

TRUTH

Has The New Testament Been Tampered With?

David Dann

According to the prophet Isaiah, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:8). In the very least, this inspired statement implies that the word of God will never be destroyed or rendered useless. The prophet’s proclamation would include all that is written in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. According to Paul, the apostles’ doctrine is included as part of the “word of our God” to which Isaiah refers (1 Thess. 1:13). However, not everyone agrees that the Bible has been preserved untainted throughout the centuries. In fact, modern critics of the Bible claim that the New Testament is not at all the same as what was first spoken by Christ and his apostles.

The Modern Claim

1. The essence of the claim. According to those critical of the New Testament, the Scriptures were written so long ago and copied so many times that they cannot possibly have retained their original meaning. They tell us that vital pieces of information have been removed from the text, while at the same time misleading additions have been made over the years. In essence, they

would have us believe the New Testament has been tampered with.

2. The consequences of the claim.

If the New Testament Scriptures have been altered from their original state, then the original meaning has been lost. If the original meaning has been lost, then the gospel has no power at all today. If the Bible has been substantially tampered with, then we may feel justified in ignoring it altogether.

The Biblical Claim

1. The New Testament claims to be divine in origin. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). The constant claim of Scripture is that it is the product of the mind of Almighty God.

2. The New Testament claims to be indestructible in nature. In quoting the prophet Isaiah, Peter writes of “the word of God which lives and abides forever,” because “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Pet. 1:23-25). Jesus said,

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*“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”
(John 8:32).*

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Love the Brotherhood

Mike Willis

Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king (1 Pet. 2:17).

So wrote the Apostle Peter in his first epistle. The word “brotherhood” is translated from adelophotus which is defined by Thayer as, “brotherhood; the abstract for the concrete, a band of brothers i.e. of Christians, *Christian brethren*” (11). The word also appears in 1 Peter 5:9. The KJV translates this verse as follows: “Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your *brethren* that are in the world.” The RSV has, “Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your *brotherhood* throughout the world.”



Unscripturally Organizing the Brotherhood

Some have historically misunderstood the brotherhood as a collectivity of churches and then proceeded to organize that collectivity of churches into some functioning organization to accomplish a brotherhood work. Alexander Campbell had the concept that the universal church is composed of all of the local churches in the world and then proceeded to organize the American Christian Missionary Society through which these local churches could function together. This was but the beginning of an institutional development in the Christian Church which led to church supported institutions of every sort, such as Christian Woman’s Board of Missions (1874), Foreign Christian Missionary Society (1875), Board of Church Extensions (1883), National Benevolent Association (1887), Board of Ministerial Relief (1895), etc.

A similar movement toward churches functioning through a human institution occurred among the institutional churches of Christ. The churches began taking funds from their treasury to support orphan homes (such as Boles Homes, Schultz-Lewis, Potter Orphan Home, etc.). However, this was but the beginning. Soon there were church supported colleges (Abilene Christian, David Lipscomb, Harding, Freed-Hardeman, etc.), church supported homes for unwed mothers, church supported camps for troubled teens, church supported medical missions, and who knows what else.

In answering the mistaken concepts of the organization of the church, brethren have correctly taught that each church is autonomous (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). There is no organizational structure for churches to pool their resources to function as a collectivity of churches.

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Connie W. Adams

My wife and I have just completed thirty days of teaching in the Philippines, my fourth trip and her second. In that time we visited 28 congregations (some of them for only one service) but spent from one to three days at other places, allowing for continuity in teaching. These were all day meetings and part of the night. We spent two weeks in Mindanao and two in Luzon (mostly in the northwestern portion). In thirty days I spoke 95 times and Bobby taught 48 classes for women — a number of these sessions were two hours long, including periods for questions and answers.

Many expressed concerns for our safety due to Muslim rebel activity, especially in Mindanao. We did not go to Zamboanga this time, nor to Basilan where much of the trouble is found. But there are pockets of insurgency in various parts of Mindanao. The brethren were careful to protect us and we used the best judgment we could.

Brethren came from many places to see us and study with us. This required much effort on their part and some of them borrowed money for transportation. We did not help with transportation and notified brethren at each place we were scheduled to that effect. We found brethren meeting in substantial buildings in a few places and very humble quarters in many places. Some buildings are framed with bamboo and covered with straw with open sides. We found some churches with elders, a sign of maturity. There are many new congregations springing up almost daily. I do not know how many congregations there are or how many native preachers. A few churches are trying to fund as much of their work as possible. For others that will be a long time coming given the extreme poverty in so many places. It is hard for an American mind to comprehend the poverty that exists there. I see no improvement in that since we were there in 1999.

How Many Remain Faithful?

During our trip there were 198 baptized (including eight denominational preachers) and two restored. Jim McDonald, Todd Williams, Kyle Campbell, and John West were also in the country during part of the time we were there going to different places; Jim reports 189 baptized where the four of them worked. Over and over, brethren ask, “Yes, but how many of them remain faithful?” I must admit that the question greatly aggravates me. It implies either that the people who obey the gospel were not well taught, or that they must have been given some reward, or that perhaps they are not too bright

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and are easily swayed. There is a trace of cynicism in the question. I wonder if anyone asked that question about the 3,000 who obeyed the gospel on Pentecost. "They that gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). "Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). At Thessalonica "some of the Jews believed and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the Greeks, *a great multitude*, and of the chief women *not a few*" (Acts 17:4-50). Yes, but how many of them remained faithful? The news of many souls obeying the gospel should first of all produce great rejoicing. It confirms the power of the gospel in human hearts. The gospel is still God's power to save, in the Philippines as well as everywhere else.

These who obey have been taught by Filipino brethren. They would obey the gospel whether we were there or not. Do some fall away? Of course. Do some fall away here? Certainly. Did some fall away in the first century? You know they did, including elders (Acts 20:29-30) and preachers (2 Tim. 4:10). But I can tell you there are many, many more congregations in the Philippines than there were in 1971 when I first visited there and even than there were in 1999 when we were there last. Attendance at our meetings ranged from 50 to over 700 with 300-500 present at several places.

Are there problems? To be sure. Are there dishonest preachers? Yes, there are some. Is there a tendency for many Filipino brethren to appeal to American brethren for financial help for every problem? Yes, sadly that is true. I asked several who approached me about personal financial needs, "What would you do to handle this problem if we were not here?" The question seemed to stun some. Others shrugged it off. I do not know how American brethren can solve all the needs of that impoverished nation nor even if we should. There are certainly special circumstances such as floods, droughts, typhoons, earthquakes, and other natural disasters which would cause great hardship in any country. The Philippines are geographically situated so as to have their share of such calamities.

There are many needs with which brethren can help. There are some worthy men who need and deserve support. By far, most of the preachers work without support except what they can supply from their own labor. Many places need song books, dialect Bibles, and nearly every place needs material for teaching Bible classes both for children and adults. Many preachers need books which they cannot afford to buy. They can use tracts in English but also need help in printing tracts in their own dialects. Jim McDonald has done much to help with that but the needs are endless. There is a great need for over-the-counter medicines. If there is sickness and the brethren do not have money for a doctor, or surgery, or even medicine, they do without it sometimes at the peril of life itself.

Personal But Special Things

My friends, the Balbins, in Davao City named their youngest son, W. Connie Balbin. We send him a card each year on his birthday. He will be thirteen by the time you read this. The Balbin family, along with some others, came down to Digos while we there and at one of the invitations offered, W. Connie came forward. He requested that I baptize him. So, Connie W. waded out into the sea and baptized W. Connie Balbin. I hope he will some day preach the gospel like his father and his two older brothers, Sonny Dave and Dudley (named for Dudley Spears).

Also, a son was born to Julie Notarte and wife soon after we were there with them at Digos. Julie e-mailed us that they had named him Connie Bobby and that he would be called C.B.

Growing Pains

Many denominational preachers have been converted in the last few years, some of whom are men of wide influence. They have much to learn. Many of them have walked away from support and their obedience to the gospel creates immediate problems for them and their families. Many issues have surfaced throughout the Philippines with which brethren have to contend including premillennialism, institutionalism, the one-cup doctrine, mutual edification (no located preacher), the one covenant doctrine, loose teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage, on fellowship, and other issues.

Many preachers there are well informed and abundantly able to uphold the truth. A few have been swayed by the teachers of error of one kind or another. At each place where we stayed long enough to present several lessons, I dealt with the conduct of gospel preachers. I addressed several of the issues just mentioned, as well as teaching on the Holy Spirit. At two places I devoted three sessions to an overview of the book of Revelation. Other subjects covered first principles, the nature and work of the church, how to establish Bible authority, surveys of Bible books, corrective discipline in the church. Bobby taught women on Proverbs 31, Titus 2, woman's work in the church, godly wives and mothers, the crucifixion, the book of Esther, how to teach other women the gospel, and other subjects. At most places there were more women present than men.

Thanks to Our Beloved Brethren

Not only are we grateful to those who made it possible for us to go, but we are thankful to our Filipino brethren who received us again with such warmth and affection. Their hospitality is genuine. They offered us the very best they had, making many sacrifices to do so. It is not likely that we will attempt another trip to the Philippines, but we long to be with all the faithful in the city that lies foursquare. Thanks for the memories. We hope and pray that we have contributed something useful to the saving of souls in that

Where Have We Been — Where Are We Now — Where Are We Going (2)

In a previous article I mentioned that as a young man, almost age twenty-one, having decided “to try to be a preacher,” I was told that I needed to obtain a good education in the Bible. I could do this, I was advised, by reading the “brotherhood papers,” by obtaining some sound, fundamental Bible study aids and books, and by attending “a Bible college of the brethren.” So I subscribed to all the “brotherhood papers” (I was already receiving *The Bible Banner*, which became *The Gospel Guardian*, as brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. had given me a year’s subscription to that paper). I began reading them voraciously and began buying books with my very limited funds. Brethren began to give books to me.

