus (Eph. 1:22). Our creed book is the New Testament of the Master. Our faith, our worship and our polity are those found in the writings of the inspired men.

I exhort all who read these lines to "Hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you..." (Col. 2:8). JHW

"For the last 25 years we have had an element among us who have been sowing the tares of what has now blossomed into the "Change Movement. They lurked in our Christian Schools, planting their tares in the hearts of our young people. Now the crop of error is in full blossom. The consequences are tragic. For years good brethren covered their eyes and stopped their ears and pretended that it was not happening...it could not happen (Matt. 13:15). They had blind faith in Abilene Christian University and other Christian schools. Now the damage has been done and they are shocked...but they really should not be." JHW

DO YOU CELEBRATE EASTER?

Our neighbors sometimes ask, "Does the Church of Christ celebrate Easter?" To understand their question and to properly answer it, a bit of information is needed.

For 21st century Americans, Easter means many things. For example, for some it is the annual time for displaying spring clothing fashions. For children, it is a time for gifts, candy treats, pastel colored bunny rabbits and an Easter egg hunt. For teens and young adults, it is a time for spring break from school. For Catholic and Protestant churches, it is a time for pageants, choral performances and communion. Even those church bodies consumed by liberal skepticism celebrate Easter. Although their preachers do not believe in the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus, they dutifully perform the rituals of the season.

Historically, Easter was a time for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Although it is the oldest of the holy days church leaders have designated, it was not observed during the time the Apostles were here to guide the church. J. D. Douglas notes, "...the Scriptures make no provision for the observance of Easter as the day of the resurrection..." (**Dictionary of the History of the Christian Church**, p. 322). It was well into the second century when the practice became common. Over the centuries it grew to become one of the two most celebrated days in the year for Catholic and Protestant bodies. "The derivation of the name 'Easter' is uncertain. According to Bede (673-735 A.D.) it is connected with an Anglo-Saxon spring goddess, 'Eostre.'" At any rate it seems clear that as in the case of Christmas, the Christian feast of Easter has superseded an old pagan festival" (**Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church** p. 432-433).

But do Churches of Christ celebrate Easter? Most of our members have a family day on Easter Sunday. They gather for a nice meal and fellowship. Most of our small children will have their Easter eggs and candy, stuffed rabbits and an egg hunt. Many of our people will adorn their spring clothing on that day and our older youngsters will enjoy the holiday from school.

On the Sunday designated as Easter every Church of Christ in the world will assemble for worship. They will participate in holy communion and hear a lesson from God's Word. Many of the lessons will discuss the resurrection of Christ and what it means for us. But then we do that every first day of every week of the year. We do so because that is how the early church, under the supervision of the Apostles, celebrated the resurrection of Christ. He was raised on the first day (John 20:1) and on that day generations of his disciples have gathered to celebrate the event (Acts 20:7). We have no pageants, plays or special programs. This does not indicate in the least a lack of faith in, gratitude for or lack of interest in the resurrection of our Lord. Rather, it is evidence of our commitment to worship and serve God in the same way as did the church in the beginning. We do not wish to incorporate anything into our faith or worship that has originated with uninspired men, no matter how old or how popular it may be. We hope you share this commitment. JHW

True Christian worship involves both the mind and the spirit (I Cor. 14:15). Our obedience must be from the heart (Rom. 6:17). We must love our God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matt 22:27). In Christian worship there is ample room for happiness, laughter, tears, and sorrow...without excessive displays that focus attention on the person displaying the emotion rather than on God to whom our worship must be addressed. I have been a Christian for 53 years. I have preached for 52. I have worshiped with congregations of the wealthy and the poor. I have worshiped with God's people in some 19 foreign nations. I have worshiped in spirit and in truth and never found the need for high emotionalism to stir my soul to spiritual devotion.

I have observed that some, whose souls are jaded with hype and contrived emotional gimmickry, are often bored with simple New Testament worship, they crave some extra stimuli to achieve any joy in their devotions. Think of it this way, some athletes perform well and succeed because of love of the sport, dedication, training and discipline. Others prefer to use enhancement drugs to help them win. The one group we admire, the others we consider cheaters. JHW

EMERGENCE OF THE 'CHURCH OF CHRIST' DENOMINATION

Many years ago Dr. David Edwin Harrell, Jr. published a small booklet entitled, "**Emergence of the 'Church of Christ Denomination.**" Harrell is a recognized historian. His perspective is that of the "non-cooperative" churches. His analyses of our brotherhood, although done 30 years ago, is most enlightening in our day of emerging "change churches."

"...what is true and what is easily demonstrated by historical scholarship, is that the rich and the sophisticated tend to want a different kind of religion from the poor and humble" (p. 8). Discussing the apostasy of the Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ a century ago, Harrell writes, "The simple fact of the matter was that the people within the church no longer wanted the same kind of Christianity. This was the basic issue—what doctrinal problems arose to divide over were inconsequential" (p. 14). "Instrumental music and organized societies were in essence the accidental basis of the doctrinal division in the movement. They certainly were not the cause of the schism. The cause was that the church had grown to include incompatible kinds of people" (p. 14).

"Most of the debates centered for several decades, around the attempts of each side to scripturally document its position. Each side was also profoundly interested in rallying the testimony of the early leaders of the movement to the support of its position." "The best a liberal literalist could do was obfuscate, muddle, or evacuate" (p. 15). "The listeners generally believe what they want to believe and in the nineteenth century controversy most members of the Disciples wanted to be denominationalists" (p. 15). "It was not until the twentieth century that a sizeable number of liberal leaders recognized the fact that they had abandoned their allegiance to scriptural literalism and restoration" (p. 16).

"It was easy for a man who wanted a more progressive and denominational religion, and yet at the same time wanted to believe that he still held to his old time convictions to satisfy himself with fuzzy rationalizations" (p. 16). "A man in the midst of the change often fails to recognize it. If he is perceptive enough to recognize it, he must have the additional ingredient of courage and moral honesty to admit it" (p. 16).

"It takes at least one generation to make the change and at least one more generation to understand and admit the change" (p. 16). "A successful liberal leader must move with calculated caution" (p. 16). "Many church members in the fifty years from 1860 to 1910 traveled the slow road to denominationalism who would have been repelled by a rapid transition" (p. 16-17). "Many a liberal Disciples leader during these crucial years underplayed the magnitude of the transition in his own personal conviction for the benefit of the less perceptive general body of members" (p. 17).

"...most of the people who are deeply and intensely concerned about their religion are conservatives. On the other hand, the liberal point of view attracts the contented and the complacent. If the conservative plea attracts those whose zeal might lead them to extremes, the liberal plea finds its most devoted supporters among those who want the easiest and least bothersome religion they can find" (p. 20).

"The old values of the early leaders of the movement are no longer an acceptable expression of Christianity to this sophisticated element" (p. 20). "The cultured element in the movement has simply begun the search for a more sophisticated type of religion" (p. 23). "The church is dividing because there are two basic kinds of people within the movement who are demanding two very different kinds of religion" (p. 23). "Many, I suppose most, of the people involved in the present schism are unaware of this basic conflict" (p. 23). "In the first place, many of the liberal leaders of the church do not understand that they have made a basic transition. Thousands of preachers who are well on their way to the acceptance of a denominational point of view do not realize that they are no longer committed to the old conservative approach" (p.24).

"There are many preachers in the church of Christ today who are consciously liberal enough, that twenty years ago they would have left the church. But the young liberal does not leave the church now as he used to do. He does not because

he understands the fundamental tendency of the church” (p. 25). “In the battle for the local churches denominational leaders must be careful not to move so rapidly that they offend the moderate members. Many ‘Church of Christ’ preachers find it necessary to be as deceptive about their true convictions as does a liberal Methodist pastor in a rural church” (p. 26).

“There has been a kind of intellectual snobbery throughout the present controversy in the church. By the very nature of the sociological character of the schism, most of the ‘doctors,’ most of the education centers, and most of the sophisticated people have been concentrated in the liberal camp. An underlying assumption among the liberals through the whole controversy has been that these ‘intellectuals’ must have a better grasp of the issues than their less impressive antagonists. (p. 26).

“The truth is that these pseudo-intellectuals are virtually alone in their contention that they have made no basic shift in religious emphasis. I do not believe that there is a reputable scholar in the country who would not consider their protestations the ridiculous aberrations of blinded religionists. Everyone knows the situation in the church of Christ today except the liberal ‘intellectuals.’” “The smug liberal ‘Church-of-Christ’ intellectual does not have the support of modern scholarship; he is exposed by it” (p. 27).

To understand our present change movement, we, like Harrell, must see it as a replay of the apostasy of a century ago. Also we must recognize that within our brotherhood there are now two elements of people, one content with the bible based church of their fathers and the other desiring to be accepted and respected as an evangelical denomination. Like fire and water, these two approaches cannot coexist in the same congregation. JHW

65.

CAN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST TRACE ITS LINAGE TO THE APOSTLES?

The existence of the Lord’s true church does not depend on our ability to trace a continual line of churches from the apostolic age to ours. The Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church, the Methodists, the Baptists and others seek to justify their existence by labored efforts to trace their lineage back to the apostles. One need only compare their faith and practice with Scripture to know that even if they should be able to show such a lineage, they have so changed their faith and practice that the historical connection is meaningless.

These denominations and others are driven to establish a lineal descent to the apostles because of a misunderstanding of Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:18. “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Most tend to prefer the King James rendering, “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” This seems to make their point that the church would never fail because Satan, the master of Hell, would not be able to overcome it. A closer study however yields a different meaning.

Jesus promised to build his church. Yet in verse 21 of the same chapter he told his disciples that “he must go unto Jerusalem...and be killed.” Like any other mortals, they would have wondered, how can you build your church if you are going to be killed? His answer was, “the gates of Hades,” not Hell, shall not prevail against my building my church. The word used by Christ was *hades*, “the region of departed spirits,” not *gehenna* (hell) the place of eternal punishment, Satan’s realm. He clarified this by clearly stating that even though he would be killed, on “the third day (he would) be raised up.”

In essence, the Lord was saying, I am going to build my church, but first I must die. But do not let this discourage you for the gates of Hades (where the souls of the dead go) will not be able to contain me. I will be resurrected and then

I will fulfill my promise to build my church. This he did on the Pentecost following his resurrection (Acts 2).

The existence of Christ's true church does not depend on our ability to trace it in history. The Lord taught that the seed of the kingdom "is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). He did promise that his "words would never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). If one lived in an area where the true church had never existed, or where it had once existed and either by apostasy or persecution had ceased to exist, he would still be able to raise up a true church of Christ by planting the seed of the gospel in the hearts and minds of people. When they gladly receive the word they will obey Christ's instructions and upon their baptism be added to his spiritual body, the church (1 Cor. 12:13). When there are two or more of them who resolve to worship and serve the Lord, they will constitute his church in that community (Matt. 18:20). In the very same way, we today plant the Church of Christ in a new part of the world by preaching the gospel. In past centuries, when apostasy and corruption destroyed the church in a city, state or region, the true church was reestablished and propagated through the preaching of the pure gospel of Christ. This we call "restoration." JHW

66.

TWO KINDS OF LIBERALS

Early, I learned there are two kinds of atheists. There are **philosophical atheists** who do not believe in God. They challenge those who do believe and labor to prove their point of view. Then there are **practical atheists** who live and conduct their business as if there is no God. Members of the latter group are often found in various kinds of churches, even Churches of Christ. They might even claim to believe in God but their actions betray their lack of faith.

I have also learned there are two kinds of religious liberals. There are the **theological liberals** who have filled their minds with information questioning the essential foundations of Christianity. Their faith is severely damaged. Some of them question the inspiration and reliability of the Bible and others the divinity of Jesus, his miracles, his death and his resurrection. Some question all of the above. There are the **practical liberals**. They give lip-service to all the above but they demonstrate a lack of respect for the authority of the Bible in their teaching and work with the church. Rather than criticizing the Bible, their criticisms are directed toward the church. They blush not to change the worship, the faith and the very nature of the church. They compromise the teachings of Christ to please themselves or their constituents.

For a long time I was under the impression that our primary problem was "practical liberalism." I thought it was the desire for bigness, worldly success and to be like their denominational neighbors that motivated our liberals. I often said, "While we have our problems with a drift toward denominationalism and worldliness, we have virtually no theological liberals in our midst." I now know that my analysis was mistaken. Such theological liberals are actively working in some of our Christian universities. Mark W. Hamilton Associate Professor of Old Testament at Abilene Christian University has revealed this for us. In a lengthy paper published in the **Stone-Campbell Journal** entitled "**Transition and Continuity: Biblical Scholarship in Today's Churches of Christ**" (Fall 2006, pp. 187-203) he cites a number of professors at Abilene Christian University and Pepperdine University, including himself, who hold and advocate the conclusions of "higher criticism" toward the text of the Old Testament. This approach to the Bible is the accepted method of all theological liberals and repudiated by all who are truly conservative in faith. It questions the authorship, integrity and dating of the Old Testament documents. In so doing it either implicitly or explicitly denies the full inspiration of the Biblical text. It has a withering effect on the faith of those who embrace it and those denominations that have done so are all in varying states of decay.

As a general rule, theological liberals are found teaching in colleges or universities. We might aptly describe them as academic liberals. They are never content to hold their skepticism privately. They are compelled to implant it in the hearts of young Christians who come into their classrooms. Their published articles and books are used to promote their views. They want to shape the thinking of the church in their own image.

Academic liberals reflect little compassion or concern for the daily life and welfare of the church. Many of them make no claim to being preachers of the gospel. They are satisfied to spend their days in their classroom or at their desk. They tend to look at the church with the cold indifference of the coroner who does autopsies on dead bodies of homeless vagrants. They can cut, slice and dissect with no emotion. In their pursuit for recognition as scholars, it makes little difference if their work leaves the church disfigured or destroyed. If their students lose confidence in the Church of Christ and depart for denominationalism, it is of no concern to them. Should students lose their faith and sink into unbelief, such is the unavoidable consequence of the liberal's pursuit. If their students go forth with damaged and distorted faith and do great harm to the church, they are unconcerned. Their desire to tinker and tamper with the sacred object and their quest for recognition as bold thinkers matters more. While the academic liberal has no interest in the health and progress of the church he is quite willing to accept a salary from a school that Christians founded and whose funds continue to sustain. JHW

67.

NEED AND NEED NOT

There are things we all need and numerous things we need not. Everyone needs food but no one needs a tourist trip into space. The same is true of the Lord's church.

- * She needs gospel preachers who are capable of teaching the Word of God to those in and out of the church.
- * She needs men whose hearts burn with evangelistic zeal. She needs men who see lost nations and feel compelled to go preach the saving gospel to them (Rom. 1:14-15). Others will be driven to teach God's Word here at home. Not because they have a contract and are paid but because they feel it to be their personal duty to do so (1 Cor. 9:16).
- * She needs men who are church planters and builders who extend and strengthen her borders.
- * She needs men who love Christians and congregations and work for their welfare as a gentle nurse would do (1 Thess. 2:7); men who like Christ, are physicians of souls (Mark 2:17).
- * She needs men who love the Bible as God's Word. They treat it with reverence and respect. They feast on its contents and teach others to do the same. They feed the flock of God on its pleasant and healthy diet, fully confident that it will provide them all things pertaining to life and godliness.
- * She needs men who are amassing a broad and extensive knowledge of God's Word and those subjects that help in correctly understanding it. They have studied all of the sixty-six sacred books. They can answer the Bible questions people raise. They can point questioners to the chapter and verse that they need.
- * She needs men whose education and experience are sufficiently broad that they can understand the times and provide leadership for the church in the midst of confusion. Such men can discern not only the good and the bad, but they can perceive that which and is not expedient for the situations we face.
- * She needs men who can defend the Bible, the church and her faith from those who attack or pervert them. In every generation there are anti-Christian teachers whose clamorous attacks must be refuted. There are sectarians who attack and slander Christ's church. There are false teachers within the church whose mouths must be stopped (Tit. 1:11).
- * She needs men who can apply Scripture to problems that arise from time to time. Each generation raises new questions about means and methods of doing God's work. As society and culture change, new questions confront Christians. As technology introduces new procedures and things into our world, she must have men to help assess them and our response to them.

Such men as these the church has needed from the day of her birth. She needs them if she exists among a poor backward people or if she is in the intellectual capital of the world. With them, she will flourish and grow strong. Without them she will wither and die.

There is a certain kind of scholar the church does not need. These are men who view the Bible as an inanimate thing to be analyzed in the same way geologists study rocks or art critics study paintings. (We speak not of Textual Criticism, a legitimate discipline that labors to secure a biblical text as near as possible to the original inspired documents). We have in mind scholars who are described as "higher critics." They approach the Bible from a rationalistic point of view. The church really has no need for them. In fact, she is much better off without them.

- * Such scholars ask questions that 99.99 percent of Christians never ask. They spend a lifetime searching for answers no one but them and their kind care about.
- * Such men tend to look at the Bible and the church with detachment like the owner of a salvage yard looks at old cars.
- * They view the Scripture as something imperfect on which they feel qualified to pass judgment. They pour over its words and phrases, culling and rejecting bits and pieces, leaving it like a puzzle with numerous pieces missing.
- * For many of them scripture study is a way to make a living and a name for themselves, rather than instruction for self-improvement and winning the lost to Christ.
- * When they teach the Bible, it is not to instill faith and obedience to its precepts, rather, they seek to convince their students that it is not the perfect message they (the students) thought it was upon entering the university. They raise questions about its origin, its integrity and harmony. They offer novel concepts of inspiration. In the end, the student may well be persuaded the Bible cannot be taken seriously as the Word of God.
- * Such scholars view the Bible as an ancient curiosity, but not as the power of God to salvation, not as the constitution of the church, not as a divine tool to save lost humanity or to edify and build up the church or to comfort the suffering or console the dying.
- * As they pursue their work, they often mask and hide their true beliefs and purposes from Christians whose financial support pays their salaries and provides their facilities.
- * Such men seem to be drawn to Christian Schools to do their work. History reveals that they have infiltrated and eventually captured virtually every seminary and Bible department of every mainline Protestant denomination. A century ago they did the same in all the schools operated by churches of the American Restoration Movement. Now we see them ensconced in some of our schools.