The first book I read entirely, other than reading the Bible daily, was T.W. Brents’ book, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*.” (I’ve read this book several times through the years. I think and believe that every preacher ought to read that book and digest it!) I purchased, and was given, over a period of several years, such books as Robert Milligan’s *Scheme of Redemption and Commentary on Hebrews*; Moses E. Lard’s *Commentary on Romans* and *Lard’s Quarterlies* (five volumes); J.W. McGarvey’s *Commentary on Acts of Apostles*, *Commentary on Matthew and Mark*, and *McGarvey’s Sermons*. I had H. Leo Boles’ *Commentary on Matthew* and B.W. Johnson’s *Notes On The New Testament* given to me. I was given an entire set of Adam Clarke’s Commentaries, six volumes, and *The Works of Josephus*. In a short period of time I was given all five volumes of N.B. Hardeman’s *Tabernacle Sermons*. Everyone in the church should read and study McGarvey and Hardeman’s sermons. These are the kind of sermons we need to be preaching and hearing everywhere, in every generation. Folks began to give me volumes of Alexander Campbell’s, *The Christian Baptist* and *The Millennial Harbinger* (years later when these books were reprinted, I purchased the entire sets). Thayer’s *Lexicon*, Young’s and Strong’s concordances were obtained, and later Vines’ *Dictionary of New Testa-*

ment Words. I began to have quite a library of fundamental books within a short time, which, in those days, almost all the older preachers possessed, studied, and from them obtained thoughts and materials for preaching the gospel. Today, I have a library of several thousands books which I plan to leave to my sons at my death. I had thought of “willing” these to Florida College but have decided not to do so. I have a few old and very rare volumes which will never be reprinted, as Dante’s *Inferno*, dating back to the fourteenth century, and Lt. John F. Lynch’s book, *The Expedition To the Jordan And The Dead Sea*, published in 1850. These books, and others, were given to me by sister Stella Winnett (now deceased) in Woodbury, Tennessee, in the late fifties.

In the fall of 1947, I went to Nashville to David Lipscomb College “to get an education in the Bible.” This was not to be. There were some good Bible classes and some good teachers. I did not take all the Bible classes offered or sit at the feet of all the Bible teachers, as I had decided to major in history and minor in speech, be a school teacher as well as a preacher, and I had to take all the necessary courses of study to that end. I also wanted to some day own a farm. My idea was to be a preacher, a school teacher, and a farmer, raising cattle and sheep. I wanted to live in one place, not move about as preachers are wont to do, and raise my children in the country. That never happened! All my life I have preached and preached only, never getting “side-tracked” into some other endeavor, job, or scheme. I have a permanent teacher’s certificate from the state of Tennessee to teach in secondary schools but have never used it. I have never owned a farm or raised cattle and sheep. One lifetime is not long enough to do many things and to do all of them well. I hope I have done well in preaching, being acceptable to our Lord.

My judgment was that Athens Clay Pullias, the president of the college, was the most able Bible teacher there, at least I benefitted more from his classes. He was a brilliant man, excellent student of the Bible, and gifted speaker.

A good many years later Pullias left the Lord's church, joined a denominational church, and died in that condition. He knew better than this! Brother J. Ridley Stroop and brother S.C. Boyce, both older men and teachers in other areas, taught much Bible in their psychology and history classes. They were excellent men. Brother Ira North was a "top water" and poor teacher, more zeal than knowledge, more showmanship than devotion to truth. Brother Batsell Barrett Baxter was a kind and good man, a gentleman in every respect, but was not a teacher who exposed error and "called names" of false religious systems, doctrines, and teachers in his classes. I have ever felt that had I not been taking and reading the publications of the brethren during those years, especially *The Gospel Guardian*, I would not have been aware of most of what was being said and done in the churches and among the brethren in those days. My conclusions, early in my life in the church, as a young preacher, and as a student at David Lipscomb College, were that I should study the Bible diligently, read incessantly, memorize Scripture daily, try to think carefully, and be responsible for myself. I realized that I would not get a real strong, solid Bible education at David Lipscomb.

During my three years at Lipscomb, I visited often with several older brethren in the Nashville area. Brother James A. Allen was preaching in Nashville, and writing and publishing *The Apostolic Times*. (I took this paper from 1946 until it ceased publication. For several years I urged churches with which I worked to purchase "bundles" of the paper and distribute them among the members and in the communities. We baptized several people in the two or three years we did this. I still have those old papers, boxed up and in our attic.) He had this cluttered little building on McGavock Avenue where he wrote and printed his paper. He would tell me about "brother Lipscomb" (David Lipscomb) and "brother Harding" (James A. Harding). He considered "brother Harding" to be the foremost preacher in the churches in his (Allen's) lifetime. I visited several times with brother C.E.W. Dorris. He lived near the college. He had a tremendous library. He was a critic of the course that Lipscomb and the *Advocate* were taking and their endorsement of the "college in the budget" issue. He was often seen on the Lipscomb campus, but I never saw or heard him called upon for prayer or comment at any chapel service. I visited several times in Murfreesboro with brother Charles Mitchell ("C.M.") Pullias. He was a great singer and outstanding preacher. I heard him preach

on the Lipscomb campus in 1948 in a gospel meeting. I still have notes I took on the sermons I heard. I've never heard a greater, more touching and effective sermon on "The Blood of Jesus Christ" than I heard from C.M. Pullias. He was heart-broken and shed tears regarding his children who had turned from the truth, especially Kurfees P. Pullias, who preached in Murfreesboro, left his wife, took up with another woman, lived in adultery the remainder of his life, moved to Texas, and died there. To his credit, Kurfees faithfully took care of his parents in their last years.

The "college question" debate among brethren (the scripturalness of local churches of Christ sending contributions to, financially supporting, subsidizing, and maintaining schools) began to surface and rage during the years I was at Lipscomb, 1947-1950. Some churches in Nashville and the Middle Tennessee area sent contributions to David Lipscomb College, especially the Charlotte Avenue church. Brother G.C. Brewer became the foremost advocate for churches supporting the schools. The *Gospel Advocate* in Nashville, the most circulated and influential paper among the brethren then, supported the opinion of churches contributing to colleges operated by brethren. In the Middle Tennessee area in those days, the *Gospel Advocate*, the Tennessee Orphans Home, and David Lipscomb College formed a triumvirate which almost entirely controlled the churches of Christ in the middle area of the state. The paper through its vast circulation of about one hundred thousand subscribers, the use of *Gospel Advocate* Bible class literature in almost every congregation; the general and wide-spread support of the "orphans home" by churches, the "orphans home" sending out its children to attend congregations, visit with the people, and the boys to lead singing, conduct worship, and to preach; the "orphan home" appeals for fifth Sunday contributions and the sending of its trucks to communities and churches to gather food, canned goods, clothing, and individual contributions; and the male students and faculty members at Lipscomb who preached regularly for many congregations all over the mid-state area; the many parents who sent their children to Lipscomb — these and other factors created a "strangle-hold" upon the churches by these institutions. One could in no way oppose the congregational financial support of the school and/or the orphans' home without immediate opposition and consequences.

Disruptions and divisions among brethren, and in some

local congregations, due to the debate over church support of human institutions, namely the college and the orphans home, began to occur. Not only did brother B.C. Goodpasture, probably the one most powerful man in the brotherhood at that time as editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, use his paper in a complete endorsement of the “colleges and orphans homes in the budget” issue, but the college administration and most faculty members became publicly identified with this issue, on the side of institutionalism. Brother C.D. Plum of Parkersburg, West Virginia, a highly respected staff writer of the *Advocate* for some years, quit the *Advocate* because of this issue. Later, brother Roy H. Lanier, Sr. left the *Advocate*, partially because of the *Advocate*'s position on the issues. Brother Roy E. Cogdill was forbidden to come on the Lipscomb campus when he was in a gospel meeting with Oak Avenue church in Dickson, Tennessee and had been scheduled to speak at a chapel service at Lipscomb.

Brother Rufus R. Clifford, Sr. was preaching for the church in Old Hickory, Tennessee in the late forties. I had become well acquainted with Rufus and Jeanetta due to preaching for the Deason church in Bedford County, where Rufus' mother, nephew, and his older brother and wife, Caleb and Frances Clifford, were members. The Old Hickory church numbered some 500-600 members then and was probably the largest congregation in numbers in the USA at that time. The Old Hickory elders and preacher published a statement in *The Gospel Guardian* that the Old Hickory church did not believe in taking money from the church treasury to support colleges. This statement was especially offensive to Lipscomb and the administration because brother Willard Collins, vice-president of the college, had been the preacher for the Old Hickory church prior to brother Clifford's work there. Evidence that this was true surfaced a bit later when “The Young Preachers Club” at Lipscomb, of which I was program chairman, invited brother Clifford to speak to the “young preachers” at our Monday evening weekly meeting. President Pullias and vice-president Collins learned that we had invited brother Clifford to speak. They rescinded the invitation and would

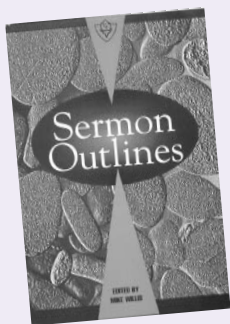
not allow him to come and speak to us. I, and some of the others in our group, met with and contended with these two administrators, but they did not relent. Rufus Clifford did not come on campus and speak to us. Lines of fellowship, evidences of a divisive spirit and practice, abounded. The *Advocate* and Lipscomb College led the way in this divisive effort throughout Nashville and Middle Tennessee.

Churches began to divide and stand apart. Brethren began congregations identified in opposition to “institutionalism.” Franklin Road church began in Nashville and several other churches in the Nashville area; West Main Street in Franklin; Westvue church in Murfreesboro; Al-maville church in Rutherford County; Locust Street church in Mount Pleasant; Downtown church in Lawrenceburg; El Bethel church in Shelbyville, and later Eastside church; West High Street church in Woodbury; Oak Avenue in Dickson; Mooresville Pike in Columbia, and a bit later Jackson Heights; Petway church and later East Cheatham in Cheatham County; and throughout Middle Tennessee brethren, a distinct minority of them, began to take a firm and definite stand for the truth and paid the price of rejection and ostracism for doing so. The “liberal movement” became a ruthless juggernaut over the consciences and convictions of the minority who stood for truth on this issue.

Powerful brethren lifted their hands against the truth. The *Gospel Advocate* published and decreed “A Yellow Tag Of Quarantine” against all of us who opposed congregational monetary support and maintenance of human institutions. Brethren G.C. Brewer, Guy N. Woods, N.B. Hardeman, Batsell Barrett Baxter, Athens Clay Pullias, W.L. Totty, and many, many others fought for error and against truth. In other parts of the country, lines began quickly to be drawn. A full-fledged division in churches of Christ was occurring. (To Be Continued)

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Sermon Outlines



Contains outlines by: Connie W. Adams, Andy Alexander, Dick Blackford, Richard Boone, James Cooper, Bob Dickey, Johnnie Edwards, Harold Fite, Marc W. Gibson, Ron Halbbrook, Gary Henry, Harry Osborne, Donnie V. Rader, Tom M. Roberts, Johnny Stringer, Weldon Warnock, Lewis Willis, Mike Willis, and Bobby Witherington, #83002

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“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner”

Philip the evangelist, like Jesus, was not a respecter of persons. He showed no partiality or disdain for any man.

This, in spite of the fact that he encountered all kinds of men, some whom many would love and some that most would despise. He helped the poor Grecian widows (Acts 6). He preached to a mongrel race of people that was a mix of the Ten Tribes and heathen immigrants — the Samaritans (Acts 8). They were held to mockery by many. We are expressly told that Jews had no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:9). Calling someone a “Samaritan” was to belittle and ridicule him as the scum of the earth. That’s why the Jews called Jesus a “Samaritan” and said he possessed a demon (John 8:48). But Philip worked among them and converted many to Christ. He even converted a popular charlatan of his time, Simon the sorcerer. Later, he converted a government dignitary, the Ethiopian nobleman (Acts 8). He was a good man who raised his family well (Acts 21:9).

A Loss of Close Friends

One of Philip’s co-laborers was Stephen, also a truly good man and the first martyr for the faith that we have on record (Acts 6:5). Not everyone has experienced the same joy over Christianity as those who first embraced it (Acts 2:41). What a great cause for dismay to know that some hated Christ and his followers to the point that they would murder his disciples. It surely struck home as one of the saddest moments in Philip’s life when Stephen, his co-worker, was put to death for being a Christian. The grief in a community at the untimely death of a good man is always great. But it is most intense when injustice and violence bring about that death. Undoubtedly, Philip was among those “devout men who made great lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2).

Things Got Worse

Saul of Tarsus was a villain among villains. Not only was he personally involved in Stephen’s death, he had unleashed a city-wide persecution against the church. He was not your average, nominal Jew, but had an unsurpassed zeal for exterminating Christians, whether men or women (Acts 9:1, 2). He dragged some from their homes, injuring them, and imprisoned many saints who were put to death. Saul’s vote helped bring that about (Acts 8:3; 26:10). He openly and publicly punished them in all the

synagogues and persecuted them even to foreign cities. He “strove to make them blaspheme,” which means he tortured them (Acts 26:11). If he would do this to Stephen and many others, would he not have done the same to Philip and his family?

A Time To Flee

It was because of this fierce persecution that Christians in Jerusalem had to flee for their lives and were scattered abroad. Imagine the difficulty of uprooting your family and leaving your home and most of your belongings behind. What a terrible thing to happen in your homeland and community! What would be your feeling toward the person that had caused all these problems? What if you could just get hold of this person?

Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner?!

Meanwhile, perhaps twenty years later, Philip has still not returned to his home in Jerusalem. It probably was not even there or was possessed by someone else. Justice was scarce for Christians. He now lives in the seacoast town of Caesarea (Acts 21:8). It is there that he has an unexpected visitor. None other than *Saul of Tarsus*! He has eight men with him, including the writer of the narrative (Acts 20:4). It is doubtful that they called ahead! They didn’t just pop in for quick snack, for they stayed *several days* (21:10, 15). What great hosts were Philip and his family! We could use such lessons on hospitality.

Try to imagine what it would be like to feed at your table the man who had been the church’s worst enemy — the one who had caused years of turmoil and tremendous heartaches for you, your family, and close friends! What thoughts would have filled your mind? Imagine him staying in your home for days! How could you sleep? What might you be tempted to do while he slept?

A Heart Of Gold

None of these things bothered Philip, though it would be hard not to cross his mind. He had captured the real meaning of being a Christian. Saul had been converted. Philip was in the group who heard from the prophet Agabas what was about to happen to Paul. One would not be surprised

Stan Cox

Applying Matthew 18:15-17

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you

have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector (Matt. 18:15-17).

The passage above is presently a focus of controversy among God's people. The problem is not a matter of understanding the procedure prescribed in the text. Rather, the misunderstanding that exists is in regard to the scope of the text's application. In order to properly understand the Lord's instructions in Matthew 18, it is necessary to look to the context and the greater context of the entire New Testament as it reveals how we are to deal with sin.

First, notice the procedure to be taken when dealing with the sin under consideration in the text. It is a four part process. First, one must go to his brother privately to deal with the sin. ". . . *tell him his fault between you and him alone.*" If the first step does not bring repentance, the second step is to take witnesses that "*by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*" This second step affirms the serious nature of the sin, that the complaint is valid, and that resolution must come through the penitent actions of the guilty party. If the second step does not lead to repentance on the part of the sinner, the complaint is to be taken before the whole church. This is a radical step, causing the sin to become generally known,

and bringing to bear the combined influence of the entire congregation. A rebellious man, who will not even hear the entire congregation as they admonish him for sin, is to be rejected (the fourth and final step).

The wisdom of this process is readily apparent. The cautious nature of the initial approach can spare the feelings of the one guilty of sin. It establishes the loving motive of the admonishing brother and can lead to a private and quick resolution which will avoid contention and embarrassment. Because of the process, the escalation of embarrassment to the guilty party will come solely because of his own rebellion.

But, what sins are under consideration in the text? This also is apparent, though often misunderstood in our time. Read carefully the first statement from our Lord, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." Contextually, the instructions given in Matthew 18 have reference to private matters between Christians. Not only is public sin not under consideration in the context, an examination of how Christians dealt with public sin reveals that a different procedure was followed. There are legitimate reasons for this distinction, which will be examined momentarily.

Some will quibble with our declaration that the text prescribes the procedure to use when dealing with *private matters* between Christians. The contention seems to be

if Philip simply didn't care what happened to Paul. But he was a *Christian* in all that term means or implies. And he was caught up in the problem that Paul was facing. He was among those whom Paul asked, "What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart?" (21:10-13). It is probable that he was among those who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (21:15, 16).

Conclusion

Following the example and teaching of Jesus was what made Philip the great man that he was. It will do the same for you. And who would you be willing to have over for dinner?

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that the phrase “against you” is an incorrect rendering, and thus the passage does not deal *solely* with personal offense. While it is admitted that the phrase is difficult, this does not negate the *context* and the *purpose* of the procedure prescribed by the Lord. As W. Robertson Nicoll states:

... apart from the doubtful *eis se* following, the reference appears to be to private personal offenses, not to sin against the Christian name, which every brother in the community has a right to challenge, especially those closely connected with the offender . . . the phrase implies that some one has the right and duty of taking the initiative. So far it is a personal affair to begin with (*The Expositor's Greek Testament* I:239).

A Greek Interlinear supplies the following literal translation of the text:

Now if sins the brother of thee, go reprove him between thee and him alone. If thee he hears, thou gainest the brother of thee (*The Zondervan Parallel New Testament In Greek and English*).

Note the following translations of the text:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother (KJV).

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over (NIV).

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother (RSV).

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother (NASB).

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one (NRSV).

And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother (ASV).

Even the NASB, which omits the “against you” related in the other translations, indicates a clearly private matter, “*go and reprove him in private.*” As Nicoll alluded to in his comments, and as we shall examine in greater detail momentarily, to prescribe these limitations upon a matter of public sin is to do violence to the greater context of New Testament teaching.

Further, Peter recognized the import of Christ’s words and asked of him following his teaching, “Lord, how often

shall my brother sin *against me*, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (v. 21). Everything in the immediate context suggests personal and private transgressions against a brother in Christ.

The responsibility on the part of an individual to deal with the sin a brother has committed against him is a principle revealed in the Old Testament. To do so is equated with loving one’s brother, as noted in Leviticus 19:17-18:

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. *You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.* You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but *you shall love your neighbor as yourself:* I am the Lord.

Jesus taught the same in Luke 17:3-4:

Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, *rebuke him;* and if he repents, *forgive him.* And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, “I repent,” you shall forgive him.

So, children of God are obligated to deal with such personal offenses. We are not loving another if we dismiss such sin against ourselves. While it may seem magnanimous, it does nothing for the soul of the transgressor. It is much better, more loving, and a God-given obligation to rebuke the sinner and bring him to repentance. This is our responsibility to our brother in Christ when he sins against us in some private matter.

Dealing with Public Sin

However, when sin is public in nature, other considerations modify the appropriate response of the child of God. As the situation is different, the way of dealing with the sin is different as well. Primarily, this is so because public sin has a leavening influence in the church. “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:6-7).