Such men the church does not need! If she had not one of them, she would suffer no loss. She would be better off because she would not have to worry if her young preachers have had their faith in God's Word corrupted by such teachers while pursuing their education in a Christian School! JHW

68.

A DIAGNOSIS WORTH CONSIDERING

We are not the only religious body being troubled by those promoting major changes to the faith, worship and practice of our churches. The problem is also being faced in virtually every denomination that has any desire to honor Scripture and be guided thereby. Among the Evangelical writers who have a good insight into the causes driving this obsession for change is Os Guinness, protege of the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer.

In his book, **Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance**, Guinness identifies four steps that will end disastrously in unfaithfulness and irrelevance:

“Something modern is assumed (step one). As a consequence, something traditional is abandoned (step two), and everything else is adapted (step three). The outcome is that what remains is not only adapted but absorbed by the modern assumptions. It is assimilated without any decisive remainder. The result is worldliness, or Christian capitulation to some aspect of the culture of its day” (pp. 61-62).

To appreciate the wisdom of Guinness' diagnosis one need only observe what is happening in those congregations of the Church of Christ that have embarked on their journey of change.

- * They assume that Postmodernism is a world view that the church must accept and accommodate. They assume that contemporary folks will not listen to nor accept the simple preaching of the old time gospel. They assume that entertainment is the best way to win the hearts of people to Christ. They assume that God will accept their assumptions.

- * These assumptions lead them to abandon the public proclamation of the gospel for story telling entertainment and drama. They abandon serious Bible teaching for pop psychology, worldly wisdom and human interest stories. They abandon a cappella praise for singing accompanied by musical instruments. They abandon congregation praise for the

entertainment of choirs, solos and singing groups. They abandon the seriousness of the sacred memorial of Christ's death for a joyful celebration with a fellowship meal. They abandon the male leadership model ordained by God for that of the Feminist movement.

* In time, virtually every aspect of their congregations' faith and worship is adapted to the standard of the flourishing mega churches of the Neo-Evangelical world.

* They forsake their quest to restore the ancient faith of the church, they lose their identity as Churches of Christ, they disassociate themselves by deleting Church of Christ from their names. They find their fellowship with Christian Churches and other Protestant bodies. Eventually they will have neither part nor lot with the brotherhood of churches of Christ. For how can two walk together except they have agreed? (Amos 3:3). They have departed from the faith (I Tim. 4:1), they have made shipwreck of the faith (I Tim. 1:19).

Let those who are wise note well that the wise doctor's diagnosis fits our change agents to a T! JHW

69.

A LOVELY SANCTUARY DOETH NOT A CHURCH MAKE

Meaningful communication demands that we have a common and correct understanding of the words we use. Most folks understand the word "church" to refer to the building where worship occurs. A well educated lady recently visited our assembly; (we temporarily meet in a rented hall). Looking around she asked, "Where is your church?" The Scriptural meaning of the word church never involves the building where Christians assemble. Jesus promised to build his church (Matt. 16:18), but he did not have in mind a building. In his death on the cross he purchased the church (Acts 20:28). He loves the church, gave himself up for it and saves it (Eph. 5:23). He is head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). All of these verses refer to his saved people, never to a building, no matter how grand or stately. The church is pictured as his body (Eph. 1:22), his bride (Eph. 5:22-23), his kingdom (Matt. 16:18), his family (Gal. 3:26-28), his army (Rev. 19:11-14). It is likened unto a temple of the Holy Spirit, not made of brick or stone, but of living stones (I Pet. 2:5).

The early Christians had no church buildings. They were poor and persecuted. They met sometimes in the courtyard of the Jewish temple, in homes or wherever accommodations could be found. Only later, when safety and prosperity allowed, did they have buildings of their own. This is the point Jesus made to the woman of Samaria. True worship of God is not limited to a particular place or setting. God is a spirit and those who worship him must do so in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Jesus said "The kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17:21). Our very bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19). Each Christian is his own priest to offer up his sacrifices to God (I Pet. 2:5). This we can do in a comfortable building or in a cave. Satan can destroy a church building, but it is much harder to destroy the church. To do so, he has to crush the faith from every individual heart.

Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews and all sorts of cults and isms build ornate and beautiful buildings which they dedicate to object of their faith. Lovely architecture is no guarantee that Jehovah will accept the worship offered. Where two or three Christians assemble for worship, be it a home, a forest glade, a rented hall or a sanctuary, Christ has promised to be with them (Matt. 18:20).

Today we may meet and worship in a rented hall in a business mall. Tomorrow we will be able to afford our own meeting house. In our rented quarters we are no less a Church of Christ than when we have our house of worship. While a building contributes greatly to our comfort and convenience it in no way sanctifies our worship or makes it more acceptable to God. Remember that a lovely sanctuary doeth not a true church make. JHW

THE FOLLY OF SOWING SEED IN THE WIND

In ancient times farmers sowed their grain by a method called broadcasting, scattering it over the plowed ground. Two things could defeat a farmer's hope for a bountiful crop. If he sowed his seed when a strong wind was blowing, much of it would be swept away. Or, a flock of hungry birds could quickly devour much of his seed before it had a chance to germinate. The farmer who ignored these factors would be laboring in vain. His harvest would be a disappointment.

There is a lesson in this for those congregations that are supporting evangelistic efforts in mission fields. Sending the gospel to new fields is the duty of every congregation. It is commendable when a church commits itself to this noble endeavor. However it is possible for a church, like the foolish farmer, to sow its seed in vain.

Simply because a brother presents himself as a missionary does not guarantee that he will faithfully sow the true gospel seed in his field. Away from the eyes of his supporters, a weak or an unfaithful worker may be tempted to compromise the message of Christ with error. Pressures of a strange and hostile spiritual environment may cause him to withhold vital teaching for his converts. We have had men supported by sound churches here at home who compromised their faith in cooperation with Christian Churches and other denominational bodies. Their actions were not to win them to New Testament standards, it was from lack of conviction. Some have continued on the payroll of supporting churches while embracing serious doctrinal error. Others prepared the mission outposts for a takeover by some legalistic faction.

Today the great danger confronting our missionary endeavors are the promoters of change.

* Change agents have found a fertile field on the campus of several of our Christian Universities. Impressionable young students are often victimized by teachers whose mission is to draw away disciples after themselves (Rom. 16:17). Upon graduation these young folks are sent forth, not to plant genuine Churches of Christ, but hybrid denominational churches. If they were supported in their work by a denominational body that would be one thing, but they raise their support from unsuspecting congregations of the Church of Christ. That is dishonest. The deceived churches gladly provide the funds for these false brethren to establish mission churches that are not truly Churches of Christ. The investment of the supporting church is thus a total loss.

* The other problem occurs when the missionary is sent with inadequate Biblical training. Not being well-rooted and grounded in the faith, he becomes easy prey for the wily change agents working in the same area, or those traveling promoters of change who make their tours abroad to sow their tares of change. He might be seduced from the faith by deceptive literature widely circulated by those wishing to advance an agenda of change

Elders who have generously supported such workers are shocked when they learned that all their prayers, encouragement and financial support were for naught. In fact the outcome was worse than failure. Their money had been misused to destroy what may have at one time been a true outpost for Christ's church. It may have been used to plant Christian Churches with their instruments of music and other unscriptural beliefs and practices. It may have been used to cause confusion and division in the mission field.

To prevent such a loss, congregations owe it to themselves and to God to carefully screen those requesting support before they agree to provide it. Even after screening it is important to keep fully abreast of the work being done to assure it is in accord with God's will. Congregations that support US or foreign-born workers abroad should send representatives to visit those workers and their converts to be sure they are faithful to their mission. After all, it is God's money that is being invested. It is Christ's kingdom that we hope to advance in the world. Elders have every right to expect their support to be used to establish and develop biblically sound congregations. A true Church of Christ has no

interest in supporting that which it would not recognize or fellowship at home. Remember, it is folly to sow your seed in the teeth of a strong wind. JHW

71.

HOW TO BRING DOWN A CHURCH

As I watch the tactics of those among us who hate America, I see a similarity to tactics being used to excise the conservative nature of Christianity and replace it with a liberal, denominational kind of religion. While visiting the Island of Trinidad some 30 years ago, I watched as workers labored to change the landscape of a certain area of the island by removing a mountain. Day and night giant earth movers hauled loads of rock and dirt and dumped them into the ocean. Little by little what had once been a towering mountain was leveled according to someone's plan. That same approach can be effective in changing the Church of Christ into something new and different. For some 25 years change agents have been employing the following destructive devices.

- * There has been a non-stop barrage of belittling of the church, her history, her faith and her worship.
- * They have been perpetually sowing of seeds of doubt regarding the faith and practice of the church.
- * There has been a replacement of serious Bible teaching and preaching with entertaining stories, pop-psychology and denominational doctrine.
- * There has been a concerted effort to convince our brethren that loyalty to the church and defending the church against her critics is sectarian, thus should be avoided.
- * There has been a practice of raising questions about the dependability and authority of the Bible. This has created uncertainty about the rightness of the faith and worship of the church.
- * When serious questions are asked, change agents tend to provide only tentative answers. The questioners thus go away without solid biblical answers and uncertain faith.
- * There has been a failure to indoctrinate new members. In fact some frown on the practice as somehow bad for the faith of new converts.
- * There are some who are ready to open the doors and give a place within the membership of the church to those who have not been born again as Christ expects them to be (John 3:3-5).
- * The use of literature written by sound men of the past and present has been discouraged. In its place they have encouraged the use of denominational literature.
- * By discouraging the selection of conservative men to serve as elders and deacons and encouraging the selection of men who will be supportive of the change agenda they can weaken a church.

Subject a body of people to these and similar tactics for a period of five years and the mountain of faith and conviction will be hauled away and what is left will be a denominational church which may or may not be known as a Church of Christ. A wise man will observe the attitudes and actions of those around him. Those who respect God and his Word they will follow. Those whose conduct harms the kingdom of Christ they will reject (Rom. 16:18). JHW

“Error always addresses the passions and prejudices: truth scorns such mean intrigue, and only addresses the understanding and the conscience” (Azel Backus).

“Men must love the truth before they thoroughly believe it” (South).

NEW ADVENTURES IN WORSHIP

For two hundred years Churches of Christ believed, taught and practiced the simple Christianity revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Such things as holy days, liturgy, symbolisms and tangible aids to stimulate devotion were unknown among them. They were rejected as the unscriptural relics of Catholicism and Protestantism.

A century into their back to the Bible movement a majority of the brethren turned aside to embrace the practices of their religious neighbors. Today that element is known as the Disciples of Christ, one of the most liberal and apostate of the Protestant denominations. A less progressive element refused to go over the cliff with the radical liberals. They are known as Christian Churches.

In the turbulent 60s the seeds of another departure began to sprout. They were observed primarily on the campuses of some of our most prominent Christian schools. After germinating for some twenty years, the first fruits of this new departure appeared in the decade of the 80s. The two most prominent names of the early blooming were Rubel Shelly and Lynn Anderson. With the birth of the new century, suddenly in every corner of the nation a flowering of departure burst forth. It was dubbed the change movement because the proponents were promoting changes in the faith, worship and practice and even the nature of the church.

Like a row boat on a swift stream, once the change agents and their congregations cut loose from their anchorage, they began a rapid trip down stream to the sea of oblivion.

Their earliest changes are well documented and known. They denounced past leaders and practices, they sought fellowship with Christian Churches and other Protestant bodies. They opened the door for instrumental music in their worship. Some of them elevated women to places of public leadership in their churches. They discounted the importance of baptism. The latest changes are even more sinister and destructive. They are borrowed from the Emergent Church movement and consist of mystical practices of contemplative spirituality. At the 2007 Abilene Christian University lectureship, several sessions were offered on mystical approaches to worship.

The most interesting thing about the Emergent church movement is it links to the New Age Movement, Eastern Mysticism and the mystical practices of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Now we see "Christians" engaging in bizarre practices such as chanting mantras, walking labyrinths, meditating in darkened, candle-lit rooms, practicing "spiritual disciplines" learned from Catholic monks and nuns. The Emergent Sources from which they have borrowed these strange practices praise their Hindu mentors and Catholic teachers. Some of them are already participating in the Catholic mass with fellow-mystics of the Catholic faith. They profess feeling a oneness with their Catholic brothers.

Since our change agents have already embraced as brothers, their Evangelical neighbors, they will likely have no trouble adding mystical Catholics to their circle of fellowship. Once that milestone is reached, then will the long journey of the departed children back to the spiritual mother (the Catholic Church) and their spiritual father (the pope) will be complete.

Now you can better understand why Paul warned, "The Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith...." (I Tim. 4:1). "Let no man beguile you" (II Thess. 2:3). JHW

GOLDEN CALVES THEN AND NOW

When Jeroboam wrested ten of the tribes of Israel from Rehoboam he knew his situation was precarious. He lived in fear lest his citizens abandon him and renew their allegiance to David's dynasty. He viewed the temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem as a threat to his power (I Kings 12:26-27). If the people continued to go up to Jerusalem to worship, they would be tempted to return to Rehoboam. His days would soon be numbered.

To keep control of his people, the rebel king took counsel with his political advisors (not God's priests or prophets) and came up with a scheme to neutralize the danger. He would build two golden calves to be placed, one in the north, the other in the south of his kingdom (I Kings 12:28). He then launched a massive propaganda campaign to persuade the people to do what God in his written word had forbidden them to do.

- * Jeroboam first decided that the sacred pattern set for in the Torah (Ex. 25:40), was too restrictive and no longer was workable in his cultural environment.
- * He set about to provide a more flexible and accommodating form of worship "which he had devised of his own heart" (I Kings. 12:33)
- * Even though Jehovah had chosen Jerusalem as the place for worship (Deut. 12:5), Jeroboam told them, "It is too hard for you to go all the way to Jerusalem to worship."
- * To him, only one place and one way of worship was too narrow and legalistic so he offered them a choice where they might worship.
- * Rather than deny or forbid their worship of Jehovah he simply provided them a plausible alternative.
- * He made substitute objects of worship to assist them in their devotions. He provided them two golden calves such as Aaron made for their ancestors (Ex. 32:4).
- * He persuaded them the use of his calves in worship was acceptable (Ex. 20:4), by telling them they had roots to ancient times and had blessed their fathers in days past (I Kings 12:28).
- * To meet the changing circumstances of his kingdom, he revised the standards for priests and inducted men of tribes other than Levi (I Kings. 12:31; Deut.21:5).
- * He changed the day on which they would observe the Feast of Tabernacles from the 7th month to the 8th.
- * Jeroboam himself demonstrated to the people that they had nothing to fear in changing the rules of Jehovah's worship. He himself went up to the altar and burned incense in clear defiance of the old pattern set forth in the Law (12:33). To embrace such egregious sin, common folks must have an influential leader to rationalize, justify and encourage them to do so.
- * It meant nothing to him that his changes made the people sin (I Kings 12:30). The only thing that mattered was his security in his position, that his kingdom would suffer no harm. He was building for himself a dynasty. Nor was he concerned where his changes would lead. In just a few years the population of the northern kingdom was fully idolatrous. That brought upon them the wrath of God, destruction of their nation and captivity in Assyria.

Fast forward some 3,000 years to another age, another place, another religion but the same kind of leaders. The place is America. The religion is Christianity. Rather than political rulers we have powerful, influential preachers. They aspire to build kingdoms for themselves. They call them mega-churches. To assure their success and to secure their position they are quite willing to change or even reject the pattern revealed in God's Word (II Tim. 1:13,) in order to attract and keep their followers. They also revise the history of the church and tell the people that their new ways are actually the old ways of the pioneers of the faith. They also set up idols of their own making, such things as

instrumental music to accompany their singing and women to lead in their worship.

Like Jeroboam, they rationalize their changes as necessary for the good of their cause. They are convinced they can burn incense on God's altar with impunity.

God sent a faithful prophet to cry out against the altar, the mongrel priests and the king who was responsible for it all (I Kings 13:1-4). Jeroboam raged against him for daring to criticize his majestic aspirations. The maligned prophet was right, the vain king was wrong. Today, faithful men of God are crying out against golden calves, corrupt priests and rebellious leaders of this perversion of God's worship. Promoters of change are railing against them. Like the wicked king, they blush not to lay profane hands on the sacred things of Jehovah. Like him, they will receive their reward from the righteous Judge whom they are offending. JHW

74.

TRUE AND UNTRUE FRIENDS OF JESUS

Jesus said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you" (John 15:13). What if the disciple of Christ does not wish to do His will? Is he still His friend? Consider the following cases and decide if the persons described are friends of the Master.

* What of the man who reads that baptism is a command (Acts 10:48); that it is "for remission of sins" (Acts 2:38); but he does not accept that? He preaches that one receives salvation solely by faith (Jas. 2:24). Is he Christ's friend?

* What of the man who reads that we are to obey all things whatsoever Christ commanded (Matt. 28:20); that only those who do the will of the Father will be saved (Matt. 7:21); yet he rejects such an idea and insists that there are no commands to be obeyed in order to please God. He prefers to teach that we need only love God and our neighbor to please Him? Is he Christ's friend?