The context of Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 5 bears on our subject. There was a man in that congregation who was guilty of such sexual immorality as to be “*not even named among the Gentiles; that a man has his father’s wife!*” (v. 1). The Corinthians had not dealt with the brother, rather they had accepted him, and had become “*puffed up*” regarding their tolerance of such a sinful influence. It is in this context that Paul warns them of the leavening influence of sin, and gives them instructions as to how to deal with the offending brother. Note that in this instance of public sin which had such a leavening influence, Paul’s instructions were different from those of the Lord in Matthew 18. Here Paul said, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you

are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (vv. 4-5). Further, Paul in making this pronouncement, had not gone to the brother privately, “For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed” (v. 3). He had sufficient knowledge of the situation to declare the need for disciplinary action without ever having met directly with the immoral brother.

Some have actually stated that Paul, as an apostle, is an exception to the rule of Matthew 18. “As we are not apostles,” it is said, “We do not have the authority to deal with sin in such a bold manner.” Such an argument is specious (having a false look of truth or genuineness: *sophistical*, Webster). It is also easily refuted. First, Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians indicate that they should have already taken care of the situation. In other words, they should not have waited for Paul’s letter before acting, they should have done so before his admonition. The action of public censure should have been taken without apostolic goading. Second, the directions given by the Lord in Matthew 18 were given directly to the apostles! (cf. 18:18, 21). As an apostle, if anyone was limited to the prescribed pattern given by the Lord in Matthew 18, it was Paul!

Paul’s reaction to public sin on another occasion is recorded in Galatians 2. Note the account, as related by Paul in Galatians 2:11-14:

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”

Peter was guilty of sin. But the sin was not a private matter between Paul and Peter alone. Rather, his sin was public and had the leavening influence already noticed. “And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.” Because of this leavening influence, and the public nature of the sin; and despite, or perhaps because of, the position of influence Peter enjoyed as an Apostle of the Lord, Paul dealt with the sin publicly. “I said to Peter before them all . . .”

Any who takes the position that the principles outlined in Matthew 18 concern all types of sin in every situation must deal with this text. They will have the apostle Paul

in violation of the instructions of the Lord. As we have already related, they cannot appeal to Paul’s authority as an apostle. The instructions relate to him as they relate to us. Paul said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Dealing with False Teaching

Most often the objections to dealing publicly with a sinner come in the area of the proclamation of false doctrine. When a brother who has taught error is publicly admonished for his teaching (whether from a pulpit or in print), the question is invariably asked, “Did you first go to him privately?” On many occasions, the answer would be “Yes,” though it is assumed no such effort has been made. Obviously, it is needful to establish that the brother has actually taught error and is thereby bringing harm to others. To do any less would be to engage in gossip and to lack the proper deference which love demands. Love “bears all things, *believes all things*, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7).

But, must one go to a such a teacher of error, personally and privately, before exposing his error to others? The Bible clearly says “No”! And one primary reason for this is as stated earlier, the *leavening influence* of such false doctrine!

Scripture clearly indicates the dangers of false teaching. Paul warned of some among the elders of the church at Ephesus which, as “savage wolves” would “speak(-ing) perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” Of this danger, Paul wrote, “Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29-31).

Paul further warned Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). It was because of this danger that he exhorted Timothy to “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

It is because of this danger of influencing others to sin by false teaching that James wrote, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (Jas. 3:1). Paul indicated that the false doctrine of Hymenaeus and Philetus had “spread like cancer,” and said they “overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:17-18), and he did not hesitate to publicly call their name. He did the same with Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 4:14), Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), and the Judaizing teachers (Phil. 3:1-2). The apostle John named Diotrephes (3 John 9-10) for his public sin as well.

From the above we can see that the procedure of Matthew 18 is not appropriate in every circumstance. When sin is public and endangers the souls of others through its ungodly leaven, it must be dealt with publicly and swiftly.

Now I urge you, brethren, *note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.* For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and *by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple* (Rom. 16:17-18).

Consequences of Misunderstanding Matthew 18

In matters of public sin, when Christians bind upon themselves and others a procedure designed for private, personal sin, they are left with unpalatable consequences. Note the following:

- **Error goes unopposed.** The anecdotal evidence for this is strong. It seems that the most common motivation for such a belief is a distaste for confrontation. People don't want to hear about disputes and desire them to be handled "behind the scenes." There have been several occasions where I personally have been admonished for not "going to him privately" by those who "agree that the man is teaching error." They agree that the man should stop teaching his doctrine, but they don't like the way he has been publicly marked. When these individuals with such delicate sensibilities are asked if they have approached the erring brother themselves, the answer is invariably no, if any answer is given at all. If the answer is yes, have they taken the succeeding steps outlined in Matthew 18?

It seems that it is acceptable to do nothing. That is, to allow the error to go unopposed. But in the minds of many it is completely unacceptable to deal with it in a public fashion.

- **The truth is put at a disadvantage.** One brother who advocates a false position on Romans 14 once stated that he went "hither, thither, and yon" teaching his interpretation of the passage. And yet he and others have been vocal in their criticism of those who would publicly oppose his teaching or the teaching of others. It is a sorry standard which would allow a false teacher to go everywhere proclaiming his error, but would impose upon the righteous the restriction of only private opposition. What of those who may be influenced by his error, and lose their soul? "Then He said to the disciples, 'It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.'" (Luke 17:1-2). Brethren, we should not be so concerned about the sensibilities of the teacher of error that we would allow the "little ones" to be offended.

- **Elders are unable to discharge their God-ordained**

duties. The absurd end of this position would require the elders to remain quiet as a false teacher proclaims his error from the pulpit or in a Bible class. If he is sinning, they must approach him first privately. (Don't laugh, this application is not hypothetical, it has actually been advocated.) Visitors would go away thinking that the congregation is unsound. It is possible that one could be convinced by the errorist's sophistry, and the elders could have no opportunity to refute it with truth.

Imagine a false teacher spreading his error in a high school class. A babe in Christ is bothered that it "doesn't sound right" and goes to him privately. Because of his lack of knowledge, he is convinced by the sophistry of one who has the ability to "deceive the elect." As such, the error is not exposed. Indeed, the false teacher is allowed to work "privily," the sheep is left to deal with the wolf, and the elder is not allowed to exercise his God-ordained duty to "convict the gainsayer." Who can believe it!

While it may be true that some will say, "I wouldn't go to that extreme," it is nevertheless where some have gone, and it is a logical end to such a misunderstanding of the passage.

Conclusion

The teaching of our Lord in Matthew 18 must be followed by all Christians. It is our responsibility, as children of God, to rebuke our sinning brother in an attempt to restore him to standing. We do not have the right to ignore his sin, and we do not have the right to embarrass him by disregarding the prescribed steps of the passage.

However, the passage is limited contextually to private offenses between a sinner and the one he has wronged. The Lord never intended that his instructions to the disciples be applied with such a broad and unsuitable stroke. A proper understanding of the passage, and the nature of public sin, will go far in correcting this present destructive error.

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Archaeology and the New Testament

by J. McRay

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Is the Lord Pleased When the Sunday Evening Worship Service is Discontinued?

All Christians should be very concerned about what pleases the Lord. With the prophet Micah, we should ask, "... will Jehovah be pleased?" (Mic. 6:7). Like Paul, our highest priority should be to seek and obtain the Lord's favor (Gal. 1:10). In the judgment, those who have found favor in the eyes of the Lord will be invited to dwell eternally with him (Matt. 25:21, 34). Surely, we want to be in that number!

I know of some "churches of Christ" which have decided to abolish Sunday evening worship service. I know that God has not commanded his children to assemble more than once on the first day of the week. However, I am deeply concerned about the thinking of God's children that would cause them to decide that the Sunday evening worship service should be abolished. What reason would justify such a decision? How could our choosing to worship our Creator less, be pleasing to him? How could such a decision strengthen our faith and make us better servants of him? Are we really seeking "first his kingdom, and his righteousness" when we choose not to assemble again on the Lord's day?

Would the fact that some brethren live some distance from the church building justify such a decision? Usually, some brethren live a few miles away and some many miles away, however, it is not uncommon for people to drive 25 miles or more to work and back home each working day. Is God pleased when we are willing to put forth a greater effort to earn money than to worship him? "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:9, 10). The love of God is the root of all good! Do Christians love God with all their hearts when they choose to worship him *less* (Matt. 22:37)?

Would the fact that it is an inconvenience to get dressed up again, travel to the church building, and worship for an hour, justify such a decision? King Jeroboam told the Jews, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem" (1 Kings 12:28). He set up a golden calf for them to worship in Bethel and in Dan (1 Kings 12:29). Among other things, Jeroboam's false system of worship was a worship of convenience. God's children, in the kingdom of Israel,

foolishly embraced Jeroboam's unholy and destructive way of worship. Some of God's children today are deceiving themselves into believing that all is well with their souls, while only worshipping him when it is *convenient* for them to do so. Was it convenient for Jesus to put on a body of flesh, incur the wrath of the Jews, and die on the old rugged cross? Are you willing to deny yourself (Matt. 16:24)?

Would the fact that the preacher is "long-winded" and boring justify such a decision? Perhaps the sermon would not seem so long and boring if the worshipers were worshipping "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). The Father wants true worshipers (John 4:23). These are the ones who enjoy worshipping him from the heart in accordance with what his Word teaches (Ps. 122:1). True worshipers are the ones the Father will want to worship him eternally. Can you imagine some saint in heaven seeking to find a way to cut back on the praise being offered to the Most High? Do you think that if you find the worship of the Redeemer to be a burdensome duty that you would truly enjoy eternal worship?