* What of the man who reads that Christ died for, purchased, established and saves his church (Acts 20:7; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 5:23); yet he cannot accept that Christ's one true church exists today, so he teaches that all the different churches men have created are of equal value? Is he Christ's friend?

* What about the man who reads Christ's prayer that all his disciples be one (John 17:20-21) and that there "be no division among" his people (I Cor. 1:10); yet he argues that God accepts and blesses all kinds of denominational bodies regardless of their divisiveness? Is he Jesus' friend?

* What of the man who reads that women are to keep silent in the church (I Cor. 14:33-34); that they are not permitted to teach or have authority over men (I Tim. 2:11-12); yet he is more impressed with the demands of feminists. He teaches that these verses do not mean what they say; that really they authorize women to teach and have authority over men? Is he the Master's friend?

* What of the brother who reads Paul's exhortation to speak to one another in songs, hymns and spiritual songs, to sing and make melody in our hearts unto God (Eph. 5:19), but concludes that it really means that a soloist or choir can do the speaking; that singing and making melody with the heart really means playing a mechanical instrument? He substitutes the kind of music he prefers for that which Christ's Word specified. Is he the Lord's friend?

* What about the man who reads the warning not to add to or take from Christ's word (Rev. 22:18-19), and yet he feels no obligation to obey that. He changes anything in the Savior's religion that does not suit his taste, that is not in step with modern culture? Is he a friend of Jesus?

Such disciples may talk much about being friends of Jesus. They may sing the old hymn by that name, but since they refuse to keep his commandments, to do what he says, they demonstrate that they are not true friends to our King. JHW

THOSE WHO CRITICIZE THE CHURCH

As the Church of Christ sails the stormy waters of the 21st century, she is subjected to criticism from many quarters.

* Skeptics and unbelievers hate God, Christ, the Bible and the church. They never miss an opportunity to hurl their insults and criticisms at the Lord's people. The church stands for all that they oppose. She is an obstacle to their ambitions to impose their secular views and values on our society and bring all into their tow.

* More criticisms comes from the spokesmen of the many churches founded by men. Imposters hate the true bride of Christ because she teaches and practices pure and undefiled religion. They are offended and embarrassed by her faithfulness to her Master and his revealed will.

* There are times when the church is criticized by her friends. Being composed of fallible souls, the church never measures up one hundred percent to her Lord's expectations. Like the church in Ephesus, some forget their first love (Rev. 2:4). Like the church in Pergamum some tolerate false teachers in their midst (Rev. 2:14). Like the church in Laodicea, some grow lukewarm in their love and zeal for Christ (Rev. 3:15-16). When such failures are evident, faithful servants of God will "reprove, rebuke and exhort" the church to mend her ways (II Tim. 4:2). Solomon wrote, "faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). Friends of Christ do not relish the job of criticizing the church. They do so "even weeping" (Phil.3:18). They do so gently as a nurse would correct her ward; as a loving parent would their beloved child (I Thess. 2:7,11). Their criticism are tempered and measured. They are spoken in love (Eph. 4:15). They are constructive and given with the intention of helping the church, building her up (I Cor. 14:26), saving those who have gone astray (Jude 21-22) Because their criticisms are presented in this constructive way and spoken in love, the church will prosper and be better for it.

* There is yet another kind of critic in our midst. These are disillusioned brethren who have made shipwreck of the faith (I Tim. 1:19-20). They have disdain for all who do not share their denominational view of religion. They are embarrassed by those brethren who went before them and built the schools and congregations wherein they now earn their living. They have no sense of pride of membership in the church. In fact they find nothing about her to be proud of save themselves and the few disciples that follow their lead. Like hostile enemies, they stand aloof and cast their stones of criticism against the church of which they claim to be members. Many are the blows they have inflicted upon her. Other enemies of the church rejoice to see the fratricidal attacks they make under the guise of "reforming, renewing or changing" the church. These critics would destroy her by making her into yet another ignoble human denomination.

The church can expect the criticisms of those without. She can be benefitted by the constructive criticisms of her friends. But she suffers most from the treasonous blows of those who appear as sheep in her midst but inwardly are ravaging wolves (Matt. 7:15). JHW

"We must not let go manifest truths because we cannot answer all questions about them" (Jeremy Collier)

UNLESS YOU KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING IN THE BIBLE. . .

A battle is raging between those determined to change the Church of Christ and those who support the traditional understanding of God's word that has guided us for generations. One of the tactics of the change agents is to boldly ask their critics, "Do you claim to perfectly understand every verse of the Bible and every aspect of Christianity?" The reason for this ad hominem attack against individuals is to silence those who would question, criticize and condemn the agenda of the promoters of change. Their illogical reasoning runs something like this:

Since John doesn't know everything about every subject of the Bible, John is in no position to pass judgment on change agents' teaching that runs counter to what Churches of Christ have commonly believed and practiced. Some brethren with limited perception seem to be impressed with this specious argument.

* First, no one has ever claimed that he perfectly understands every verse of the Bible. The **question is loaded** and is used by change agents to discredit their critics by implying that they claim perfect and complete knowledge, which all would recognize as arrogant and impossible. It is designed to discredit by creating prejudice against their objectors.

* Second, it is a fallacy to say that since a person cannot claim to know and understand everything about the Bible and its teaching therefore he cannot pass judgement on some things which are clearly and easily understood. It is a **hasty generalization**. It's like saying that since John cannot know everything about all birds therefore he cannot be sure a redheaded woodpecker is not a water fowl. But John may have done extensive research on redheaded woodpeckers and thus can be certain in his conclusions about that particular bird.

* Third, this approach is faulty because **it proves more than its proponent is willing to concede**. Since Richard does not know everything about the Bible, his logic would imply that he cannot know for certain that Jesus was born of a virgin or raised from the dead. Yet Richard insists he believes these two points. If the question proves that John cannot challenge Richard's views on worship, then it would also mean that Richard could not question the man who denies the virgin birth and resurrection of Jesus.

* Fourth, it is **self-contradictory** to say that since John does not know everything about every Bible subject, therefore he is not qualified to question the possibility of error in Richard's teaching. But since Richard does not know everything about every Bible subject, Richard cannot question John's points made in opposition to his beliefs and practices.

* Fifth, this line of reasoning is a "**red-herring**." A red herring is a question, denial or assertion whose purpose is to divert attention from the real issue at hand and thus escape having to deal with and answer difficult or embarrassing questions. Change agents are determined to change the faith, worship and practices of Churches of Christ. Knowing full well that such presumptuous actions would not be well-received, if perceived by the average member, they seek to divert the attention of folks to other matters. Thus they can continue their malicious activities without interruption. When John questions Richard about his "new or strange" teaching, Richard responds by demanding, "John, do you claim to know and understand everything about the Bible and worship? While John pauses to deny that he has made such a ridiculous claim, Richard slyly diverts the discussion to other matters. The average person might never realized what Richard has done!

* Sixth, the conclusion that since John does not know every thing about everything in the Bible therefore he is in no position to pass judgment on the change agents is a **non sequitur**. This means the conclusion does not necessary follow from the premises advanced. That I cannot and do not know and understand everything about the state of the dead does not imply nor prove that I cannot therefore know what is essential for man's salvation. Little is said in the Bible about the state of the dead, but much is said about the requirements for man's salvation. On the former subject I can only offer tentative conclusions. On the latter I can cite numerous verses that prove my point.

* Seventh this approach is often described as **building, attacking and defeating a straw man**. When a controversialist cannot successfully meet and answer the arguments of his opponent, he may be tempted to paint an unreal picture of his opponent's position and then proceed to attack and destroy the false picture. In this case the change agent falsely depicts all his opponents as arrogant men who claim to know everything about the Bible. He may attempt to portray

them as unlearned and ignorant men who are unqualified to discuss the matter and thus unworthy of a hearing.

* Paul warns, of vain talkers and deceivers...whose mouths must be stopped (Tit. 1:10). Let no man deceive you. JHW

77.

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Proponents of the change agenda blame all our divisions and disagreements on our emphasis on doctrine. Their solution is to place a low premium on doctrine and concentrate on believing in and loving Jesus. While this approach sounds like a very practical solution to our problems of discord, it runs contrary to the teaching of Christ and his apostles

The meaning of the word “doctrine” is significant. Webster explains it to be: “a principle or position, or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief...a statement of fundamental government policy...” The biblical term is *didache* which means “the act of teaching or that which is taught.”

Consider what the Spirit of God says about the doctrine we hold and teach:

There is the “doctrine of Christ” in which we must abide if we wish to be in good standing with the Father and Son (II John 9). This is the teaching which Christ himself gave or else authorized his apostles to deliver to us (I Cor. 14:37). It constitutes our New Testament. It **originated with God** in heaven (John 7:16). Paul called this “**sound or healthy doctrine**” (Tit. 1:9). It **nourishes the soul** of man (I Tim. 4:6). This healthy doctrine **must be held and taught by faithful Christian leaders** and imparted to those they lead (Tit. 2:1). This alone is the “**doctrine which is according to godliness**” (I Tim. 6:3).

There is “false doctrine” which is propagated by false teachers (II Pet. 2:1). False doctrine is “**contrary to**” **sound doctrine** (Rom. 16:17). It is a “**different doctrine**” than that which God gave and intends for his church to hold (I Tim. 1:3). It is doctrine that flows from the mind of mortal man rather than from the Spirit of God (Matt. 15:9). It is **demonic in origin** (I Tim. 4:1). False doctrine “**corrupts**” the **doctrine of Christ** (Tit. 2:7). There are specific false doctrines peculiar to particular sects of religion. Jesus warned against the **doctrine of the Pharisees** (Matt. 16:12) and the **doctrine of Balaam** (Rev. 2:14). We could add the false doctrines promoted by hundreds of religious bodies founded by uninspired men.

The doctrine of Christ is something **to be taught and learned** (Tit. 1:9; I Tim. 1:3). It is **to be obeyed** (Rom. 6:17) if one wishes to be free from the bondage of sin. We must **hold the pure doctrine** of Christ in our hearts and **abide therein** (II John 9) if we would stay in good standing with the Savior. We must always **be open and receptive to the sound doctrine** of Christ if we would please Him (II Tim. 4:3). We are expected to **adorn our lives with the doctrine** of our Savior (Tit. 2:10). We must be willing to **defend the doctrine** of Christ against those who would corrupt or destroy it (Phil. 1:16). **Should any teacher come to us teaching any other doctrine than that of Christ, we should reject him forthrightly** and extend to him no comfort or encouragement (II John 9). Above all, **we must live our lives and guard our teaching lest by our message or conduct we blaspheme the doctrine** of God (I Tim. 6:1). False doctrine is to be avoided as it will surely set us at odds with the Savior on whom we depend.

These scriptures make it clear that this increment of the change agenda, when weighed in the balance of God’s Word, is found wanting. It is contrary to sound doctrine and consequently stands condemned. The doctrine of Christ, correctly understood and taught, is not the cause of our problems, rather it is the failure on the part of some to honor and respect

that sacred body of truth given us by the founder and head of the church. To propose Christianity without doctrine may give the uninformed a warm, fuzzy feeling but it is totally void of truth and substance. The fact is, the promoters of this view wish to be rid of unpopular Bible doctrines so they can, without hindrance, implement their own. JHW

78.

DEVICES OF THE DESTROYER

While reading through an old handbook on how to deal with the strategies of psychological warfare I found the following methods for subverting and overthrowing a kingdom and gaining control over its citizens.

- * The use of “**smooth and fair speech**” (Rom. 16:18) and to “**Beguile the hearts of the innocent**” (Rom. 16:18). We must ever be alert that no man beguile us (II Thess. 2:3). Rather than blindly heed every teacher who comes our way we must prove them (I John 4:1)
- * The **fear factor**. The fear of the ten spies caused not only them but the entire nation of Israel to fail to take Canaan, but it also doomed them to 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness and the death of a whole generation (Num. 13:25-14:35). We must never be afraid to confront evil or error.
- * The **pride project**. A Christian, lifted up with pride, will fall into the condemnation of the devil (I Tim. 3:6). False pride drives many a man to manipulate his congregation in his quest for worldly success.
- * The **lie oft repeated**. By using this propaganda device, the lie often repeated comes to be considered the truth by the masses. This is a favorite weapon of today’s anti-Christian secularists. It also is used by change agents who continually tell brethren the church is mistaken or dying unless it heeds their call for change.
- * The tool of **revising the history of a people**. Marxists and other secularists are doing this in our textbooks and class rooms. Ere long a people forget who they are, what their forefathers believed and stood for. The good appears to be bad and the bad appears to be good. Without historical roots, they are at the mercy of their manipulators. Our promoters of change are attempting to revise our spiritual history as well.
- * The **false shepherd** method. A true shepherd leads the sheep in safe pathways and provide them protection, refuge, food and water. A false shepherd leads the sheep into dangerous situations, he ignores their needs. He neglects and abuses them. He flees when predators appear (John 10:11-14). Elders and preachers can be either true or false shepherds.
- * The **wolf in sheep’s clothing** strategy (Matt. 7:15). Predatory teachers present themselves to a church as faithful Christians. Trusting them, the sheep have no fear. When the time is right the wolf strikes, rending and scattering the flock.
- * The **mask of love and kindness**. This is a common tool of the liberal church wrecker. He feigns piety, love and kindness. When the flock is thoroughly deceived he reveals his true agenda to lead them away from Christ and his church.
- * There is the **Edenic approach**. Satan snared Eve by assuring her God did not mean what he had clearly said about the forbidden fruit. He convinced her there was no punishment for disobedience. He promised she would be her own god by acquiring the forbidden knowledge (Gen. 3:1-6). Elements of this approach are used of our apostles of change.
- * There is the **angel of light effect** (II Cor. 11:14). Paul warned the Corinthians about this tactic. The preacher appears to be as pure and grand as an angel from heaven. Only later does the congregation learn that he is really Satan’s agent in disguise. Sadly many never figure this out.
- * There is the “**we want to be like our neighbors**” approach. This was the failure of the Hebrews (I Sam. 8:5, 20). One of humanity’s greatest weaknesses is the fear of standing alone and being different. We are easily drawn astray by the desire to be like other religious groups.

* The “**we must compete in this Postmodern age**” strategy. The logic is, to accomplish this goal the people must compromise their faith in God’s standard. Paul warns us not to be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2). Satan says, “Oh, but you must do so to survive.” Being competitive with the world trumps faithfulness to God’s word.

* There is the **discrediting tactic**. The false, Judaizing teachers could not answer Paul’s teaching so they set about to discredit him as a man of God. They said he was not truly an apostle, that he was a man-pleaser, that he was an unfaithful Jew and that he taught a flawed gospel. This tool is widely used today to discredit those past and present who dare to challenge the encroachments of the change agents.

* There is the **peace at any price method**. Jeremiah warned of those who preached “peace, peace, when there is no peace.” (Jer. 8:11). In the name of preserving peace the voice of truth has been silenced, the conscience of multitudes has been stifled, false teachers have enjoyed free course in churches and false teaching has been able to flourish .

* There is the **pragmatic weapon**. If it works it must be good and pleasing to God. Under this banner all sorts of innovations and changes have been thrust upon the church. People are deceived into thinking that since the innovations have increased their attendance they must be blessed of God. They have only passed the people’s test, they have yet to face the judgement of Jehovah’s Son who straitly warned us not to add to nor take from his word (Rev. 22:18-19) and not to go beyond what is written (I Cor. 4:6; II John 9-10).

To be aware of and familiar with these devilish devices makes it easy for us to recognize and reject them when the false teacher comes and presents his package to us. Let us “be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might!” (Eph.6:10).
JHW

79.

CHRISTMAS: A DIFFERENT VIEW

Around the world folks are busily preparing for Christmas. Most churches devote one day per year to celebrate Christ’s birth. That is done with an array of human traditions unknown to Scripture. “The day of Christ’s birth cannot be ascertained from the New Testament, or indeed from any other source. “The fathers of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observance of the nativity...” (McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, Vol. 3, p.276). “Chrysostom in 386 states that the celebration of the birth of Christ’s according to the flesh ‘was not inaugurated in Antioch until ten years before that date’” (Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. 3, p.46). December 25th was determined by the decree of Liberious, bishop of the church in Rome, in 354 A.D. The date was widely disputed by others. “The Western Church ordered the feast to be celebrated on the day of the Mithraic rites of the birth of the sun (Americana). “The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence. The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad for an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit or in manner. (Schaff-Herzog, Vol 3, p. 48)

Since Churches of Christ are committed to practicing Christianity as it was in the beginning, we do not observe Christmas as a special holy day. God gave his church only one special day, the first day of the week. This is the day of Christ’s resurrection and the day of the church’s beginning (Mark 16:1-2; Acts 2). Jesus tells us to “observe all things whatsoever (he) commanded” (Matt. 28:20). But he did not command a Christmas observance. Paul warns us “not to go beyond the things which are written” (I Cor. 4:6 ASV). While we enjoy the fellowship, and festivities of the season, we believe that we should remember and be grateful for Christ’s birth every day and that our charity and generosity should extend through out the year.

There are many great lessons for daily life in the story of Christ’s birth.

* We see God’s marvelous love. He so loved the us that he **gave** his only begotten Son (John 3:16).

* That Christ came into the world as “a child born,” demonstrates God’s love and respect for the innocence of infancy.

Children are not born totally depraved with sin. Rather, we must become as little children if we would enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3). This implies their innocence. In a society where one of three children conceived is legally aborted, we are reminded of the sacredness of innocent human life.

* Christ's birth of Mary reminds us of God's concern for woman. Through woman came sin and the fall. God redeemed womanhood by allowing Mary to bring the savior into the world. In that unique sense, the world is saved through "her child-bearing" (I Tim. 2:13-15). Through Christ, woman was saved from the degradation of the pagan world. Before he came, they were little more than the chattel and amusement of men. Now there is no male or female in Christ (Gal. 3:26-28). Now we honor them as "joint heirs of the grace of life" (I Pet. 3:27). We also see God's respect for purity in that he chose a virgin to be the mother of his Son (Lk. 1:34).

* This story teaches us respect for manhood and fatherhood. God gave Joseph the privilege and responsibility of providing for and protecting the infant Savior. We need fathers like him who will nurture their children "in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

* The birth of Jesus demonstrates God's respect for and interest in the family. His son was placed in a loving, caring, devout family with a mother, father, and siblings. This sacred concept of family has been seriously eroded in our day, but it is the strength of the church and society and the hope for the future well-being of the race.

* We see in this record, God's respect for the poor of the earth. He could have sent his Son into the home of a rich and noble family, but he chose a humble family in a poor community to receive the blessing. The poor were not neglected in the ministry of Christ (Matt. 11:5).

* God's appreciation for labor and hard work are reflected in his allowing Jesus to grow up as a carpenter with Joseph (Mk. 6:3). There is dignity in labor. Working with ones hands is not shameful (Eph. 4:28), but there is shame in laziness (Prov. 6:6-11).

* The story tells us there is a place for people of all stations in the kingdom, be they lowly shepherds or wise kings. The gospel is for every social and ethnic group (Matt. 28:19). With God's people there can be no respect of persons (Acts 10:35).

* This timeless story reminds us of our desperate plight as sinners before a just God. If we were to be saved, Christ had to come and "die for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). JHW

80.

"WE BESEECH YOU ON BEHALF OF CHRIST"

Paul penned these words to the Corinthian, some of whom had become alienated from the head of the church (II Cor. 5:20). Within our brotherhood today there is turmoil and confusion as the result of a self appointed band of change agents who are pressing for unscriptural changes to our faith, worship and practice as the body of Christ. In the face of this challenge, which has the potential of doing great harm to the church, the author extends the following appeal:

I. To you who are elders of God's church: I beseech you to be faithful shepherds; to diligently protect the flock of God among you (I Pet. 5:2-3). Please don't allow agents of change to gain even the smallest foothold among your people. They are truly wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). They will promise you great things; numerical growth, an influx of young families and revitalization, but their prescription will actually bring death. It may well divide and scatter your people. It most certainly will change your congregation by leading you away from the clearly taught principles of the gospel into the world of unauthorized human ideas and opinions. Even if you gain the advantages which they promise, you will lose the favor of God and be rejected. What a terrible price to pay.

II. To you who stand before God's people to preach his word: I beseech you to preach Christ (I Cor. 2:2), but do not neglect his teaching regarding his doctrine and his church. To do so will leave your hearers weak and anemic in

faith and vulnerable to Satan's deception. Preach the whole counsel of God, including warning your people against cunning false teachers who will lead them astray from the paths of God (Acts 20:26-31). Take time to inform yourselves regarding the message of the change agents, invest the time and energy to prepare yourselves to answer them and to defend your people from their error (Phil. 1:16). Then use your classes and sermons to make sure your brethren are properly taught and inoculated against this pernicious error. Should the agents of change appear in your congregation or even in your city, be bold and courageous to speak out against their pernicious program of change.

III. To you who work with young people: In most cases the change agenda finds early acceptance among youth workers and their charges. Please understand that your job is more than just providing entertainment and fun for the precious young people of your congregation. They are young and immature, you are older. Children don't always know what is best for them or good for them. You are there to help them discover that. While many of your peers have eagerly embraced the call for emotionalism and excitement in worship, for an entertainment style of worship, please don't follow them in that error. I beseech you to be faithful to God's standard. Recognize his pattern he has provided us and follow it (II Tim. 1:13). Do your work in such a way that when those boys and girls are grown they will be faithful members of the Church of Christ and not likely to be lured away into denominational bodies.

IV. To you who are young in years: I beseech you to always be faithful to Christ and his church. Take heed to the teaching and guidance of your elders in the faith. Remember it is God's will that "ye younger, be subject unto the elder" (I Pet. 5:5). Please remember that what your friends like and enjoy may not be what God wants from us in our worship. Respect the authority of God's Word. It will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). Do not allow vivacious and charismatic young teachers to lead you away from the faith of your fathers. The church was here long before you were born and will be here when Christ returns. We must take heed that we stay faithful to it.

V. To our sisters in Christ: I beseech you to remember that God who created you said, "Your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16). In his divine wisdom, he ordained, "Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a women to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness" (I Tim. 2:11-12). He gives you his reasons for so doing. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression..." (I Tim. 2:13-14). Understand that this restriction is not simply a matter of custom, culture or tradition. The Holy Spirit directed Paul to tell us, "As in all the churches of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law" (I Cor. 14:33-34). In our generation you have been liberated from virtually all the limitations that culture and social convention placed upon your predecessors. For some this has been a blessing for others it has brought catastrophe. But remember that no matter what the social reformers may say, or regardless how liberated your peers may be, you are still under the restrictions that Christ our King has placed upon you. You cannot be his faithful child and rebel against his revealed will. Even if people arise within the church urging you to ignore those prohibitions and aspire for public leadership roles in the church, please don't heed them. Reject them as false teachers whose message will lead you astray. To be with Christ in glory, we must abide by his will in this life (Matt. 7:21).

VI. To all fellow-Christians: I beseech you to be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10). Observe the old paths of Biblical truth, they are unchanging and totally reliable. Stand up for Jesus! For his church and his Word! "Mark them that are causing divisions and occasions of stumbling among (our people) and turn away from them" (Rom. 16:17). When the change agents come knocking, do not open the door and give bid them welcome. I tell you, even weeping that "they are enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18). JHW

"Stick to the old truths and the old paths, and learn their divineness by sick beds, and in every-day work, and do not darken your mind with intellectual puzzles, which may breed disbelief, but can never breed vital religion or practical usefulness" (C. Kingsley).

"Men's hearts ought not to be set one against another, but set with one another, and all against evil only" (Carlyle).

ARE ANOINTING CEREMONIES AUTHORIZED FOR TODAY?

Dear Bro. Waddey: Is it OK for a preacher to anoint another preacher and his wife during church services? Should we be doing this at all? Janice

Dear Janice: Under the Mosaic system God ordained that kings, priests and prophets be anointed when assuming their office. Thus David was anointed to be king by Samuel (I Sam. 16:2,13). Aaron and his sons were anointed to the priesthood (Ex 28:41). Elijah anointed Elisha for the prophetic office (I Kings 19:16).

Christ was symbolically anointed to his office as Messiah and the High Priest of God's people when the Holy Spirit publicly descended upon him (Heb. 1:9; Matt. 3:16-17). All who become Christians are likewise symbolically anointed with the Holy Spirit (I John 2:27). This they experience when upon their baptism, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

In the early days of Christianity, when some Christians were blessed with supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:4-10), elders could pray for the sick and anoint them with oil and the Lord would heal them (Jas. 5:15-16).

The term anointing was used to describe the rubbing of refreshing oils into the feet, or hair as a part of one's grooming or as an act of hospitality (Luke 7:46).

As to publicly anointing of a person, be he preacher or any other Christian, as a ceremonial connected to the church, we find the New Testament is absolutely silent. We Christians are not under the Mosaic system so we cannot look to the Old Testament for such authority. We cannot impart the gift of the Holy Spirit to anyone, only God does that. We have no supernatural gifts and cannot heal the sick. Thus to have any kind of public anointing in an assembly of God's people is without Scriptural authority and violates Christ's instruction that we "obey all things whatsoever he commanded" (Matt. 28:20). It violates I Corinthians 4:6 (ASV) which says we are not to go beyond what is written. Those so doing are not abiding in the doctrine of Christ and thus have not the blessings of the Father and the Son (II John 9). The parties participating in an anointing ceremony have not learned it from the New Testament of Christ. Such is a doctrine and practice of men (Matt. 15:9). It is borrowed from the denominational world, most likely from the Pentecostal type churches. JHW

"A mean hateful spirit will not benefit the cause of our Lord Jesus. Paul exhorts us to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) yet that did not keep him from telling Timothy to reprove, rebuke and exhort those he taught. Nor did it keep him from specifically naming Hymenaeus, Alexander and Phygelus as trouble makers in the kingdom." JHW

"Within the ranks of the church a movement is afoot to undermine the foundations of her faith and turn her into a worthless denominational body. They would corrupt her faith, her worship and her activities into ways that please men rather than God. They think by ridiculing her and branding her as obsolete, myopic and irrelevant they will achieve their goal. While they distract and hinder her from her great mission of evangelism, they blame her for not being more effective in winning the lost. Their movement is not new, it is a revival of the same mentality that divided the church a century ago and gave us the Disciples of Christ/Christian Church. If you are so unhappy with the Church of Christ perhaps it is with those folks that you belong." JHW

ANTI-CHRISTS

No other term in the Bible stirs the imagination and fires such wild speculation as that of “anti-christ.” The speculation is most extreme among those religious teachers holding the various pre-millennial theories. It is the stuff of scary movies and novels that attract multitudes of superstitious worldlings. In their ignorance, authors weave a web of error. God’s word provides the light that will help us understand the who and what of “anti-christ.”

The term is a combination of “anti” and Christ. “Anti” has two basic meanings: (1) “over against,” hence one who puts himself in the place of Christ; (2) “opposition to,” i.e., one who stands in opposition to Christ.

From first to last, the story of the Bible is that of Satan’s attempts to take the place of God, and his opposition to the Creator’s rule and will. This was first displayed in heaven in the misty past when certain angels, not content with their position, sinned and were cast down to hell (II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Satan then appeared in Eden to corrupt the only creatures made in God’s image (Gen. 3:1-6).

In Noah’s day he nearly succeeded in snaring all of humanity in his vile net (Gen. 6:9-12). In Egypt, Satan’s man enslaved the Hebrews and slaughtered their male children. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, crushed God’s people and demanded that they worship his image (Dan. 3:1-5).

The Holy Spirit inspired Daniel to foresee Satanic efforts to hinder and even destroy God’s cause. From the broken Grecian Empire he saw a “little-horn that rose up to persecute God’s people (Dan. 8:9-14; 23-25). This represented the Syrian tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes (176-164 BC). He hated the Jews and their religion. Their temple he robbed. He placed an image of Jupiter in the Holy of Holies. A swine was sacrificed on the sacred altar and the temple defiled with its blood. He forbade circumcision. Every copy of the Hebrew Scriptures that could be found was destroyed. He tore down the walls of Jerusalem. Truly he was anti-God.

Daniel also saw yet another little horn that persecuted God’s people. It sprang from the Roman Empire and most likely represented the vicious emperor Domitian (Dan. 7:23-26). From Nero onward most of the Roman emperors were anti-christs.

Jesus was confronted by anti-christ forces of evil. At his birth, wicked Herod the Great sought to have him murdered. When his ministry was launched, the Jewish hierarchy waged an ongoing war against him and his teaching. Ultimately they secured his death. The Master warned his disciples of imposters who would claim to be Christs, i.e. messiahs (Matt. 24:5). With deceitful signs they would lead many astray, even among the elect (Matt. 24:24).

Paul warned of a coming “man of sin” (II Thess. 2:1-12). He was described as the “son of perdition.” He would oppose and exalt himself against all that is called God or worshiped. He would sit in the temple of God and set forth himself as God. His coming would surely be a work of Satan. He would use lying signs and wonders to deceive people. This malevolent spirit of anti-christian iniquity was already at work in Paul’s day.

The Apostle John wrote of “antichrists,” not just one single evil individual. In his day there were already many antichrists. They formerly had been among the faithful churches but they had gone out from them because they were no longer with them in heart and mind (I John 2:18-19). They were liars because they denied that Jesus is the Christ

(I John 2:22). They denied his Sonship to God. They were false prophets. In their teaching they denied Jesus had come in the flesh, i.e., his incarnation. They were actively at work in John's day and he warned the brethren to reject and avoid them. They were deceivers (II John 7). Because they did not abide in the doctrine of Christ, they had not God (II John 9). There is an attitude or spirit held by certain false teachers then and now which John labels "anti-christian" (I John 4:1-3).

Anti-Christians are of two varieties. There are those yet within the church. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, "From among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). He likewise warned Timothy that "some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons..." (I Tim. 4:1-3). Such anti-Christians seek to corrupt the faith and practice of the church. They seek power and control over congregations.

Some create their own churches that compete with Christ's church for the souls of men. These are counterfeit churches that do great damage to Christianity. We see popes who put themselves in the place of Christ, claiming to be the head of the church (Eph. 1:22). Of similar nature are the founders and heads of denominations. Founders and leaders of all the cults that pervert the message of the Master and seek to situate their "church" in the place of Christ's sacred body are anti-Christians. Most prominent in this class of antichrists are those theologians and "pastors" who have embraced one of the many varieties of religious skepticism. Claiming to be Christians, they deny Jesus existed from eternity, that he is God, that he was virgin born, that he worked genuine miracles, that his death secured forgiveness of humanity's sins and that he arose and ascended back to heaven. Occupying positions in seminaries and churches, these unbelievers are against Christ and his holy Cause.

Then there are those antichrists who in no way are associated with Christianity. They are unbelievers of every stripe who hate Jesus, his church, his word and his disciples. Their hatred drives them to make war against the saints (Rev. 12:13-17). This warfare can be violent, physical persecution such as Rome and Jews employed in the early years. Modern examples of this violent anti-christian spirit is seen in Russia under Communism, China, Cuba and most Muslim nations.

The opposition of unbelieving anti-Christians can be ideological such as presently prevails in academia, the media and the entertainment industry. They ignore the existence of Christianity, or they marginalize Christians. They subject them to ridicule and continual assaults on their faith. This opposition can take the form of legal harassment. Anti-Christian organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State use every legal trick to hinder, hobble and undermine the influence of Christianity in America.

Imagining anti-Christ to be some horrid supernatural enemy who is to come at the end of our age, many are ignorant, blind and unaware of the anti-Christians working in their very midst!

Paul describes the end of all such anti-Christian enemies, "Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his coming (II Thess. 2:8). In the day when the Christ returns, "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God" (Phil. 2:10-11). This will certainly include every person who has set himself in the place of Christ or worked against Him and his Cause! JHW

"You can believe that the New Testament is God's pattern for the faith and worship of his church! What do you think Paul meant when he wrote Timothy to "hold the pattern of sound words" (II Tim. 1:13). If there is no pattern, why would the writer of Hebrews point Christians to the case where God said to Moses, "See that you do all things according to the pattern shown thee" (Heb. 8:5)? Why would Paul mention "that form of teaching where unto ye were delivered" (Rom. 6:17), if there were no form to obey? True, God has not given us a blueprint with every minute detail like an architect provides the builder. But he has certainly revealed to us the major details of the organization, faith, worship and duties of his church. The problem is, many are not willing to accept the guidelines given. They want to have things their way. Thus they deny the pattern that God tells us he has provided." JHW

CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY

The latest rage in Evangelical circles is contemplative spirituality. In case you are unfamiliar with this practice, it uses ancient mystical practices to induce altered states of consciousness (often described as *the silence*). It is rooted in the mysticism of Catholicism, Hinduism and New Age practices. While the current version is dressed in Christian terminology, the basic premise of contemplative spirituality is pantheism. That belief is expressed thusly, "God is all" and all is God. The next step is called panentheistic meaning "God is *in* all" including those pursuing Him through this medium of meditative prayer.

Ray Yungen in his book, **A Time of Departing** writes, "In the spiritual climate of today a unifying mystical prayer practice fits the paradigm necessary to unite the various world faiths. In Western civilization, this model is the contemplative prayer movement.... this movement is on the slippery slope that will lead to ... apostasy. For this to happen, as the Bible says, there will be "seducing spirits" who design a spirituality very closely related to the truth." (I Tim. 4:1).

It is a brilliant strategy of Satan to take prayer, one of the most sacred things of Christ, and pervert it in to a tool for his own purposes. When person has fasted, prayed and meditated alone for hours and strange thoughts and visions come to his mind there are three possible causes. God could speak to him that way; or from the deepest recesses of his weary mind visions may arise in the same way that dreams come while he sleeps; or Satan may be taking advantage of his mental fatigue to plant tares of deception (Matt. 4:1-3). God hath spoken to us in his Son (Heb. 1:1-2). That message is recorded once for all times in the New Covenant of Jesus (Jude 3). Since we have no indication that God communicates today through mystical experiences, only one of the other two possibilities explains the responses found in the mystical exercises. Using the intelligence God has provided, we should ask, if the contemplative prayer movement is a deeper way of walking with God or a deception that undermines the very gospel of Christ? The answer is patent!

We expect such vain religious practices among the practitioners of New Age cults. It is interesting to observe such vagaries among our denominational neighbors. But it is downright alarming to observe some of our own people experimenting and offering such strange fire to God. It is emerging from some of the musky caves of contemplation in Abilene, Texas. Like those apostates of which Jesus warned, they would "lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). JHW

WHY WE REJECT INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP

Bro. Waddey: "If Jesus did not condemn the use of instruments in worship, how can we?" Mitchell.

Dear Mitchell: The conclusion we reach will depend upon the concept we hold about how God authorizes a thing.

Luther, with others following, argued, "I can do anything the Bible does not condemn. Zwingle and others correctly argued, "we can only do what God has authorized in his Word. Churches of Christ have followed the Biblical approach of Zwingle. Those who became the Disciples of Christ and Christian Churches accept such items as instrumental music in worship. They followed Luther's concept. Zwingle was right since the Bible lays down that proposition. Note the following:

Jesus instructed us to teach disciples to "observe all things whatsoever (he) commanded" the apostles to do (Matt.