Would the fact that so many Christians choose to forsake the Sunday evening worship assembly justify such a decision? It is true that the Sunday evening attendance is not as high as Sunday morning attendance in many local churches. Should the faithful few decide to join those who neglect the Sunday evening worship? Should the faithful few grow weary of contending with the spiritually weak? Will the spiritually weak brother or sister be strengthened in the faith if the Sunday evening service is discontinued?

Let us appreciate and take advantage of this wonderful freedom we have of assembling to worship our Lord. It is not inconceivable that this freedom could be taken away from us. I cannot think of one justifiable reason for the church to dispense with the Sunday evening assembly when the church could assemble if they choose. Is there one? Brethren, we are drifting!

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Raymond Harris

Baptizing in the Twilight Zone!

community that used to be. Just two church buildings and a few houses remained.

It's been forty years! Yet the memories are still vivid. It was another of those meetings in a little rural com-

The meeting was scheduled for Monday through Sunday, September 5th through the 11th. July and August had

been hot as usual, but now we were having an early fall. The nights that week were really chilly.

Monday and Tuesday nights didn't offer a lot of encouragement for a memorable meeting, as the attendance was only 30 the first night and 25 the second night. Then things really started to move in the right direction. Fifty were present on Wednesday and 94 on Thursday. Saturday night found 84 present and then, the last service of the meeting on Sunday night, we closed with a fine crowd of 92.

And then came the fruit! Much to the joy and delight of everyone present, five responded to the invitation. Three young ladies and two young men came confessing their faith that Jesus is the Son of God.

It was agreed that as many as possible of the congregation would drive some seven or eight miles to the church building in a neighboring town for the baptizing. The brethren there were very accommodating and had given a key to their building to some of our brethren so they could have access to the baptistry as needed. We all arrived, thinking the baptizings would be routine. But, to our dismay, we found that the baptistry was dry! Now, what were we to do?

Without a moment's hesitation, some of the locals said, "We'll have to go to the river." I was rather stunned, as the river flowing through that community had a bad reputation for treacherous currents, sharp drops in the river bed, and drownings!

Before leaving for the river, I gathered up the waders and unscrewed the handle from a push broom I saw standing in the corner of the dressing room. Some of the brethren gave me a "what is he going to do with that broom handle" look, but said nothing. However, I had a plan.

When we got to the bank of the river, the cars all pulled up in a long line and left their headlights on, as the night was pitch black. As we got out of our cars, we all stood in

amazement. There was a heavy fog laying along the bank on either side of the river. The water in the river was still real warm, but the chill of the night air was causing a mist to rise from the river as if it were steaming hot. The light from the auto headlights, the fog, and the steam off the water made the whole area look like a spooky "twilight zone"!

When we all got to water's edge, I put on the waders and gathered the five who were to be baptized in one spot. I told them it was very, very important that they not move. Then I took the broomstick and carefully tapped the river bed every step as I went out. I kept the stick in front of me to be sure I did not walk off into a hole. Such could have been fatal! If I had stepped off, perhaps over my head, the water would have filled the waders and no one could have pulled me out. When I got out to where the water was deep enough to baptize, I pushed the broomstick hard down into the riverbed. I left it sticking up, perhaps a foot out of the water. Then I carefully retraced my steps directly back to those who were to be baptized. One by one I led each of the five out to the broomstick and baptized him. Each time we returned to the bank step by step, just as we had went out. I told each one to stay on the bank at the exact spot where we had entered the water. Then after returning the last one to the bank, I went back out and retrieved the broomstick. We were all relieved that five new Christians had been baptized and that we had encountered no problems.

We then returned the waders and the broomstick to the church house. Then we all went our way, thankful for our new brothers and sisters in Christ. To this day, I am so thankful that all went well that night, so long ago, when we baptized in a foggy, misty river that now makes one think of the scenes depicted on TV of the "Twilight Zone."

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Steve Kearney

Overcoming the Fear of Terrorists

September the 11th

Lunch was finished. I turned on the TV to catch a quick look at the news. The newsreader was unusually excited. A commercial aeroplane had crashed into one of the twin towers in New York. While I was trying to figure out what was going on, flight UA 175 careened into the second tower before my eyes. The newscaster was now speculating about terrorism. In the midst of all the rushed reports, the first tower imploded. I held my breath in disbelief. A short time later the second tower also dramatically collapsed. I was horrified!

Sky News replayed the scenes every few minutes. The aeroplanes crashed into the buildings and the towers collapsed again and again, I felt like I was in a time warp. The pictures were addictive; I could not stop watching! How did the passengers on flight AA 11 feel when they realized that the hijackers were on a suicide mission, I asked myself? What about the office workers in the Twin Towers? I sensed their fear, their helplessness. God help us all! I murmured under my breath. I was deeply unsettled and shocked. Were you?

The Fear Factor

This “bolt out of the blue” caused widespread fear in the civilized world. For Americans it was particularly significant. It shattered the quiet peace they have enjoyed since the days of the Civil War. The Stock Market reeled under the blow, and the business world temporarily buckled at the knees. The insouciant lifestyle, so much taken for granted, was under threat. It was hard on the ordinary decent American. The destruction of the Towers was a watershed because September 11 changed American society.

Does anyone doubt another strike at some point? Who in America will deny that the fear factor makes freedom qualitatively different since the attacks? Since a state of

war has been declared by the President, fear will remain a fact of life for a long time to come.

Fellow brothers and sisters, let us individually and collectively give ourselves to earnest prayer! If you want peace you must ask for it. “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Living With Fear

In the meantime, how can people live with this fear?

Well, Irish people have lived with it for years. Terrorism and sectarianism have made fear an ugly reality in this green and verdant land. In the last thirty years the bomb and bullet have maimed and killed over 3,600 people on this island. In the best of times, fear was present like a toothache; in the worst of times, it was as painful as a severe case of angina.

Be warned. In times of national tension television spreads fear. And because TV exaggerates our perception of reality, it can induce paranoia. Paranoia is infectious. Pictures of violence are also addictive. So, do not over indulge the scare mongering news channels. My advice is keep an eye on the news, but do not OD on it.

Worldly fears paralyze spirituality. That is why Isaiah was told, “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’” In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy and you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the Lord of Hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear and He shall be your dread” (Isa. 8:12-13, NASV). Violent people, like Muslim extremists, gain their objectives by intimidating us through fear. God tells us that he is in control, therefore, he alone must be feared. “There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel

against the Lord. The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the Lord” (Prov. 21:30-31). There is a great truth here we need to grasp. One can only live a normal life in abnormal circumstances when “God is our refuge and our strength.” While living under constant threat from their unbelieving husbands, wives were told, “And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled” (1 Pet. 3:14b). God knows it is natural to be afraid to die, but it is unnatural to be afraid to live. We must not allow terrorists to paralyze us with fear. “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?” (Ps. 56:3-4).

Fear of Being the Odd Man Out

The father of lies glories in the gullibility of partisan people on both sides in a war. If politics is a dirty business, then war is a cesspool of toxic evils. Soldiers get out of control. Things will happen we cannot justify. Sometimes the good guys are bad guys. To defeat the enemy it is deemed necessary to use jingoism, propaganda, lies, misinformation, and half-truths in a war. This confusion can leave even Christians scratching their heads and asking, “What is truth?”

Unless you, as a Christian, are first and foremost a citizen of heaven (Phil. 1:20), your loyalties will be divided. Is it James who says “a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” Brethren, do not be deceived, the devil has

always worked through rulers, powers, and world forces of this darkness to gain our unsuspecting allegiance (Eph. 6:10-12). In times of crisis, your patriotic fervor is the gateway to your heart. When the government, the media, and the general public chant in unison that “right is wrong and that bitter is sweet,” will John Doe deny it? In the emotional turmoil of such heady days, it will take a person of independent mind and Christ-like character to maintain that wrong is wrong and right is right. Fear of being the odd man out will pressure even the Christian to set aside the gospel so as not to cause offence.

It is said of the sons of Issachar that they were “men who understood the times with knowledge of what Israel should do” (1 Chron. 12:32). Let us pray that we also may understand the times and have the knowledge of what we should do!

Fears Realized

Just think of what the early Christians had to endure. Saul, with threats on his lips and murder in his heart, persecuted the disciples by entering house after house and violently dragging off men and women. Like the ancients these faithful brethren were tempted, mocked, scourged, yes, also chained and imprisoned. They were stoned, sawn in two, and put to death with the sword. Being destitute, afflicted, ill treated, they went about in sheepskins and goatskins. Without homes they were forced to live in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground (see Heb. 10:32-40). Times were hard. Life was cruel and uncertain. Yet their predicament was an opportunity for God to display his power and glory. “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Who knows what the future holds? I don’t! What I do know is that in the crises of life, undaunted faith makes life worth living and death worth dying. Christ makes it possible to successfully prevail against the pressing burdens of sickness, death, financial reverses, family troubles, misfortunes of innumerable kinds and immeasurable degrees, and to bear them all with equanimity.

September 11 was a wake up call for us all. Jesus said, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1)

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Harold Fite

I Have Lost My Friend

Leon Odom departed this life October 30, 2001 in the East Texas Medical Center, Tyler, Texas. He was 75

years old. Funeral services were conducted on Friday, November 2, 2001, in the Lloyd James Funeral Home, with a large crowd in attendance. Clark Dugger, Norman Whitehorn, and this writer were the speakers. His body was laid to rest in a beautiful setting in the Cathedral of the Pines cemetery in Tyler. Pallbearers were Harold Ritchie, Tim Biernacki, Blake Biernacki, David Odom, Jr., Jerry Fite, and Jay Taylor. Honorary pallbearers were Bob McDonald, Bob Craig, Dan Shipley, and Ron Murray.