28:20). Anything he taught them, personally while here or through his emissary the Holy Spirit, I am authorized to teach. That which he did not command, I cannot teach with his approval. I can read where we are instructed (thus authorized) to sing unto God, but I cannot read a line about the use of instruments of music in worship. (See Eph. 5:19 and Heb. 2:11-12).

If I abide in the teaching of Christ, I enjoy the blessings of the Father and his Son. If I go beyond that doctrine in my teaching and practice I have not God (II John 9). I can sing praises in worship within the boundaries of Christ's teaching, but to add instrumental accompaniment, I must go outside the teaching of Jesus for my authority. Notice how some go to the Old Testament, some to tradition, some to human wisdom. But no one can find its authorization in the New Testament of Jesus.

Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 4:6 "not to go beyond the things that are written" in our religious practices. If I abide by his instruction, I can only sing in worship, for that is all that is written. We freely grant that the New Testament nowhere forbids by name the use of instruments, but it does not approve or authorize the practice by the principles stated above.

To argue for instrumental accompaniment on the grounds that it is not specifically forbidden, proves too much. Scripture nowhere forbids me to use soft drink for the communion or catsup on the holy bread. Yet all would immediately take exception if I did so. Why? Because Scripture plainly tells us what to use; bread and fruit of the vine (Matt. 26:26-29). If I should not go beyond what is written in the communion worship, on what grounds should I go beyond what is written in the song worship?

Remember, Christ did not condemn instrumental music, burning incense, counting beads, holy water, infant baptism, sprinkling for baptism, clerical uniforms and a hundred other items of humanly originated religious practices. If that justifies us in the use of musical instruments, then it must of necessity approve the other items as well. Few would follow this logic to its end.

As to the matter of church buildings and song books, we must remember that God authorizes things in two ways: (1) Specifically, and (2) Generically. When He instructed Noah to build an ark we see both of these illustrated. The ark, its dimensions and materials were specified. Noah was not free to change the number of decks, windows and doors, nor to use any other material than gopher wood (Gen. 6:14-16). The kind of tools, the number of helpers and the schedule of work were not stated. God left this to Noah's judgment. He was authorized to use whatever tools, helpers and schedule he needed to fulfill the general command to build the ark. In like manner, the charge to assemble and worship authorizes Christians to secure a suitable place so as to comply with the command. The command to sing authorizes such incidentals as songbooks, song leaders and pitch pipes.

God's command to build an ark could not be stretched to cover building a permanent temple. It took another command to do that. The authorization to sing cannot be construed to cover a different kind of music such as the instrumental variety.

Of course, since we are under the New Covenant of Christ, that the Hebrews were authorized to use instruments in their temple worship, is of no consequence to us. Their use of instruments is in the same category as their use of animal sacrifices, incense and the Levitical priesthood. All were authorized by a former law not currently binding upon us.

Faithful Christians are committed to doing what Christ authorized, in the way he prescribed and for the reason he gave. That is the meaning of restoring New Testament Christianity. JHW

"The view of Christianity I advocate is the Biblical view. It is the view that our people held and promoted until the last 25 or so years when a generation of teachers and preachers, influenced more by Postmodernism and denominational theology than by Scripture, arose among us. I repudiate both the liberal on the left and the radical on the right. I stand with those who know and love God's Word and wish to be nothing more or less than Bible Christians." JHW

"Many of our conflicts have actually been the result of sinful men with strong personalities striving for dominance and recognition among brethren. Division will be avoided and unity will prevail when those who teach and lead, conduct themselves by the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12) and speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Peace will prevail if our lives and ministries are filled with lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and forbearance and love for brethren and if we give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2-3). If we are tenderly affectioned in our love for our brethren and if we honor others above ourselves (Rom. 12:9-10), factions will be avoided. If we truly love the brotherhood (I Pet. 2:17) and are greatly concerned for the welfare of all the churches (II Cor. 11:28) we will not involve ourselves in divisive activities." JHW

IS THE SINGING OF I CORINTHIANS 14 INSPIRED?

Bro. John: In I Cor. 14:26 Paul writes, "each of you has a song..." Is the singing mentioned here miraculous (like some of the other things mentioned -- revelations, tongues, interpretations) ? Philip

Dear Philip: In this chapter of First Corinthians the Apostle is dealing with the disorderly atmosphere that was observable in the assemblies of the church in Corinth. After addressing the problem, he concludes, "Let all things be done unto edifying" and "let all things be done decently and in order" (14:26, 40). In those early days some of the brethren were endowed with supernatural gifts. The gift of speaking in an unknown tongue, i.e., a previously unknown foreign language by the power of the Holy Spirit, was one such gift. The ability of some to reveal new truths from God by the power of the Spirit was another. One however could be an effective teacher without a supernatural gift. Such was Apollos (Acts 18:24-28).

In verse 26 Paul enumerates the kind of activities one would see in those early assemblies: "each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation..." Some of these things of necessity were the work of the Holy Spirit. Others may or may not have been. One need not be inspired by the Holy Spirit to sing a psalm. We know that early saints continued to use the psalms of David. Today we can sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs without the need of special inspiration of the Spirit. Some may have created new hymns, just as some Christians do today. The ability to write a song is surely a gift from the Creator, but not necessarily a supernatural gift. Whether the singing of vs. 26 is specially inspired must remain uncertain.

This passage shows that the activities of the worship assembly were conducted by several brethren. It was necessary that they be careful to maintain a proper decorum in so doing. We can see that there was a competitiveness between those with the gift of tongues and those with the gift of prophecy. Others with their different gifts may have exhibited the same unwholesome spirit.

The fact that a brother came to the assembly to sing a psalm does not establish conclusively that he therefore sang a solo as some are wont to say. While that is an unstated possibility, it is also possible that he shared his song with others and they sang together. I have observed this in Africa where only the song leader had a hymnal. He taught those assembled the song he had chosen and they followed him in learning it. Our modern practice of a gospel singing service illustrates this concept. Brethren come together to sing praises. Those capable of leading know they will be asked to do so. They normally think ahead and determine which song they will lead. When their time comes and they "have a psalm" to sing, all join them in the experience.

You also ask, "What Biblical principle can one use to forbid the placing of wreathes as decorations in a church building?" As to the use of a wreath for decorating a church building, that would be in the realm of opinion and thus a decision of the elders of each congregation. It really is no different than other floral decorations we commonly see in churches. But to have a Christmas holy day service is something quite different. Such is adding to God's will for his church (1 Cor. 4:6; II John 9-11). Paul warns against observing "days, months, seasons and years" (Gal.4:10). JHW

"In the book of Revelation we do find harps mentioned in heaven. In 14:1-3 John saw the one hundred forty four thousand saved souls. "And I heard a voice from heaven; as the voice of many waters, as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harper harping with their harps: and they sing....a new song..." Notice John's use of the four similes. The sound was "as or like the roar of waters," "like the surf or a waterfall," like the crashing of thunder and like the sweet sound of harps". What he heard was the saved, singing a new song, praising Christ and it sounded like roaring water, crashing thunder and harp music.

In chapter 15:2-3 he sees the victorious saints by the sea of glass having harps of God. "And they sing the song of Moses...and the song of the Lamb." Again we have the parallel of harps standing symbolically for singing. To use these passages to justify instrumental music, fails the test of sound exegesis. JHW

BRETHREN: PLEASE UNDERSTAND

We are in the midst of a major crisis in our brotherhood. Nothing comparable to the “**change movement**” has confronted the Lord’s Church since the defection of the Disciples of Christ/Christian Churches a hundred years ago.

* We are not defending or seeking to retain customs and traditions of our fathers, only the traditions passed down to us from the apostles (II Thess. 2:15).

* We are not clinging to our personal preferences in what we believe and the way we worship. We are seeking to hold fast the faithful word of Christ which has been entrusted to us (Tit. 1:9).

* We are not opposing progress. All of us have lived through, enjoyed and benefitted from the many changes progress has brought us. We embrace modern meeting houses, sound systems, means of communication and travel that benefit the church. We embrace the benefits of improved education for preachers and all brethren. But we cannot, in the name of progress, abandon the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). We cannot embrace the philosophy of the anti-Christian society in which we live (Col. 2:8). We will not sacrifice the old truths of Christ for the new thinking of the postmodern world.

* We are not against younger people, and younger leaders. Any young Christian who is faithful to the precepts of our Lord, we honor and respect. Younger preachers and elders who are taking their place among us we will love and respect, if they love and respect the Word of the Head of the church. But young adults who want to cast off the restraints of Sacred Scriptures we must resist as Paul did Hymenaeus and Alexander who had made shipwreck concerning the faith (I Tim. 1:19-20).

* We are not alarmists, who shout fire when there is not fire. Brethren, the fires of error are raging in several of our Christian Universities and in many of our congregations. Change agents are busily at work across the nation and even overseas. Books, overflowing with destructive error, are circulating widely among our brethren. Not to cry out a warning at this critical time would be criminal negligence (Is. 58:1).

* We are not just a bunch of cranks. Yes, some brethren are cranky and seem always to be looking for a quarrel. Yes some are ultraconservative and lack the true spirit of the Master. But the problems of which we write and speak are not “non-issues.” They are not peripheral matters of no consequence. We are warning of doctrines and practices that attack the very heart of the church; that undermine the authority and even the integrity of God’s Word.

* We are not extremists, running with one foot in the ditch. We reject extremists whether they be to the right or the left of truth. One has no advantage if he crashes in the ditch on the right while trying to avoid the ditch of liberalism on the left.

* We are not antis trying to impose our will on the brotherhood. We have no new, different or peculiar views to advance. We are pleading with our brethren to be true to the gospel they and their fathers have professed and followed for the last 200 years; that they be faithful and true to the Church of Christ which the Savior purchase in his death on Calvary (Acts 20:28).

* We are concerned citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Eph. 2:9). We love the church and are concerned for her welfare.

* We are pleading for the preservation of those Bible truths, doctrines and practices we have learned from our Bibles and followed since the day when we obeyed the gospel and were saved.

* We are warning our brethren against a movement that is set on the destruction of the Church of Christ as we have known her, done in the name of change.

* We are fighting for the purity and the honor of the holy bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2).

Surely you must share our concern. We desperately need your help if we are to stem the tidal wave of error and save that which is most sacred to Christ and to his people. JHW

“Villainy, when detected, never gives up, but boldly adds impudence to imposture” (Goldsmith).

CONCERN FOR ALL THE CHURCHES

To the Corinthians Paul expressed his deep concern for the all the congregations existing in his day (II Cor. 11:28). Those who truly love the brotherhood (I Pet. 2:17) will likewise be concerned when they see the church going through difficult times of conflict. When someone we love is in trouble, the Christian instinctively reaches out to help them. The same is true when a fellow-Christian, a sister congregation or the brotherhood is in danger.

Today churches of Christ are being torn by a group of leaders who wish to impose their agenda of change on them. This is not a new experience that will take time to reveal whether it will be good or bad in the end. More than a century ago the Lord's church went through a destructive change movement that was virtually identical to that we are facing today. The issues are the same, the motives and methods are the same. The church was decimated. Eighty-five percent of our people and congregations were swept away. We know what the end of this movement will be if left unchecked!

Because we love the church:

- * We warn everyone night and day with tears (Acts 20:31). Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15).
- * We watch unfolding events with concern, remembering Paul's grave warning (Acts 20:31). We read the literature and listen to the recordings of those who think they have found a better way to worship and serve God. We believe not every spirit, but prove them because we know that false prophets are gone forth among the churches (I John 4:1). We share our findings with every brother and sister in Christ who shares our concern.
- * We plead with those who have rejected the narrow gate and straitened way for the broad way of denominationalism, urging them to come home (Jer. 3:12).
- * We correspond with those who are young in the faith, weak or wavering, exhorting them to be steadfast and unmoveable in the Lord (I Cor. 15:58).
- * We seek to rally every faithful man of God to the defense of the kingdom of Christ (I Tim. 6:12).
- * Understanding the danger of extremes, we encourage brethren to stay on the middle ground of truth avoiding ultraconservatism even as they do liberalism.
- * Knowing it is not enough to oppose the error, we encourage brethren to be abounding in the work of the Lord; evangelizing the lost and caring for those in distress (Mark 16:15; Jas. 1:27).
- * Each day we offer up fervent prayers for God's people. We pray that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened (Eph. 1:18), that they may recognize the danger and the needs confronting the church. We pray that God will grant all his people increased faith and courage in the face of this crisis. We pray that He will rise up in defense of his righteous Cause (Is. 33:10).
- * In addition to this weekly Lesson to Fortify Your Faith each month we publish our Christianity: Then & Now journal. It is sent to some 20,000 preachers and elders here and abroad. We maintain a website at www.christianity-then-and-now.com that is an archive of several hundred articles addressing the errors of the change movement and reminders of the truths of New Testament Christianity. We have written and published twelve volumes that deal with this destructive movement. These we have placed in the libraries of virtually all our colleges, universities and schools of preaching. We read and publish reviews of the books written to promote the agenda of the change agents and good books that refute them. We correspond with those who are confronting the agents of change offering them wisdom, counsel and strategies for victory.
- * We invite brothers and sisters who share our concern to join hands with us in this undertaking for the blessed church of our Lord Jesus. JHW

"A soul without watchfulness is, like a city without walls, exposed to the inroads of all its enemies" (Secker).

MISCONCEPTIONS OF MISGUIDED TEACHERS

It is not uncommon for people to harbor misconceptions about life, people and the things around them. Some misconceptions are harmless because they are about insignificant things. It is of no consequence if you are misinformed about the ancient inhabitants of North America. But if you hold a misconception about the time your flight departs from the airport, it can be a serious problem.

Those who are crusading to change the Church of Christ into the likeness of a denominational body are operating under several serious misconceptions.

* They falsely assume that all who reject their agenda and oppose their efforts are radical, ultraconservatives. That folks of that category do object, we doubt not. But the majority who object are not of that stripe. They are moderate in their faith, neither untraconservative nor liberal. They reject both extremes as flawed. Moderates constitute a good 80 percent of today's brotherhood. They will reject the arrogant presumptions of the promoters of change.

* They mistakenly assume that all who refuse their leadership are legalists who are striving to earn their salvation by law-keeping and works of righteousness. Even among the most conservative, it is understood that man cannot save himself. All believe in and teach the role of God's grace in our salvation. All believe that without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6). While some may not understand this great theme as fully as others, it is not as the change agents suppose.

* Promoters of change falsely assume that all who oppose them are ignorant, uneducated pikers. They willfully forget that numerous conservative men, past and present, have attained doctoral degrees. In addition they had a life-time of experience in preaching, teaching and applying the gospel message in the tests of life. Their knowledge was tested and proven in conflict with every kind of cult and ism and every variety of error that surfaced in the church. Others, while not attaining an advanced degree, became scholars by their own study and experience in Christian service. If placed side by side with the most erudite of the agents of change, it might just be that many of the latter are in fact the pikers whose claim to advanced knowledge is more illusion than fact.

* Workers for change assume that their marketing strategies that enable them to recruit large numbers of followers will automatically be pleasing and acceptable to God. They forget Jehovah's warning, "...my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah" (Is. 55:8). It is the gospel that is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). It is God's good pleasure, through the foolishness of the preaching to save those that believe (1 Cor. 1:21). He does not promise a blessing to marketers and entertainers!

These are not harmless, inconsequential assumptions. They include things that can keep a person out of heaven. May God open their eyes that they may see clearly the truth that will make them free (II Kings 6:17; John 8:32). JHW

"It is important that we maintain a proper Christian spirit as we go through this tumultuous period. It is easy to be bitter and angry when we see brethren turn their backs on God's way. Also many of the change agents themselves have a proud, arrogant, superior attitude that can stir up our resentment. Let them be the bad guys, we must be kind and considerate, but firm and uncompromising in our convictions.

We must always respect the autonomy of sister congregations. That each church is free under Christ to make its own choices and decisions, by its very nature, means that some will make decisions and choices of which we do not approve. They have to answer to Christ, not to us. This is sometimes hard to live by, but it is right.

While we must never allow ourselves to be drawn into practices that we know to be contrary to God's will, we should always be eager and willing to help those who are wrestling with the problems. Hopefully we can snatch them out of the fire (Jude 23). We should always be willing to receive any and all who wish to flee from such situations even though it may have taken them longer to reach that conclusion that it took us." JHW

LET THE CHURCH FULFILL HER ASSIGNMENTS

When the founder and head of the church ascended to his throne, he left written instructions for his people (Matt. 28:20). First he designed that in each community his disciples organize themselves into congregations (Matt. 18:20; Acts 2:41-47). Each of these congregations would have elders and deacons to lead them in their work (Acts. 14:26; Phil. 1:1). Collectively, all the churches made up the universal kingdom of Christ (Rom. 16:16; Matt. 16:18).

To his church, Christ assigned some duties fundamental to her mission and expansion. First among these is to teach his message and recruit new disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). Secondly, she is to educate, nurture and shepherd his disciples so they will grow up in all things unto Christ (Matt. 28:20; Eph. 4:15), become functional, dedicated disciples and be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10). Third, she is to minister to the poor and suffering of humanity in the name of the Lord (Jas. 1:27; Gal. 6:10). All of these duties are incumbent on the individual Christian as well as the congregation. The universal church cannot fulfill these requisite duties save through the individuals and congregations that compose it.

There is a universal tendency among men to doubt the ability of the church to fulfil the tasks assigned to her. Hence men are ever inclined to create other organizations to do the work of the church.

- * Some are convinced the church can't do the job, others that congregations won't do it.
- * Some sincerely believe they have a better way, method or organization to do the work than through the church.
- * Some want the recognition, honor, glory and income that derive from creating and, directing an organization that does the good work God wants done.
- * Some look at the business world and other religious bodies and admire their bigness, their great resources and success and long to duplicate that in the service of God. So they set about to plan and organize a business to do some particular task assigned to the church.

We freely concede that these folks have no evil intentions of harming the Lord's church. But in greater or lesser degrees they do so by robbing her of the duty and responsibility laid upon her by her creator. We do not dispute that they do some good through their efforts, perhaps much good. No doubt many folks are blessed by their labors, but we restate the ancient maxim, that the end does not necessarily justify the means. Such thinking is flawed on several counts.

- * It assumes the church is incapable of doing that which God assigned her to do.
- * It assumes that man's plans are better than God's (Is. 55:8-9).
- * It assumes that which is done on a grand, universal scale is better than that which is done in smaller, incremental units.
- * It assumes the ways of business and industry are superior to the simple ways set forth in Scripture.
- * It assumes the recognition and applause the world gives their large-scale undertakings justifies their projects.
- * It overlooks the fact that when we create that which is huge and commands large resources, worldly men are motivated to compete for control of it, and when they get control, they quickly corrupt it.
- * Such humanly designed projects often lead their promoters to view the church, less as the kingdom and body of Christ and more as a cash cow to finance their projects.
- * Our history demonstrates that promoters, ever desiring and seeking for bigger things, conclude the church cannot adequately provide the need funds and thus they extend their appeal to non-Christians and other religious bodies. To gain their support, they find it necessary to adjust their message and practices to please those worldly sources of revenue. In so doing they lose their Christian identity and become just another Protestant eleemosynary organization. Doing good, but no longer as the outreach of Christ's true church.

We appeal to members of the Church of Christ to let the church do the work God assigned to her. She is fully capable. Let the glory of meeting the needs be hers. Believe that God's simple way is always better in the long run than our vast business projects. "Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations..." (Eph. 3:20). JHW

SECTARIANISM

Everyone agrees that sectarianism is wrong. In fact all agree it is a very serious flaw. None however, considered themselves to be sectarian. Sectarianism is unique sin in that only religious folks can be guilty of it. However in partisan politics we see a spirit that is virtually identical to sectarianism. While it is common for folks to accuse others of sectarianism, it seems impossible to see this is sin in oneself.

Many who frequently use the word would be stumped if asked to define it. Webster defines sectarian as “a narrow or bigoted person.” The term obviously derives from the root word, “sect.” Sect is found but five times in the New Testament. Three times it refers to parties of the Jewish religion and twice it is used contemptuously of the church (Acts 24:5; 28:22). In contemporary usage, “sectarian” is always negative and derogatory. It is frequently used as a term of slander to discredit the person or group whose doctrine or arguments cannot be successfully refuted. Sectarianism is most often suspected and seen in those to the theological right of the accuser. In common usage, the person so labeled need not be a member of a sect. He might just hold tenaciously to a differing view on some religious issue.

Churches of Christ and their members are often falsely referred to as sectarian by denominational leaders for the following reasons: We believe that Christ has only one church; We have no creedal standard, believing we should be guided by Scripture alone; We believe that God’s truth is absolute and attainable; We strongly believe that in strictly following God’s word we are doing what He expects of us; We do not accept in fellowship members of other religious bodies; We often persuade members of denominational groups to leave them and worship and serve Christ as his Testament prescribes; We point out the errors commonly promoted by other religious teachers; We do not join with other religious bodies in their ecumenical activities. We refuse to compromise or to keep our convictions to ourselves.

By today’s religious standards, Christ himself would have been sectarian and so would the Apostles and early Christians.

- * It is not sectarianism to insist that the way set forth by Christ in his New Testament is the exclusive way to serve him. Christ has all authority, he left us “one faith” (Eph. 4:4-5) and we are to observe all his commands (Matt. 28:18, 20).
- * It is not sectarian to recognize as our brothers and sisters in Christ only those who have been added by the Lord to His church when they believed, repented and were baptized (Acts 2:38, 47; I Cor. 12:13).
- * It is not sectarian to be steadfast and unmoveable in our commitment to Christ and his Word (I Cor. 15:58).
- * Neither is it sectarian to teach the way of the Lord more perfectly to those who are trying to serve the Lord in a faulty way. Nor is it sectarian to help them make the needed corrections to come into compliance (Acts 18:24-26; 19:1-6).
- * It is not sectarian to insist that God’s Word is absolute truth (John 8:32; 17:17). Nor is it such to insist that we will be judged by that objective standard and not by our subjective feelings (John 12:48).
- * It is not sectarian to emphasize that sinners are saved, not by faith alone, but by obedient faith (Jas. 2:24-26; Heb. 5:9).
- * It is not sectarian to strive to restore the church of the Bible, its faith, worship and practice. Christ left us a pattern to follow (Heb. 8:5; II Tim. 1:13). He expects us to do so (Matt. 28:20).
- * It is not sectarian, in a world of religious confusion, to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered (Jude 3).

There is in fact such a thing as sectarianism. It is an attitude or spirit that frequently is seen in a certain kind of religious person. It is hateful toward those who will not conform to its dictates. It is divisive. It is close-minded to the questions others might ask, or to the reasons presented by others for their stand on matters. It refuses to consider the possibility it may be wrong on some point, or that others have truth it needs to consider. It is void of agape love and kindness to those not subscribing to its edicts. Its evangelism consists primarily of recruitment of other Christians to its narrow group, not to Christ and his one body (Matt. 23:15). Its main emphasis is on select doctrines, rules and the defense thereof, rather than on Christ and the broad aspects of Christianity and the Scripture. It is heartless in dealing with its disciples who either fail to measure up to the party standards or who dare to think and speak independently. It is usually a splinter group who have written all other members of the church off as flawed. Railing, condemnation, accusations and personal attacks on non-conformists are the norm in sectarian bodies. They think that by being more conservative,

more strict and more narrow than others God will reward them. By this ,unconsciously they are trying to merit salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). It is often the cases that those who are branding others as sectarians, are in fact the real sectarians. Don't be deceived by their accusations (II Thess. 2:3). JHW

91.

PREACHING GOD'S WORD IN AN AGE OF CHANGE

Whether a congregation follows the change agents into the apostasy of denominationalism or continues in the old paths of the gospel will depend in large measure on the leadership of the man in their pulpit. If he does a proper job of teaching and indoctrinating his brethren, they will be strong; if he fails in his duty they will be vulnerable when false prophets come to them.

TOPICS THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED IN TODAY'S RELIGIOUS CLIMATE

To fortify and strengthen the faith of your brethren and to inoculate them against the change virus, a faithful man of God needs to prepare and present lessons that directly address the many false teachings of the change agenda. Don't be opaque; don't leave folks guessing about what you are saying to them. Warn them of the problem and prepare them. Every congregation needs to hear lessons on the following themes.

- * Preach on **grace**, showing that God's grace is conditional. To receive grace we must meet the conditions God has imposed (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 2:11-12; 3:5).
- * Preach on **faith**, showing that faith without works is dead and useless (Jas. 2:24,26).
- * Preach on **baptism** showing its importance in God's scheme of redemption. Show how the blood of Christ saves us when we obey the sacred command to "arise and be baptized and wash away (our) sins" (Acts 22:16).
- * Preach on the **necessity of obedience** to the commands of Christ. (Heb. 5:8-9).
- * Preach on the **one true church**: purchased by the blood of Christ, his bride, his kingdom, his family of the saved (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23-24). Stress its superiority over every institution established by men.
- * Preach on the **sin of denominationalism** (I Cor. 1:10-15; 3:1-5).
- * Preach on God's wish and command that **all his people be united in Christ** (John 17:20-21; Eph. 4:3).
- * Preach on the **proper role of women in the life of the church** that they learn in quietness and neither teach nor have dominion over men (I Tim. 2:12).
- * Preach on **true worship in spirit and in truth** (John 4:24); worship that is not based on the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:6-9), nor on emotion or subjectivism but on the solid rock of Christ's revealed Word.
- * Preach on **praising God in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with singing**, with the melody made in our hearts, not on mechanical instruments of music (Eph. 5:19).
- * Preach on the **meaning of and proper observance of the Lord's Supper**, as a memorial of Jesus' death for us (Matt. 26:26-29).
- * Preach on the **New Testament as the absolute and final authority in all matters relating to Christianity** (Matt. 28:18; John 12:48). Show that God has given it as a pattern for us to follow (II Tim. 1:13; Heb. 8:5).
- * Preach on **fellowship and show that God has specified conditions that call for a refusal of fellowship** (Rom. 16:17; I Cor. 5:13; II Thess. 3:6 ; II John 9-11).
- * Preach on the **Holy Spirit**, noting the many blessings the gift of the Spirit brings to the Christian, and show that no miraculous gifts or personal revelations are available today.
- * Preach on **traditions**, marking the distinction between those of men (Matt. 15:9), those from God (II Thess. 2:15) and those that are simply harmless ways of fulfilling the divine will.
- * Preach on the **Bible, showing the difference in the two great covenants** and that we are now amenable to the New Covenant of Christ but not to the laws and regulations of the Old (Heb. 8:6-13)
- * Present lessons showing **brethren how to read and understand the Bible**, especially how we determine right and

wrong and how authority for what we believe and do is established.

* Have a lesson that **illustrates the “law of silence”** and show how it impacts on what we do as disciples of Christ (Heb. 7:12-14).

* Have a lesson that deals with **the uniqueness of the name Christian** (I Pet. 4:16) and the **scripturalness of using the term Church of Christ** to identify our congregations (Rom. 16:16).

All of these topics are featured items on the agenda of the change agents. You must prepare your brethren before the wolf is found in the midst of the fold. “If you put the brethren in mind of these things you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine...” (I Tim. 4:6). JHW

92.

WILL A DEATHBED CONFESSION SUFFICE TO SAVE ONE?

Dear John: Are deathbed conversions valid? Is the thief on the cross a deathbed conversion? Are deathbed conversions valid with or without baptism? Tim.

Dear Tim: There are two parts to your question. The first is about baptism. God endowed Christ with all authority (Matt. 28:18). Jesus commissioned us to go preach the gospel to every creature. He said he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:15-16). This verse alone should be sufficient to establish that baptism is essential to our salvation. But there are other verses that impact the second aspect of your question. The Lord told Nicodemus that a man cannot enter the kingdom except he is born of water and Spirit (John 3:3-5). The only time water is used in connection with the religion of Christ, it has to do with baptism. Absent baptism, no man can enter the heavenly kingdom. We are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). Saul was told to be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). These and other passages teach the necessity of baptism in order to receive salvation. So clear is the teaching on this subject that our only two options are to accept it or reject it.

Now to the second part of your question. Can a man be saved on his death bed? Many who preach have assisted aged or terminally ill people in obedience to Christ in baptism. I have no doubt that God accepted their faith, repentance, confession and obedience. This is illustrated in the parable of the eleventh hour worker (Matt. 20:1-16).

As to the person who has reached the point where he cannot be baptized, I have not one scripture that promises him that he will be saved since he did not do what Christ said he must do to obtain salvation. I dare not preach or imply that the person who has neglected his Lord's will for all his life can hope to slip in with his dying gasp. To do such would be to give false hope and encourage others to neglect their obedience to the will of Christ. That said, we are not God and we do not feign or reject souls. If God should choose to save the person, who in his final hours calls upon Him for mercy, that is His prerogative and I would not protest His decision. God's grace is the most wonderful thing in the world, but we must not presume upon God's graciousness and neglect obedience to His will. Remember Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him (Heb. 5:9). Also obedience is the proof of our love for the Master (John 14:15).

The Thief on the Cross lived and died under the Old Covenant. Christ's New Covenant was not activated until his death and coronation at God's right hand (Heb. 9:14-17; Acts 2:33-36). While here on earth, the Lord could distribute his blessings as he would, but now that he has departed we are left with his will containing his instructions on how his gifts (salvation) will be given. Because of faulty teaching regarding the salvation of the thief, millions of people have been led to put off or even refuse baptism, thinking they could always escape judgment by doing as the thief did. How tragic. JHW

“The weakest spot with mankind is where they fancy themselves most wise” (C. Simmons).

BLINDNESS

For many years I worked with students who were visually impaired. Some were totally blind. A blind man cannot see his mother's or his wife's face. He cannot see the glory of the sunrise or sunset. He cannot see danger when it is near. Truly his handicap is great. There are two kinds of blindness: the one is caused by injury or disease. Such cannot be helped. The other consists of refusing to see that which you don't want to see or recognize. Jesus scored Jews of his generation, saying, "their eyes they have closed...Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes...and understand with their heart..." (Matt. 13: 15). In the last 40 years a sizeable number of young preachers have appeared among our churches who evidently suffer from this spiritual blindness.

* They can't see the different purposes for the Law of Moses and its accompanying Old Testament Scriptures in the Old and the New Dispensations. For the Hebrews, from Moses to the cross, it was the constitution of their nation, the statute book of their courts, their guide for daily living and the standard and guide for their religious life and activities. For Christians it is no longer binding as our law and spiritual standard (Col. 2:14). Jesus, the founder of the Christian religion, is head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). He has all authority both in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). We are to teach people to obey all that he has commanded (Matt. 28:20). The Old Testament record of those ancient folks provides us with valuable examples (I Cor. 10:11). Its history provides us much valuable and reliable information. God expects us to make use of it. For information on how to be saved and how to worship we must look to Jesus and his New Covenant. Like their peers in the denominational world, our change agents want to be able to stroll through the Old Testament and gather things they desire to use in their worship. Most noticeable of their selections is instrumental music.

* They cannot see the difference in changes that are in the realm of means and methods and changes that affect the essential nature of the church, her worship and her message of salvation. The first we are free to make and each church can make them as will benefit their local situation. The latter category are wrong. They usurp the authority of Christ, the head of the church. Those we dare not and cannot make.

* They cannot see why women must not fill leadership roles in the public worship of the church. The most obvious reason is that God plainly says, "As in all the churches, let the women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law" (I Cor. 14:33-34). Later Paul wrote, "But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness" (I Tim. 2:11-12). In these and other passages Paul gives the theological reasons why such is God's standard. For the humble servant of the King, His expressed will is sufficient.

* They cannot see the difference in Christ's church and those churches created by men. True they can talk vaguely of "The Church" in the same way that their denominational mentors do. But in so doing they include the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox Church and all Protestant bodies along with the Church of Christ. They consider the Church of Christ, in which they still claim membership, to be just another denomination. From their constant and hateful criticism of her, in their minds she must surely rank as the most sorry of the lot.

* They cannot see the difference between gospel preaching and the story telling, wise-cracking and joking offered by many change agents. To merely hold a bible in hand while telling stories or to tack on a verse or two for decoration does not constitute a gospel sermon. Politicians do that all the time and everyone knows it is not a sermon. It is done to garner respect or credibility for that which may or may not have merit in itself! The true man of God will preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering teaching" (II Tim. 4:2). He will speak God's word faithfully (Jer. 23:28).

May the Lord open our eyes that we may see things as they truly are (II Kings 6:17). JHW

"In all our weaknesses we have one element of strength if we recognize it—Here, as in other things, knowledge of danger is often the best means of safety" (E. P. Roe).

TO AVOID SCYLLA THEY FELL INTO CHARYBDIS

The ancient Greeks had a story about a dangerous whirlpool in the watery channel separating Italy from Sicily. It was named **Charybdis** and stood opposite treacherous, rocky waters called **Scylla**. Maritime history tells of numerous ships lost as the helmsmen, trying to avoid the one danger, wrecked their vessel on the other. Thus the saying has come down that says, "Between Scylla and Charybdis" which means "to avoid one evil, we fall into a greater." (**Dictionary of Classical Mythology**). We see this ancient proverb being played out among our brethren in our current situation.

First we see those who are so fearful of legalism that to escape it, they rush to the opposite extreme of liberalism. This is the case of the promoters of the change movement. Their sermons, lectures and books are filled with warnings against the dangers of legalism. Among our brethren, a **legalist** is a man who is untraconservative. He lives in fear of being mistaken and is unwilling to investigate any thought or idea beyond what he has previously concluded. He is cynical and suspicious of all brethren beyond his immediate circle of friends who think as he does. He lives in a fighting mode. Such themes as evangelism, unity, love of brethren, and peace have little appeal to his mind. He tends to be harsh and judgmental toward those who do not abide by his demands. Legalism is certainly an unhealthy aberration of the Christian faith and all do well to avoid its rocky waters.

Liberalism as seen among our people, describes those who feel free to take liberties with God's Word, his church, his worship, or the faith He has given us. They are impatient with those who wish to have Bible authority for what they believe and do in religion. They see those who do not hold their liberal view as old-fashion, obsolete and out-of-date. They yearn to be free of the restraints our back to the Bible commitment impose. They desire to be accepted as equals among their denominational peers. Liberalism is like that giant whirlpool that sucks into its deadly vortex all who venture into its swirling waters. The liberal change movement is but one stop on the road away from New Testament Christianity and into denominationalism. It is only a matter of time until those who embrace the first are pulled into the latter.