Leon began his preaching career in 1948. He did local work in Dallas, Iowa Park, Port Arthur, Clute, San Antonio, Midland, and Tyler — all in Texas. He was a well known preacher and in addition to his local work did meeting work throughout the United States. He moved to Tyler, Texas in 1985 where he served as evangelist and elder for the Rice Road church of Christ.

One of the great biblical friendships is the friendship between David and Jonathan: “The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1). David said, “I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women” (1 Sam. 1:26). Theirs was a true friendship; hearts bound together as one. Their friendship began in peaceful times and remained strong during turbulent seasons.

The friendship between Leon and myself is similar. Our friendship covered 60 years. I was thirteen and Leon fifteen when we met. He lived with his mother not far from our house. We attended the same congregation (Oakland and Tanner in South Dallas). We “ran around together.” In the common vernacular today, we “hung out together.” Leon met Dorothy Patterson and fell in love with her. I went on most of their dates. I was the one who took the pictures! Growing tired of this arrangement, Dorothy introduced me to Norma Guthrie, to whom I have been married 55 years. Dorothy and Norma were high school friends. The war separated us, but afterward we resumed where we left off. Leon mar-

ried Dorothy in 1945 and Norma and I married in 1946. What was a twosome now became a foursome. We spent a lot of time together. Not many days passed without seeing one another.

A strong desire to preach began to possess Leon. He did some “appointment preaching” in a few places, then began his full-time work with the church meeting on Page and Cumberland Streets in Dallas. I was the song leader. We would meet at the church building early on Sunday mornings, and he would preach his sermon to me. He preached with the same fervor, emotion, and power that he did an hour later in the worship service. We did home studies together and baptized a good number. We made preaching trips together. He had two public debates in which I moderated.

Leon loved to sing. When we were teenagers there was a Sunday afternoon singing almost every Sunday among the various churches in Dallas. We attended these regularly. We sang with a group from the old Pearl and Bryan congregation each Sunday morning on radio station WRR. Leon enjoyed quartet singing. He produced two albums of gospel songs: “The Blessed Assurance Radio Quartet” and “Wasted Years.” The first album grew out of the quartet making tapes for a weekly radio program over Station KCRS, Midland, Texas.

Our friendship was tested many times but remained strong. We have buried each other’s dead and have laughed and wept together. He was present when I was baptized. He and Dorothy were at our wedding. He sat with me at the hospital when our son, Jerry, was born. Leon was my friend. “Friendship does not mean knowing all about a person — it is knowing him.” Someone has rightly said, “Life has no blessing like a prudent friend.” We both recognized that friendship is a responsibility, not an opportunity.

Leon Odom was a good man, tenderhearted, and a persuasive person. He had a sense of humor, was a great storyteller, and was an excellent mimic. He could entertain you. He was dead serious, however, when he entered the pulpit. His wife of 57 years, his children, grandchildren,

Mike Cornwell

Why I Left the Pentecostal Church

Paul could have been thinking of me when he wrote this verse to a young man named Timothy, “*traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*” (2 Tim. 3:4). I was born into a Pentecostal family of many years. My grandfather preached “fire and brimstone” from the time I could remember until his death in 1968. He was somewhat of an intimidating individual who was demanding and abrupt. I was taught that only those who were “chosen” or “called” could ever enter into the “faithful” ministry of our Lord. I never challenged his thinking or his preaching. What he said was like a direct command from Jesus Christ himself. With this in mind, at the age of 12, I was told I was being called into the ministry. I preached my first sermon shortly thereafter. I spent a total of 18 years preaching as a “Pentecostal” preacher. I taught the “Jesus Only” doctrine known as the “Apostolic Faith” (United Pentecostal Church).

To this day, my family fully believes that if one is not of the “Lord’s true church” that being, saved in baptism in Jesus name and filled with the “Holy Ghost” with the evidence of “Speaking in Tongues,” one is not a Chris-

and grateful brethren will miss him. I will miss him. He has been a part of my life for 60 years.

Leon had many physical problems over the past several years. With each assault his body grew weaker until it could no longer retain the spirit. We are comforted to know that there remains a rest for the people of God (Heb. 4:9-12). He rests from his labor; his works follow him (Rev. 14:13). Jesus promises the faithful, “You will find rest unto your soul.” With what I know about the Word and Leon, I believe he has found that rest. I have lost my dear friend. He has left a void in my life, but he will always be a living presence in my heart.

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tian and is headed for a “Devil’s hell.” My grandfather (before his death) preached this 54 years; my step-father has preached this in excess of 50 years; my brother-in-law and sister “Pastor” a very large Pentecostal church in the Cincinnati, Ohio area. I have two cousins who are “Pentecostal” preachers. I have been accused of being “in a den of thieves and a pit of vipers” because of my stand on the Word of God and my faithfulness to the Lord’s church. My wife and I have been publicly chastised and the atmosphere is very tense when we are visiting with my family. We are shunned by most of my family. We are reminded regularly of 2 Timothy 3:12, “Yes, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

It was the first Thursday night of October 1984, at the age of 42, when I realized that all that I had been teaching for 18 years as a “Pentecostal” had been “false doctrine” and that I was like the “blind leading the blind.” That Thursday night of October 1984 changed my life, my thinking, and my understanding of the Word of God. I was invited to a gospel meeting at the Sandstone Drive church of Christ, in Little Rock, Arkansas (I had never been to a Lord’s church in my life). Chris Bullock, of Kansas City, Missouri was to be the speaker. I consented to go with the attitude that I would be able to shed some light on his teaching and thus convince others of their wrong. Something happened: what was preached was what I had secretly believed all my adult life. One did not have to come to an “altar,” cry out, beg and plead for mercy to receive forgiveness; one did not have to come again to the “altar” to “seek for the infilling of the Holy Spirit,” which was promised to believers, one did not have to “utter” confusion in an attempt to show one has the gift of “speaking in tongues.”

All one had to do was hear the simple word of truth, believe it, confess Christ as the Son of God, repent of one’s sins, and be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for remission of sins. The Lord not only forgives completely but adds one to the church. This I did in obedience the following Sunday evening: I was “born again.” I gave up my life, my music, even my future dreams to follow Jesus for the first time in my life on the right path.

It was not until October 1987 when I met Louis Sharp in Little Rock, Arkansas, that I really understood what

“faithfulness” really means. As we began to study and learn, I began to realize from the Scriptures that the Lord had work for me, as a Christian, to do. I then began to teach and preach the gospel of Christ. It has now become my life. My desire is to teach those who are in error the truth that they too might become part of this body of Christ.

Let Me Tell You Why I Am a Member of the Lord’s Church

Pentecostalism traces itself back no further than New Year’s Eve, 1899 in Topeka, Kansas. This is when a small group of people supposedly received a “Divine Revelation” for the first time ever recorded. The Lord’s church dates back to A.D. 33 when the twelve disciples received the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). This was a result of the fulfillment of the promise Jesus gave to his disciples (Acts 1:8). The Pentecostal church cannot show authority from God’s word for its beginning!

Pentecostalism teaches that the “power of the Holy Spirit” fell first on the 120 gathered in the upper room. The Bible teaches that only the twelve disciples received first the “Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:26-2:1). Pentecostalism believes that his power is received today because of the “New Revelation of God” in 1899. The Bible teaches no such thing (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Scriptures hold all that man needs to know for his salvation. There are no new revelations.

Pentecostalism teaches that in 1914, another revelation was received revealing that being baptized in “Jesus’ name” became a tenet of faith (law), a formula! That is not what the Bible says (Matt. 28:19-20).

We find that in the early half of the last century (1900-1944), several Pentecostal groups were established: two being the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ, Inc. and the Pentecostal Church, Inc. In 1944, these two bodies became known as the United Pentecostal Church. (See *Pentecostal Church Manual* 8-10, Foreword.) The Bible teaches that the Lord established only one church (Matt. 16:18). This is the only church that Christ and the apostles ever speak of.

What Are Some of the Pentecostal Practices?

They claim that through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, miracles and healing incurable diseases occur daily, e.g., silver fillings become gold; poor become miraculously rich; dead are raised; sick people instantly healed (I never saw anyone miraculously healed in all the years I was “Pentecostal”). I will not limit God. He has the power if he so chooses. Man does not have that power. If he does,

where is the proof? They call it “lack of faith.” Why does the Holy Spirit give to one man this power and not another? That is unscriptural. Only the disciples and those they laid hands on had this power. They are all dead.

Pentecostalism teaches a person may speak in “tongues” while under the influence of the “Holy Spirit” just like Peter and the apostles at Pentecost. The only others who were able to do this were Cornelius and his kinfolk (Acts 10:44-46) and those whom the apostles laid their hands on. Don’t we all have the continued influence of the Holy Spirit through the word? Can any one of us speak in an “unlearned” language?

Pentecostalism espouses religion as a “romantic” philosophy, that is, that the heart of man has reasons which his mind knows not of. Man’s feelings are the highest authority. The Bible is truth (John 17:17). The truth is not subjective. It does not originate with a person’s own thinking. Religion is not based on a “feel good” experience. I get excited sometimes because of the truth and that is natural. The Bible must be read, studied, and obeyed (2 Tim. 2:15; John 8:32). The Bible is the absolute, inspired, and authoritative Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). When a man regards his feelings as the basic authority, he is on the wrong path. To reject the Word of God and do “that which is right in our own eyes” is to reject God (1 Sam. 15:22-26; Matt. 7:13, 14). I feel good about the truth, but my feeling good is not authority!

Pentecostalism believes and teaches that women may participate in leading in prayer, teaching and preaching, and doing the work of an evangelist and teacher. The Holy Spirit contrasted the duties of men from that of women in public prayer (1 Tim. 2:8-15). Women are to learn in silence (1 Cor. 14:34). They are not to teach in any capacity over a man. Women may teach younger women (Tit. 2:4). They may teach a man in private (Acts 18:25). Timothy was taught in private as was Apollos (2 Tim. 3:15). Women may not “teach” (deliver discourses) for women are forbidden to preach (1 Cor. 14:34). There are many things, however, women can and should be doing.

Pentecostalism teaches that instruments of music are used to “glorify” God in worship. True worship is according to “spirit and truth” (John 4:24), the word of God, not Moses, not our feelings, and not what we believe to be right. Jesus will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). Vocal music is repeatedly specified as the kind of worship God wants from Christians (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). Christians are to abide in the teachings of Christ, not in man (2 John

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9, 10). We are to follow the pattern given by God (Heb. 8:5) without adding, subtracting, or altering according to our own desires or opinions.

I had read the Bible all my life. I preached that which I had been taught with fervor. When I doubted, I was always told of "new revelations" received from God. In the "Pentecostal" church, one is taught that the "Pastor" is the authority within the church and only knowledge is gained by adherence to "God's man" and in the leading of the "Holy Spirit" directly. They are to accept that which is doubted with one's faith.

I finally realized that in order to understand the "Gospel," one must study with an open heart, be prepared to accept the truth of the gospel, and with this truth obey the word of God. The Bible really is a simple book to understand, but when man attempts to add to it his opinion and his feelings, he begins to lose the truth and believe a lie.

Trust this word completely and obey it! It contains all that man needs to get him into eternity with Jesus Christ.

P.O. Box 642, Brighton, Missouri 65617

A Tribute to Roy S. Fudge

(Editor's Note: *The following material was compiled from material sent to me by J. Wiley Adams. Brother Adams has experienced some health problems and was not able to do what he planned. He forwarded the material to me and asked me to compile it. Brother Adams expressed his regret about not being able to write this personally but felt that he should not delay the tribute any longer.*)

Roy Smith Fudge passed from this life November 21, 2001 at his home in Hayden, Alabama. He was born to Edward and Susie Fudge on April 4, 1920. The funeral services were conducted at 11:00 a.m. Friday November 23rd at Spry Funeral Home in Athens, Alabama. He was buried in the Oneal Cemetery near Athens. Leon Mauldin spoke at the funeral services. Nathan Williams, his grandson, had some encouraging remarks about his grandfather.

Roy is survived by his wife, Mary Ella Norman Fudge; three sons — Raymond C. Fudge of Hayden, Alabama, Philip R. Fudge of Trenton, Florida, and Kendall R. Fudge of Lutz, Florida; three daughters — Betty Williams of Mt. Olive, Alabama, Peggy Phifer of Des Moines, Iowa, and Ellen Williams of Ardmore, Alabama. Betty and Ellen both married sons of Paul and Helen Williams of Eshowe, South Africa. Roy also had seventeen grandchildren, one great-grandson, and a host of nieces and nephews. He is survived by three sisters (Edith Fudge of Athens, Alabama, Irma Meeks of Ft. Worth, Texas, and Lucy Waller of Nashville, Tennessee) and two brothers (Curtis and Clarence Fudge of Athens, Alabama).

Roy met his wife at Abilene Christian College. He was a transfer student from David Lipscomb College, and she was a transfer student from Freed Hardeman. Both of them were taught Bible in college by James R. Cope. They were married August 18, 1948 at a small church building in Combes, Texas near Harlingen. After the wedding, they boarded a bus for Alabama where both could teach at the Athens Bible School. Roy taught two years there. During that time he preached at Capshaw and Oneal in Limestone County. Roy preached for the following churches in Alabama: Hartselle, Hanceville, Demopolis, Mt. Olive in Fayette, Barton, and Lacey's Spring. Most of his preaching was outside the state. He has preached in Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and California. He conducted meet-

ings in Washington, Texas, Montana, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina.

Those having the greatest influence on his life as a preacher were Irven Lee and his brother, Bennie Lee Fudge. Roy lived with Irven and Othlo Lee while attending high school at Dasher Bible School near Valdosta, Georgia. It was there that brother Lee asked him to preach. He preached his first sermon at Cherry Sink, Florida where his son, Philip, and his family now attend. Roy didn't have a suit to wear so Harry Pickup, Jr. loaned him one.

Roy was baptized in a creek during the second week of a gospel meeting in which J.C. Hollis did the preaching. There were nineteen baptized during that meeting.

Roy was in the heat of the battle when the institutional questions were being debated. He took his stand for the truth and never looked back. Roy was steadfast in what he believed to be the truth; however, when it was shown to him from the Bible where he was wrong, he always corrected it publicly.

Sister Fudge found a letter written by Roy in 1961 when they lived at Belle Glade, Florida. It expresses his belief on the issues that faced the church at that time. She suggested that this letter be included in this tribute to her husband. I am going to copy the letter word for word as he has written it. Ron Halbbrook was a student in high school in Belle Glade and remembers well the struggle Roy had there. Below is the letter:

Dear Don,
Although you did not answer the two last letters I wrote you, I find myself writing again. My confidence in you has been so great since I first met you that I do not believe you would take a stand or close your mind against any truth. I may be wrong, but I have had a feeling you did not answer my letters because of my change of conviction concerning the Herald of Truth and orphan home support from church treasuries. I have always said that I can remain on friendly terms with any man though we differ widely on our religious views.

I remember your discussions with Mr. Rice on the Sabbath. You were not willing to take any man's word as truth unless it was backed up with Bible teaching. I believe this is the only course we can take and please God. We cannot

be saved unless we do please Him.

Your ad in the *Gospel Advocate* for a preacher with the specification that any preacher not willing to accept or support the Herald of Truth or the church support of orphan homes is the thing that has prompted me to write this letter. When I was with you I felt the same way about these things. So I do not make any criticism about your taking a stand as you do. In fact I commend you for taking a stand. This indicates to me that you are honest in your belief. As you know it takes more than just believing a thing to make it right. We must also have the word of God for what we believe (Rom. 10:17; 14:23).

As you know I am not opposed to preaching the gospel any where at anytime we have the opportunity. What I am opposed to is building human institutions through which to preach the gospel and having the church to support the institution. I am not opposed to caring for needy children in human institutions. But I am opposed to building these institutions and then having the church to support the institution. If I could find one passage of Scripture that would uphold the church contributing to any human institution to do any work of teaching or benevolence, then I would have something to hold to in support of the church doing so today. I am convinced that there is no Scripture to uphold this practice.

It seems to me that if we take money that has been given into the Lord's treasury to use for our organizations without any authority from God that we are guilty of embezzlement of the Lord's money. This I realize is a very serious accusation. It is so serious that we may lose our souls unless we are willing and unless we do study to see what the Lord's will is and then act according to His will. For this reason I decided to study the Bible and set aside all of man's opinions. It was through a study of the word that I have reached the conclusion that I have. I believe that if you will make a thorough study with an open mind to accept all that the Bible says and nothing more, that you

will come to the same conclusion.

I wish I could see you and study with you at length on these things. I don't know when I will have the opportunity to see you again. We are being asked to leave the work here because I refuse to take man's opinions instead of the New Testament on these very things. As yet, we do not know where we will go from here. I am not worried for I know the Lord will provide for us as long as we are doing His will.

We have had five baptisms in recent weeks. One of them is our oldest son, Raymond Carroll. The family is well at present. May the Lord bless you in your earnest desire and study of His word. I would like to hear from you and the others in Demopolis as well as the work there if you could bring yourself down to the level of writing me. We love you and your family much in the Lord.

In Christian love,
Roy S. Fudge

Roy's preaching spanned over fifty years. The last place that he preached full time was at West Madison Street in Pulaski, Tennessee. Roy never desired to be viewed by men as a popular preacher. He never considered himself a good writer, so he did very little writing over the years.

One little amusing thing that happened when Roy was baptizing a person when living in Hendersonville, North Carolina. The person being baptized panicked and it took three tries to get her buried in water. Later someone asked Roy if he was baptizing in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

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“... Tampered With?” continued from page 1

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

The Evidence Supports The Biblical Claim

The indestructible nature of the divinely inspired New Testament Scriptures is borne out by the weight of the evidence. We will now take a brief look at four lines of evidence which attest the integrity and indestructibility of the New Testament.

1. The King James Version. In 1604 King James I of England authorized the making of a new translation of the Bible into English. This new version was completed

in 1611. The King James Version has been widely used for nearly 400 years. Interestingly, nothing that would substantially change our faith or any command of God has been changed in the many revisions that the King James Version has undergone. Therefore, we can be sure that the New Testament can be, and has been, preserved for the last 400 years.

2. The Latin Vulgate. A translation of the Bible from Greek to Latin was made around A.D. 150 and came to be known as the “Old Latin” version of the Scriptures. In A.D. 382 the scholar Jerome was commissioned to revise the Old Latin version. He undertook the task and completed his work around A.D. 400. His revision is known as the Latin Vulgate, which means, “common Latin.” The Latin Vulgate

was widely used from the 5th to the 15th century and is still used today. The Latin Vulgate can be used to prove that the New Testament can be, and has been, preserved substantially unchanged for 1600 years. In addition to this, we can reach back very near to the time of the apostles by showing from the Old Latin that nothing in the New Testament that would substantially change our faith has been changed in the past 1850 years.

3. The surviving manuscripts. When the New Testament was first written, early Christians made many handwritten copies in the original Greek language in which it was written. These copies are known as “manuscripts.” Of the approximately 5,000 known manuscripts of the New Testament in existence, few contain the entire New Testament and some are only fragments. Among the most complete are the Vatican, Sinaitic, and Alexandrian manuscripts, which were written during the middle of the 4th and 5th centuries. These early copies of the Scriptures had not yet been discovered when the King James Version was made, however, a comparison shows no substantial differences between these manuscripts and the text of the King James Version! This proves beyond all question that the New Testament has been successfully preserved for at least the past 1650 years.