Using the same imagery, we see brethren who are so afraid of liberalism that they rush to the opposite extreme of **legalism**. Make no mistake about it, liberalism is a danger to be avoided. But not everything different from the thinking of the legalist is actually liberalism. For many, the measure for other preachers and congregations is not so much Scripture as the way things were when they were first introduced to the church in a small town or rural setting. They fail to grasp that while there are unchanging fundamentals in our religion, there is room for a multitude of variations that are harmless and acceptable. Preachers may have little formal education or lots of it and still be faithful men of God. Churches may be poor and small or rich and large and yet be true to Christ. Our hymns may be old or new, so long as they are Biblical. Our services may be held at different hours, on the Lord's Day. Cultural differences are not wrong so long as they do not lead us to violate God's commands. There are questions about difficult subjects, not clearly enunciated in Scripture, about which sound and good men might differ. There may be controversies and issues that are not so much biblical as they are personality-driven. If, to avoid the deadly whirlpool of liberalism, we flee so far that we wreck on the lethal rocks of legalism, what are we profited? Yes, liberalism is a dangerous evil that must be avoided, but we must find and abide within the safe middle passage rather than plunge into the opposite destruction.

Holy Father: Please give us the wisdom to avoid the extremes in religion that wreck and destroy people. Help us to follow our Lord Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life. Through Christ we pray. JHW

"I would rather speak the truth to ten men than blandishments and lying to a million" (H. W. Beecher).

"The course of evil begins so slowly, and from such slight source, an infant's hand might stem the breach with clay..." (Massillon).

JUST WHAT ARE THE CHANGE AGENTS DOING THAT IS SO WRONG?

Dear Bro. Waddey: I love God and want to be like Jesus. I love Jesus' church and want to do the will of God in all things. I believe in the inerrancy of the holy Scripture and think that spiritual and moral truth is knowable and is intended for my life. What I don't understand is why there is so much turmoil. Is it mostly about ways to worship? I cannot find a biblical reason for arguing over which songs to sing or for specific teaching methods. I cannot argue over the number of cups to use in communion or whether the cups are passed to me or I walk to the cup. I have searched and read and prayed about this. I have been talking to friends who feel the same way. Can you tell me exactly what the problems are? Does everyone else know what problems you are talking about but me? Katie

Dear Katie: God bless you for your love for his Son, his Church and his Word. We are in agreement on the things you mentioned. Yes, there are some who are protesting over the trivial, insignificant things you mentioned, but I do not.

It matters not which songs we sing so long as they are psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19), offered to God through Christ...sung in spirit and in truth (I Cor. 14:15). It does matter however if instead of singing praise to God, we listen to a musical presentation, whether vocal or instrumental when we assemble for worship. When we are to sing we are to speak one to another with the words we sing (Eph. 5:19). It does matter if in addition to our singing we add instrumental music, which is something other than singing. Singing in worship Christ has clearly authorized, the use of instruments he has not. We are to do that which he has commanded us to do (Matt. 28:20).

It matters not the method chosen to distributed the communion to the worshipers. It does matter however if should change the day He authorized for the communion to be observed. His New Testament clearly shows that it was on the first day of the week that disciples assembled to break the holy bread (Acts 20:7). It does matter if we should try to mix the communion service with a common meal (I Cor. 11:20-22).

The thing that is troubling our churches is the spirit or attitude that says we can do anything we want to do in our worship. They hold this mistaken view because they do not respect the New Testament as the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) or accept that it is a pattern for us to follow (II Tim. 1:13).

We are troubled by men who no longer believe the teaching of Scripture that makes baptism an essential element of the sinner's salvation. They correctly emphasize salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9) but then they place baptism in the area of something one does as a demonstration of his salvation. They hint that a man can be saved even if he never gets around to baptism, because of God's grace and the man's faith. Such teaching is diametrically contrary to the plain teaching of God's Word. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16); "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16).

We are troubled by men who no longer believe the truth of God's Word about the nature of the Lord's church. They often speak of the Church of Christ in a derogatory manner, they shame her before the world. They seek acceptance among folks who are members of churches founded by men. They seek to reduce the Church of Christ to the status of a denominational church of human origin. Christ built but one church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4-5). The idea of dividing into groups that call themselves after men is clearly condemned (I Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-6). While building large congregations for themselves, they are undermining and harming the body of Christ. For that we fault them.

I regret very much we have to deal with such unpleasant matters as we serve Christ and make our way to eternity. If however you read your New Testament carefully you will see that such problems existed even in the days of the apostles of Christ. We must be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10). God be with you and keep you strong and faithful. JHW

PARABLE OF THE LOST LIMB

A small sore appeared on Mrs. Smith lower leg. An incompetent doctor treated it as inconsequential. When he finally realized that the lady had a problem, his treatments were inadequate and too late. After a few months at his ineffective hands, the poor lady sought another doctor who immediately saw the wound was morbid. In spite of his best efforts, gangrene spread and the leg had to be amputated at the knee. The doctor she had trusted to care for her had miserably failed in his duty. His patient suffered serious loss.

The body of Christ has wounds that must be tended or else they too will cause great harm. These wounds have been inflicted by those who should be her friends (Zech. 13:6). Some brethren, among them preachers, youth ministers and campus workers, have taken it upon themselves to change many of her essential features. Each unscriptural change is a wound inflicted on the body. Left unattended these wounds will fester and grow. Gangrene will result (II Tim. 2:17).

Elders and preachers are God's appointed physicians to tend to and maintain the health of his church. Tragically in hundreds of cases they are behaving like the careless physician. They are unaware of her wounds, or unconcerned about them. They fail to realize the danger. They are loath to treat the problem. Because of their incompetence or their neglect, the wounds are daily worsening and unless given immediate attention will result in tragic loss. Members will be lost, even entire congregations will be corrupted and lost.

Just as that Ms. Smith's doctor was guilty of malpractice for his neglect of his patient's wound, so are those preachers and elders who fail to treat the wounds on the body of Christ before the condition becomes critical. Let all who accept the privilege of leading Christ's people understand their responsibility to be good physicians who care for his church.
JHW

A PARABLE OF PLAIN WINNIE SUE

Winnie Sue was a plain girl. Born of Christian parents, she had good upbringing and training. They instilled in her heart strong and strict Christian values. They also discouraged her from worldly friends, dress and manners that might reflect poorly on her faith. Given her plainness and simplicity of dress and countenance, poor Winnie was not among the most popular girls at her school.

As Winnie watched the young men flocking around the other girls who dressed stylishly and improved their appearance with makeup and fancy coiffures, she came to resent her plainness and strict upbringing. When she went away to college, she gradually cast off the teachings of her parents. She quickly learned that the more she imitated her worldly girl friends, the more the boys took notice of her. By the time she finished her four years of school Winnie was the "belle of the ball." She looked and acted just like all the other young ladies on campus. Only occasionally did she find time to worship with God's people. That was mainly when she went home to visit her parents. Later in life when Winnie had married and had daughters of her own, she began to reflect on her life's experiences. At 35, her parents' rules did not seem so extreme. The lessons learned at church seemed very reasonable. She convinced her husband that it would be best if they resurrected some of those old standards for the training of their own children. At night, Winnie often reflected on her years in college and felt ashamed that she had cast away for popularity, the values that she now wanted her girls to embrace. In her prayers she asked God for forgiveness of sins she had drifted into.

Observation tells us that the leaders of some Churches of Christ are like Winnie. To them the church is so plain in her adornments, her worship is so simple and old fashioned, her doctrine is so limiting. With these limitations, how can she ever be popular with her worldly neighbors? Like Winnie, they are eager to cast off those old biblical restraints,

and apply the make-up and dress of the world. Popularity with their neighbors, they surmise, is reason enough to abandon the old paths (Jer. 6:16). Sadly, most of them never recover themselves. The further they go in pursuit of worldly honor and recognition, the less inclined they are to go back to the ways set forth by Christ and his apostles. In time, faded and jaded, one would never guess that once they were truly the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-25). He that hath ears, let him hear. JHW

98.

BEHIND THE MASK

The Japanese have an opera troop that consists of men dressed and made up as women. They sing in falsetto voices. The uninformed person looking and listening to them would swear that they are lovely females. But when the disguise is removed, the truth is revealed. There are preachers and religious teachers who operate similarly in their professions. They present themselves as lovers of Truth and friends of Christ's church, but when the mask is removed, we see a very different reality. They love truth only if it complies with their standards and they love only such churches as share their point of view.

Change agents present themselves as men above all the meaningless doctrinal frays that little-minded Christians engage in. Yet they have their doctrinal viewpoint to propagate. They imagine themselves as above the personal, vindictive arguments of narrow minded, mean spirited traditionalists. As I read their books, blogs and articles, I note that they describe those who do not share their liberal views as "ultraconservative, legalistic, patternistic, factionists, enforcers of the party policies." Their beliefs they style, "a growing degeneracy and dysfunction, an outrage, they are enslaved, ranting and raving, fear-mongering, tyrannical sectarians." This is how these apostles of love and kindness view their brethren.

Agents of change see themselves loving, broad-minded, tolerate progressives who are laboring to save Churches of Christ from themselves. Their writings suggest that they are more akin to the "antis" whom they despise and against whom they rage. Note the following:

- * The major thrust of their assaults is **against** the Church of Christ of which they were one time faithful members and in which they served in the early days of their ministry.
- * They are **against** the idea that we should "hold fast the pattern of sound words" delivered to us by the Apostles (II Tim. 1:13).
- * They are **against** the teaching that we must not go beyond the teachings of Christ (II John 9).
- * They are **against** expressing the truth that "baptism doth also now save us" (I Pet. 3:21).
- * They are **against** the belief that God has told us what he wants in his worship and expects us to abide by that instruction (Matt. 28:20).
- * They are **against** their brethren who worship as they did in days past.
- * They are **against** evangelists, soul-winners and missionaries who teach the lost the truths about salvation and worship that they have learned from God's Word.
- * They seem obsessed with their "**anti-patternism**" dwelling on it time and time again.
- * They are **against** the concept of restoring the faith and worship of apostolic church.
- * They are **against** the idea that the Church of Christ is truly Christ's church.
- * They are **against** the idea that Christ has only one church in which he expects us to worship and serve him.

From reading their materials for the last seven years, I conclude that:

- * They consider themselves more intelligent than and spiritually superior to the thousands of brethren past and present who preached the gospel among Churches of Christ (one of whom likely planted the church they now serve).
- * Their writings often drip with venom when describing brethren who do not share their liberal point of view.
- * They imagine themselves as being persecuted for a holy cause when we or other faithful men of God respond to their fallacious message and divisive actions.
- * They picture themselves as bold and courageous, risking all by attacking their brethren who are content to be Christians in the biblical sense of that term.

- * They can tolerate most any departure from New Testament teaching regarding the church, her faith and worship. To them the only sin of any great consequence is that of division. It seems never to occur to them that truth and error are opposites. When truth tolerates and embraces error, it ceases to be truth. When factious men draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:29-30), they blame the church for the resulting division. **Those sin who cause division**, not those who suffer from it.
- * They cannot see nor accept that they and their fellow change-agents are causing yet another division in the church. That which is their greatest sin (division) is really their sin.
- * They and their comrades in faith are repeating the same disastrous journey of the Disciples of Christ who abandoned the concept of restoration 125 years ago. Their destination is theirs.

Liberals operate on huge assumptions:

- * They assume that those members of Churches of Christ whom they call “traditionalists,” do not love and appreciate Truth. One of them said, “it’s a lot easier to convert an atheist to Jesus Christ than it is to convert a traditionalist to Truth.”
- * They assume that their new gospel is a more grace-centered, Christ-focused spiritual experience than worship that conforms to the teaching of Christ’s Testament (Matt. 28:20).
- * They assume that the brother who chooses to walk the straitened and narrow way of truth (Matt. 7:14) is a “sectarian.”
- * They assume that because they laugh at those who refuse to follow their lead that everyone likewise holds them in contempt.
- * They assume that they and their fellow-change agents now represent all but a very small percentage of the entire membership of the Church of Christ.
- * They assume (better, they hope) that those traditionalists whom they despise will soon be virtually nonexistent.
- * They assume that the congregations that they succeed in changing to their new ideas will be acceptable to Jesus, the founder of the church.
- * They assume that they can inflict these grievous wounds on the church (the body of Christ, Eph. 1:22) and enjoy God’s blessings for so doing.

These are the men behind the mask! I find it strange that they draw their income from and identify themselves with a body of people in whom they see little or nothing good and in whom they have no confidence. JHW

99.

PARABLE OF THE NEGLECTFUL FATHER

Jack was an easy going fellow. Nothing seemed to bother him. Like the old song, things could always be taken care of “manana.” His father gave him a nice van to drive. But as usual, Jack never got around to servicing it. Just so it would run, he was happy. He notice the brake peddle was pretty low, but he reasoned he would get to it next month. One day his wife was driving their two children and several of their friends to school. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a semi truck pulled in front of her. Her foot instantly hit the brake peddle, but it sank to the floor. The van smashed into the big rig. The results were terrible. Jack’s wife and one of his children were killed, the other seriously injured. One of the other kids died, the rest were badly hurt. Poor Jack, in an instant death and destruction swept away his mate and his child. As he stood beside the bed of his injured child guilt and self-recrimination overwhelmed him. He was in large part responsible for this tragedy. He was the head of the family. He knew the brakes were worn out. He should have had the van repaired. Because of his lackadaisical attitude, he put off taking care of the needed service. The parents of the other children all blamed him for their loss and the suffering of their children. Jack never got over his guilt. His neglect had caused all of this suffering and loss.

Across town, the preacher and elders of the Church of Christ knew that problems were confronting their congregation. They were aware that their young adults were agitating for changes in their faith and worship. But the leaders did not

get too concerned. They thought the problem would go away, if they gave it time. There were other things that they thought were more important. Then one day it happened. There was an uprising in the congregation. Incredibly the majority of the people were clamoring for serious changes in their worship. They wanted more entertainment, solos and singing groups, even instrumental music. They were pressing for women to be placed in leadership roles. They openly challenged the old biblical teachings about salvation. They demanded a new preacher and elders. The leaders met. They prayed and they agonized. They protested, but it was too late. In the end they had to resign and go elsewhere. Like Jack, they had neglected their duty and responsibility to watch for dangers and to guard the flock (Acts 20:28-31). They went out filled with shame and guilt. They should have known better. They should have acted when the first signs of danger became apparent. He that hath an ear let him hear! JHW

100.

LEGALISM WILL NOT WIN THE BATTLE AGAINST LIBERALISM

It is true that the church is under attack by enemies on the left. It is a serious challenge that could easily cripple us and at worst bring ruin to the Lord's Church.. There is no doubt that liberalism must be rejected; that its proponents must be confronted and driven from the field. The question is who can best do that job and what method should be utilized?

The legalist is always eager to fight our battles. It is his nature to enjoy a fight. The question is, will his approach be effective? Will the results truly be beneficial to the church? There are some observations worth considering:

- * Harsh words, loudly spoken, do not persuade people. In fact they cause them to close their minds and turn away from the one so speaking.
- * Calling out the opposition by name and showering them with invective and ridicule likewise is ineffective.
- * The man whose faith is based on what we've always done rather than on the word of God will not prevail. In fact, the one doing this is the very example the change agents use when trying to discredit us.
- * He whose objections rest on verses lifted out of their natural context cannot help us.
- * The man who thinks that cute "one-liners," ridicule and sarcasm will suffice is doomed to fail.
- * The brother who has not first read, studied and listened to the reasoning of the change agents will be fighting against the shadows rather than the real enemy.
- * The man in whom the Spirit of Christ is absent cannot properly represent the Master's Cause (Phil. 2:5; Rom. 8:9). The true soldier of Christ will love and treat with respect, even his enemy (Matt. 5:44-45). He will demonstrate his Christian spirit by doing good even to those who are his opponents (Rom. 12:20). His speech will be with grace seasoned with salt (Col. 3:6).
- * He whose arguments are primarily quips and slogans will not be effective.
- * The man who is in the ditch on the right side of the road will not be successful in refuting those stuck in the ditch on the left.
- * He whose religion is mingled with rules and restrictions of his own making is ill-prepared to defeat the opponent who uses similar man-made regulations to justify his dismissal of the rules of Christ.
- * He who scorns all the brethren but himself, and the few who agree with him, cannot save the church from harm.
- * He who is a factionist on the right cannot make a solid case against the man who is a factionist on the left.

The fact of the matter is, liberalism and legalism are both erroneous ways of approaching Christianity. Both are extremes. Both have the seeds of self-destruction in their essential nature. Both will never attract the lost.

To win the battle, the Lord's church needs the leadership of wise and faithful men who avoid both extremes. She needs men who are beholding to no one but Christ; men who can discern and distinguish between matters of opinion and matters of faith; men of compassion and conviction who can call the erring back to the gospel standard; men who are of no party. She needs servants of Christ who labor to advance His Cause and none other. JHW

PARABLE OF THE DOG AND THE TRUCK

Back in the 1950s my uncle operated a repair shop on a busy street. To keep him company while working, he kept a cur dog named Spot. Spot was a friendly pooch but he hated trucks. He would snarl and bark at any truck that happened by. Like a tiger springing for the kill, Spot would charge passing trucks, snapping at their wheels. If aggressive action, barking and snapping could kill a truck, spot would have been like David who slew thousands of Philistines (I Sam. 18:7). But I don't recall ever seeing a single truck stopped, wounded or damaged by old Spot.

One day, however, a big delivery truck rolled by the shop. Out shot Spot with the courage of a mighty warrior defending his outpost. He was running for all he was worth, growling and snapping at the big tires. Suddenly something happened. Spot must have miscalculated the speed of the truck, or maybe he slipped, but in a split second he was swept under that massive truck. It was an awful sight. The screams and howls of the injured dog drew lots of attention. Some said, "You need to put him out of his misery." But his owner gently wrapped the wounded warrior in a blanket, placed him in a box and took him back to the shop. Back then poor folks couldn't afford to take a cur dog to the veterinarian. He placed poor Spot near the stove and daubed axle grease on his cuts and abrasions. He then laid a burlap bag over his wounded buddy, food and water were placed near his head. But there was little hope for his survival.