4. The early Christian writers. These men, also known as the “apostolic fathers,” lived and wrote near the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century A.D. Their writings are filled with quotations from the New Testament. We will consider the writings of only three of these men, Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp. The writings

of these three men survive from a period beginning between A.D. 96-110. In their writings we find quotations and references from 25 of the 27 books of the New Testament. The Scripture quotations of these and other early Christian writers are so extensive that the entire New Testament could be reconstructed from their writings. These writers take us back to the time when the New Testament was first written, and their writings prove that the New Testament they had is the same as the New Testament we have today. There is no substantial difference.

Conclusion

The New Testament has not been tampered with. In light of the available evidence, the message as we have it today is the same as when it was first delivered. Jesus said, “My words will by no means pass away” (Matt. 24:35). He meant what he said. Indeed, every essential fact, command, and promise of the gospel is preserved for us today. Let us take to heart the fact that the indestructible word of the Lord is the unmovable standard by which we will be judged (John 12:48).

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“... Brotherhood” continued from page 2

Don't Forget That We Are A Brotherhood

Nevertheless, Peter exhorted that Christians are to “love the brotherhood.” There appears to me to be some need for emphasizing our need to love the brotherhood.

1. There is a brotherhood. We need to begin by stating what is obvious — there is a brotherhood. Men become part of the same family, the family of God, by becoming children of God. Everywhere that God has a child, I have a brother or sister whom I am to love. John said, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1). In the physical family, one is taught to love his brothers and sisters; so also should this be true in the spiritual family, the church.

The church is the family of God. Paul wrote, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of

the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). The child of God is taught to love the “brotherhood,” his band of brothers, whether or not they attend the same local congregation.

2. The brotherhood is identifiable. Apparently, the Lord thought that brothers and sisters in Christ could identify one another. And, why not? The first century apostles taught the same things in every church. Paul said,

For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church (1 Cor. 4:17).

But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches (1 Cor. 7:17).

The same moral conduct that was condemned in Jerusalem was condemned in Rome. Fornication was not condemned in Rome but tolerated in Athens; the gospel

which the apostles revealed does not teach one doctrine of divorce and remarriage for Alabama and another for California. The same pattern of worship was practiced in all of the churches. The same pattern of organization was practiced in every church. Consequently, those who were children of God were as distinguishable as the Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:32).

Love The Brotherhood

Among brethren there seems to be diminishing a feeling of “brotherhood.” What appears to be happening is that we are moving toward a concept of isolation among the churches. The concept that each local church is independent is being translated into practice as follows: “You people in your congregation have your gospel meetings and carry on your affairs and we at our congregation will have our gospel meetings and carry on our affairs. Each of us will have minimal interest in or concern for the other.” The spirit of brotherhood that characterized God’s people thirty years ago is waning.

We live in an area where there are 20-30 local churches within driving distance. Some of them number 150-350. Yet, a congregation can have a gospel meeting and very few brethren from sister congregations make any effort to attend. With this many congregations in the area, the church buildings should be full when area gospel meetings are conducted. My observation is that those who do attend are more frequently the older generation than the younger. We are raising a generation that simply doesn’t make much of any effort to get to know their brothers and sisters in neighboring congregations. How much do we “love the brotherhood”?

Should something happen in a sister congregation that is not according to God’s word, the brother who loves his brethren enough to try to save their souls from sin is not well received. If he preaches or writes something to lead his erring brethren back to the way of truth, he is judged to be a trouble-maker who is meddling in another’s affairs where he is not welcome! Was Paul “meddling” in the affairs of the churches at Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Colossae, Galatia, and Ephesus when he wrote them? Was John “meddling” in the affairs of the seven churches of Asia when he wrote to them and addressed their problems? And, can we follow the approved apostolic examples of these good brothers in calling attention to the truth which applies equally to all of us? Paul said, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Phil. 4:9). Something is wrong when one understands the autonomy of the church to mean “we don’t care about anything except what happens in our local congregation.” Why don’t we have the “care of all the churches” on our hearts just as did Paul (2 Cor. 11:28)?

Which Brotherhood?

I received a copy of a brochure mailed out by a church that decided to change its name from the “church of Christ” to “The Church.” The explanation that was given was that they wanted to emulate the spirit of New Testament Christians. They wanted their “measuring stick” to be the word of God and not what some other group or association of churches that exists elsewhere in this world does. Why did they have to change their name to accomplish this worthy goal? Does this not indict those who do not change their name as using what some group or association of churches says as their “measuring stick”?

I sometimes wonder when I read such puerile statements if Paul would not have written back to such a church as he did to the church at Corinth: “What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?” (1 Cor. 14:36). The RSV may be clearer: “What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?” Paul’s argument in this verse is that the church at Corinth was departing from what other churches were doing. He is appealing to them on the basis of their choosing a course different from what other churches were practicing. What is there about wearing the name “church of Christ” that identifies that congregation with a non-existent “group or association of churches”? If there is a “group or association of churches” among non-institutional brethren that one does not wish to be identified with, please let us know what it is, who are its officers, where is its headquarters, which churches are pooling funds there, and such like things.

Will it be argued that “the church at a certain place” is more scriptural than church of Christ because of such passages as 1 Corinthians 1:1-2? “Church” means those who are called out, separated, and who thus form a distinct group or assembly. The character, nature, or identity of the assembly is not signified by “the church.” When Paul wrote to a church, in the very nature of that context the brethren knew their own identity. Church of Christ is not only scriptural in describing who we are, but also it is expedient in stating to a world in sin and error our identity as the people emphatically belonging to Christ. We are not merely an assembly, or even a religious assembly, we are in fact a people emphatically identified with and belonging to Christ. “The churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16). Church of Christ is both scriptural and expedient.

One also must ask, “What impression will calling a group ‘the church at . . .’ or ‘Christians meet here’ imply?” What is occurring in America is a movement among the denominations to get away from using their denominational names without changing their denominational doctrines. They are willing to accept as Christians those in every denomination. Near my home are several churches that have recently changed their name to “The Community Church” or something similar. There will be some people in the community that will think that a church with the name

“The church at . . .” or “Christians meet here” are part of this interdenominational fellowship that believes there are Christians in all denominations. The Boston movement usually called itself “The Church at . . .” Is wearing the same name going to identify oneself with that group? Surely our brethren who are changing the name of the church do not think that the new name they have chosen conveys nothing to the community in which they live!

But the fact of the matter is that this change of names itself is a way of identifying a church with a newly forming “association” or “group of churches” (this does not mean that they are organizationally tied). Several churches around the country are deciding to post on their signs “Christians Meet Here,” and dropping “Church of Christ” from their signs. These churches are trying to present the gospel in a more palatable way. They want a gospel that is not so abrasive to visitors. Sermons that condemn dancing, immodest dress, mixed swimming, social drinking, and gambling are not well received. Sermons that emphasize that there is just one way to heaven are judgmental and narrow minded. Sermons that preach the identifying marks of the New Testament church are not generally preached. One is not likely to hear a sermon on why the church does not use instrumental music in its worship. One is not likely to hear a sermon regarding why the church does not observe Christmas or Easter on such religious holidays. These kinds of sermons might run off visitors. One is likely to hear a sermon about how the institutional divisions was caused largely by cranky and domineering conservative brethren, and about how it all could have been avoided if we had shown a better attitude. So, by changing the name from “church of Christ” to “the church” such a congregation in effect is saying, “We choose to be identified with another group or association of churches.” So, “which brotherhood does one love?” is an appropriate question.

One does not have to listen to what is preached in such churches very long before he perceives a distinct animosity toward a group of preachers and churches who cling to the word of God. These preachers and churches are described as “tradition-bound” churches. The pulpits of the ones who are changing their names to “Christians Meet Here” and “The Church” spew a poisonous venom at brethren whom they label as “watch dogs,” “guardians of the orthodoxy,” “Pharisees,” “jingoists,” “creed writers,” and other hateful epithets. Not much love is shown to this brotherhood. But when the names of Max Lucado, Gary Smalling, Bill Hybels, and such like men are mentioned, they are treated with utmost love, respect, and courtesy. Now, which brotherhood do you think such men love?

Conclusion

Paul wrote, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8). Let us not be ashamed of

the testimony of the Lord, just because it is not popularly received in this generation. Nor let us be ashamed of those faithful ministers of Christ who unabashedly proclaim its distinctive message that is so offensive to the Protestant and Catholic denominations among us. We should be delighted to be identified with such men because we *love the brotherhood*.

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Quips & Quotes



Poll Shows Shift to Left on Campus

“Religion News Service — Today’s college freshmen are more supportive of same-sex relationships and less likely to back the death penalty than their predecessors were, a new UCLA study shows.

“A record-high 57.9 percent of freshmen in the fall of 2001 said they believed that same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status. That percentage is an increase from 56 percent to 2000 and 50.9 percent in 1997.

“One-fourth of entering students supported laws forbidding homosexual relationships, compared to 27.2 percent in 2000. In 1987, half of the students surveyed agreed with such laws.

“Researchers found that 32.2 percent of freshmen support ending capital punishment, an increase from 31.2 percent in 2000 and the highest score since 1980.

“In short, what we have been seeing in the past few years is a broad-based trend toward greater liberalism on practically every attitudinal question in the survey,” said Alexander W. Astin, education professor at the University of California at Los Angeles and founding director of the survey.

“A record high of 15.8 percent of freshmen reported that they had no current religious preference, compared to 14.9 percent in 2000 and 6.6 percent in 1966. An all-time high of 12.4 percent of incoming students said their fathers have no religious preference and a record high of 7.8 percent said their mothers had no religious preference.

Researchers also found a decline in the percentage of students who pray or meditate at least once week — from 67.7 percent in 2000 to 65.7 percent in 2001 (The Indianapolis Star [February 2, 2002], F2).