After a couple of weeks, to the amazement of all, Old Spot began to recover. However, during those long days of convalescence Spot must have rethought his sport of chasing trucks. His retirement years were spent hanging around the shop, greeting customers and taking it easy.

Perhaps you ask, Teacher, what is the moral of your story. An old Arabian proverb sums it up well. "The dogs bark, but the caravan keeps moves on by."

Today, a bunch of curs are barking at the Lord's church, criticizing her faith and worship; her practices and her history. To hear these arrogant critics, one might think they could capture and control her, making her into something of their liking. But such critics are not new. They have been present in every generation. They will be dogging the church to the end. Satan will see to that. However, the dogs may bark, but we can be assured that the King's army will keep on marching forward. JHW

"You speak often about your "faith heritage tradition" and assure me and your readers that you love it. Anything you hold in your religion that is based on your "faith heritage tradition" is obviously not based solidly on the teaching of God's Word. You could as easily give it up or keep and observe it. I predict that if we both live long enough I will see you embracing and practicing and teaching many things that contradict your "Church of Christ" faith tradition. The river of change is deep and wide and the current carries all who are caught up in it. Its destiny is the great sea of denominationalism."

"Since both "legalist" and "liberal" are pejorative terms and are never used in a complimentary way, they are frequently used to brand and label someone who is unpopular or unliked. The person may be a faithful Christian and a true teacher of God's Word, yet an enemy or some ignorant or prejudiced soul may try to blacken his reputation by calling him a liberal or a legalist. This means we have to be very careful how we use such words and how we evaluate them when we hear or read them used to describe some brother. Rather than just call some mistaken brother a liberal or a legalist, it is better if we take a few extra lines to point out just what he is doing that deserves such a label. JHW"

102.

CAN YOU READ THE PSALMS WITHOUT A HARP?

Those change agents who are seeking to introduce instrumental music into our churches have borrowed dozens of excuses from their peers in the Disciples of Christ, the Christian Churches and other denominational bodies.

When we cite Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:19, that we speak one to another in *psalms*, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with our hearts, they triumphantly pounce on the word "*psalms*." Ignoring the lexical evidence that notes that by the first Christian century, the word "psalmos" had evolved to include unaccompanied singing. They assert, "You cannot sing a psalm (*psalmos*), without an instrument!"

I have a few simple question for these profound scholars of ancient biblical languages.

- * If it is impossible to sing a psalm without accompaniment on a string instrument, i.e., a harp, would not every singer be obligated to play a harp as he sang the psalm?
- * Would having a harp be necessary only when singing a psalm, but not when singing hymns and spiritual songs?
- * If the word *psalmos* demands that one pluck the strings as he does his psalm, would he then have to pluck his harp when he reads the psalms? When we study the Psalms in a bible class, must we accompany ourselves with harps? When we read the Psalms in our home devotions, must we break out our harps and accompany ourselves? When the change agent preaches a sermon on the twenty-third psalm, must he accompany his reading with his harp? If not, perhaps those fountains of linguistic wisdom could explain why such is not the case! JHW

103.

GRACES NEEDED IN A DAY OF CHANGE

God has promised to liberally supply the needs of those who in faith ask of Him (Jas. 1:6). With the church besieged on every side by men determined to break down and replace her faith and worship with those of their own making and preference we must diligently seek God's help. If we are to successfully repel their attacks and be successful in reclaiming those already snared, there are graces every soldier of Christ needs. For these we should daily implore the Father.

- * First we need **understanding**. We need to correctly understand God's message so we can effectively wield it in our conflict, as the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). Also we need God's help in understanding the plans, and proposals, the tactics and message of the promoters of change. Being shrewd deceivers they conceal their intentions in flowery, crowd-pleasing terms. To avoid deception we need understanding.
- * We need **discernment** so we can look at matters and distinguish between the true and the false; between traditions which are harmless and those which are harmful; between changes that might help and those that would surely harm the church; between things that are of God and those of men (Mal. 3:18).
- * We need **dedication** to our task. The church is God's holy family on earth (I Tim. 3:15). It is the sacred body of Christ (Eph. 1:22). It is his divine kingdom (Matt. 16:18) and worthy of our best efforts to defend, protect it and preserve it for those who come after us. We must do our best for our Master.
- * We must pray for **determination** to stick with our task and win this battle for the heart and soul of the church. We cannot afford to grow weary in well-doing for the Lord's cause (Gal. 6:9). Around us we see many who have no heart for the battle. They are willing to ride out the conflict in their safe-haven. Others are willing to surrender without a struggle. Still others choose to walk away and allow the adversary to occupy their congregation. Left to such soldiers, the church would be quickly overrun with error.

* Each day, let us all pray that the mighty God will supply every member of his body with the courage and necessary strength to fight the good fight of the faith (I Tim. 6:12), that he will supply our every need for the battle (Phil. 4:19) and that he will save his church from those who would do her harm. JHW

104.

JUST HOW SERIOUS ARE YOU ABOUT SAVING CHRIST'S CHURCH?

The church of our Lord Jesus is under a massive attack throughout the nation. This is no ordinary, run of the mill problem such as we have faced in times past. Not since the great apostasy of the late 1800s have we encountered a problem of this magnitude. After years of quietly infiltrating our schools and congregations, what has come to be known as the "change movement," has now burst forth in full blossom. At least three of our most prominent schools and dozens of congregations, including many of the largest among us, have already been swept into this new heresy. Under attack is **the very nature of the church** (Are we truly the Lord's church or are we just another human organization?); **the nature and essence of our worship** (Shall we worship with instruments of music and shall our communion be part of a common meal?); **the leadership of the church** (Shall women be allowed to preach and teach over men?); **what constitutes one a Christian** (Is baptism an essential aspect of one's salvation or are we saved by grace through faith alone?); **the nature and extent of our fellowship** (Should we stand apart from churches founded by men or should we embrace them as Christian brethren?).

It takes no genius to understand that if these ideas finally prevail among our people we will have completely lost our identity and will cease to be in any sense the Church of Christ. Clearly the threat is enormous. We know that there are many who want to see the above agenda successfully imposed on all our congregations. Without doubt there are thousands who are appalled at the temerity of those who would hold and teach views so diametrically opposed to the revealed will of God. The question is just how badly do we want to save the church from apostasy? Are we willing to pay the price necessary to accomplish this? Consider the following:

- * Do you care enough to pray fervently every day that God will protect his church, that he will discomfit those who would harm her, that he will raise up a faithful band to defend her walls and lead the way in restoring her to prosperity (II Cor. 11:28)?
- * Do you care enough to invest your time, energy and money in opposing this change movement and in promoting faithfulness to God's Word? Are you willing to put your hands to the task and work to help salvage those around you (II Cor. 12:15)?
- * Do you care enough to spend time educating and informing yourself and the brethren where worship? This is especially pertinent for those who preach.
- * Do you care enough to write, preach, teach and talk to every person, exhorting them to hold fast the faithful word (Tit. 1:9)?
- * Do you care enough to speak up and speak out against the false teaching and error when someone promotes it in your presence? Too many sit tongue-tied and mute while others espouse these concepts in Bible classes, sermons or conversations.
- * Do you care enough to work with others in combating the error? One soldier here and one there can easily be overrun, surrounded or driven from his post. But standing together, we become an unmoveable force that can block the incursions of the enemies of the faith (Eccle 4:9-12).
- * Do you care enough to tolerate the imperfections and different approaches of good men who uphold the sound doctrine of Christ while holding varied opinions on lesser matters, in order to win the greater victory over the true enemies of the church (Phil. 1:16-18)?
- * Do you care enough to help reclaim, restore and rebuild those disciples and congregations who have been led astray (Gal. 6:1)?
- * Do you care enough to reject those who are determined to abandon the Bible way (Rom. 16:17-18)? We cannot keep

them in our midst and expect to keep the church loyal to the Master's will.

The way you respond to these questions will reveal just how much you really love the church for which Jesus died. I urge you to let your love and loyalty be manifested by your diligent service on behalf of Christ's church in this hour of crisis. JHW

105.

ELDERS: IMMUNIZE YOUR FLOCK

Because of the ever present danger of communicable diseases every school child must be inoculated against them. Heresy operates much like a communicable disease and the consequences are equally deadly to spiritual life. One such disease has now reached epidemic proportions in the body of Christ. In every state of the union and in numerous foreign mission outposts we hear of churches infected with the virus of change. Symptoms are easily identifiable. Their preachers begin promoting changes to worship and questioning fundamentals of the faith. Their elders are compliant toward these innovations. Their younger members are pushing for more and quicker changes. Older members who are distressed by such unscriptural changes are ignored and even told to leave if they cannot accept the changes. The time to deal with the problem is before it makes its appearance in your congregation. The following is a working plan that will help inoculate your flock.

Bro. V. Glenn McCoy of Yorba Linda, California has written an excellent series of tracts that can help you fortify the faith of your members. Among his many titles, the following will fulfill the needs of this program. * **What is the Church of Christ?** * **What is Our Authority in Religion?** * **What Must I Do to Be Saved?** * **Can One Be Saved by Faith Alone?** * **Baptism: What? Why? Who?** * **The Lord's Supper: When Should We Observe It?** * **Why Doesn't the Church of Christ Use Instrumental Music in Worship?** * **The Role of Women in the Church?** * **The Gift of Tongues: Ecstatic Utterance or Actual Languages?** * **Christ's Second Coming.**

- * Order a copy of each of these tracts for each family unit in your congregation.
- * Plan a ten week series of class studies based on these tracts. All students from junior high through adults will participate in the study.
- * Announce in your bulletin and from the pulpit the study plan you have scheduled.
- * Give each family a copy of the first tract with the exhortation that each member read it before the next Lord's Day as it will be the topic for discussion in Bible Class.
- * Appoint your most mature and capable teachers to lead the discussions. Be doubly sure those who teach are sound in their understanding of these topics and that they will teach them effectively.
- * Each succeeding Sunday, pass out the tracts for the next week's study.
- * You might even wish to prepare thought questions to accompany the tracts so folks can ponder them ahead of time.
- * You might wish to add additional tracts on related themes to round out a 13 week quarter of study.
- * It would be profitable if your minister would prepare a series of sermons that would compliment each of these topics. People learn best by repeated exposure to an idea or concept.
- * A similar program should be provided every two years, perhaps more often.

You will find this to be a valuable and productive investment in the spiritual growth and maturity of your congregation. Either confront this epidemic now or it will confront your congregation later. Tracts may be ordered from V. Glenn McCoy, 22470 Mission Hills Lane, Yorba Linda, CA 92887. Cost \$30 per hundred. JHW

"When your last hour comes will you be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith... (II Tim. 4:7)?"

End

TO WIN THE VICTORY—2008

A change movement is impacting churches of Christ throughout our nation. Promoters of the change agenda now control scores of our largest congregations, three of our major universities and one college. They have pockets of influence in several other schools. This divisive movement has already made its way to our mission outposts around the world. To successfully block the spread of this malignant growth there must be a response equal to the problem. We need your help to extend our outreach to every English speaking church of Christ in the world. Currently we print upwards of 20,000 copies of CTN and mail CTN to some 9,400 congregations in America, plus bundles to schools and to 365 contacts abroad.

We yet need to add the following items. This is a goal easily within our reach. Consider the following:

History demonstrates that false teachers always try to capture the mission outposts, so we also need to mail CTN to all the congregations in the English speaking nations. Printing plus overseas postage is as follows:

Nation	Num. Of Congs.	Currently Mailed	Monthly Cost to Mail
New Zealand	23	05	\$ 23.00
United Kingdom	108	11	\$108.00
South Africa ca	200 (Eng. Speaking)	02	\$200.00
Caribbean Islands ca	100	13	\$100.00
African Nations & India	500(a small fraction)	117	\$500.00
Philippines	100 (a small fraction)	17	<u>\$100.00</u>
The calls from English speaking African & India brethren are innumerable			
Total needed per month to add these churches to our mailing list			\$1031.00

To help our Missionaries in Foreign Fields be aware of the problem and prepared to resist it, we need to mail them. Best estimates are that we have some 350 workers on foreign soil. At 1.00 per month the cost would be \$374.00

Libraries of Christian Schools. We need to send bound copies of CTN Vol. 7 & Lessons to Fortify Your Faith to the libraries of all our US schools. Cost of mailing is \$13.00 per school. \$455.00

We also need to mail packets of all our books on the change movement to the remaining 28 Bible schools in mission fields. The cost per school would be \$142.00. \$3,976.00

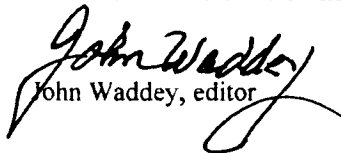
To bring a needed new book on this issue into print (2,000 copies) \$8,000.00

To publish a tract relating to the change movement (5,000 copies) ca. \$1,000.00

The monthly cost of sustaining our current level of operation is approximately ca \$5,700.00

The things currently being done in this project are made possible by a handful of faithful saints and a few small churches. Visualize what could be done if you and others stood with us and helped in this undertaking. This is a volunteer work done by people who love the Church of Christ and are determined to block those who are harming her. No one receives pay for this work. Contributions are tax-deductible and should be made to the West Bell Road Church of Christ. All individuals and congregations are encouraged to participate. If you would like to assist in any one of these projects, please let us hear. If you have constructive suggestions, please share them. Please remember this work in your daily prayers. Pray that God will bless our efforts on behalf of his beloved church. Write **John Waddey, 12630 W. Foxfire Dr. Sun City West, AZ 85375.** You may contact us at (623) 214-3715 or email to johnwaddey@aol.com

Our sincere thanks to all who have lent their help and encouragement,


John Waddey, editor

CHRISTIANITY: THEN & NOW PROGRESS REPORT, AUG. 2008

John Waddey, Editor

<p>Monthly editing and mailing of CTN to preachers and elders of some 9,400 US congregations. (Virtually all US mainstream churches. We are in our 8th year. CTN has now been enlarged to 8 pages.</p>	<p>Each month bundles of CTN are sent to 29 schools where young preachers are being trained.</p>	<p>Each month CTN is sent to 94 preacher training schools in foreign lands.</p>
<p>CTN is mailed to the preachers and elders of all Canadian and Australian churches, and 12 in the United Kingdom</p>	<p>We mail CTN to 270 key men in other foreign nations, many of whom duplicate and distribute the paper in their areas. In addition to these, the paper is provided to some 400 preachers in Nigeria.</p>	<p>We have published bound volumes of the first seven years of CTN. They have been placed in the libraries of 35 US Christian Schools and schools of preaching.</p>
<p>We maintain websites at www.christianity-then-and-now.com and www.firstcenturychristian.com We are now in our seventh year. We are now averaging 10,500 pers site per week.</p>	<p>Each week we email a Lesson to Fortify Your Faith, A First Century Lesson and A Lesson for Preachers to some 1,700 contacts around the world. Many forward it to their Christian contacts.</p>	<p>We read and review all the books published pertaining to the change movement, both for and against it. They are published in CTN and posted on the website.</p>
<p>We have now written and published Surviving the Storms of Change, Books About the Change Movement, 3 vols. Of Lessons to Fortify Your Faith and Sacred Principles on Which We Stand.</p>	<p>All of these, plus Liberalism: Deadly Enemy of the Church have been sent to the libraries of all our schools where preachers are being trained.</p>	<p>We have written & had published Sacred Principles on Which We Stand to help indoctrinate brethren in the faith. Two grants have enabled us to give this book to some 1400 preacher students</p>
<p>Daily we answer questions from those concerned about the Change Movement. My response is then modified to remove personal content and posted on the CTN website.</p>	<p>We correspond with those who are struggling to save their congregations, providing helpful materials and encouraging the to fight on.</p>	<p>We correspond with proponents of the change agenda and those who are waffling on these issues, encouraging them to be faithful to God's word and way.</p>
<p>We have put together recommended strategies for preachers and elders to help them protect their congregations from the promoters of change.</p>	<p>We spend many hours recruiting faithful saints to help in this struggle for the heart of the church. We maintain regular correspondence with those who help.</p>	<p>We write and mail to our supporters a monthly news report of this work with a financial report of the funds received and spent.</p>
<p>We are researching our brotherhood history and that of the promoters of change to help brethren see and understand the origins of this movement.</p>	<p>We included occasional quality tracts and booklets as inserts with our mailings. These are additional tools for church leaders to use.</p>	<p>We have been able to mail all of these books to 60 of our foreign Bible schools where preachers are being trained.</p>
<p>We need to mail CTN to all English - speaking congregations abroad: United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Caribbean & S. Africa</p>	<p>We need to send CTN to all missionaries in foreign fields.</p>	<p>Additional books need to be written responding to the on-going challenges of the change agents. We envision a dozen volumes in this project.</p>
<p>We need to write and publish a series of tracts on each point of our faith, worship and practice that some are trying to change.</p>	<p>We must motivate churches throughout the nation to host lectureships on the issues agitated by the change agents.</p>	<p>We want to encourage faithful brethren to host regional strategy meetings to deal with the problems caused by the promoters of change.</p>
<p>We hope to produce a collection of pertinent lessons on the change movement that will be record on CDs and made available.</p>	<p>We must send the volume III of Lessons to Fortify Your Faith to all our school libraries.</p>	<p>We need to provide complimentary copies of the above mentioned books to all student preachers.</p>
<p>We must continue our work of organizing resistance to the change movement at home and abroad.</p>	<p>We must support and encourage all faithful preachers, churches, schools and papers who are resisting the promoters of change.</p>	<p>We need to finish mailing packets of our books to the remaining 28 Bible Schools in foreign nations</p>