



# The Church of Christ Is Not a Denomination

Fred Melton

Denominationalism is defined by Webster as a “narrow emphasizing of denominational differences: sectarianism.” Denominationalism is a modern invention of man. It has absolutely no biblical authority for its existence. In Bible days there was only one church, built by Christ (Matt. 16:18) and separated into autonomous congregations known as the “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16) with identically the same teaching and practice. It is true that there were some differences in the early church (1 Cor. 1:11-13), but they were not approved by God. Paul exhorted the brethren at Corinth to have “no divisions among you” but be of the “same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10).

Satan has very successfully used denominationalism to destroy God’s people. There were no denominations that were approved by God among the early Christians. There were no Catholics, no Lutherans, no Baptists, no Methodists, no Pentecostals, but simply Christians

(Acts 11:16), baptized believers who were all individually members of the body or church of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27). However, there is no such thing as a “free lance” Christian with no obligation to any local work and worship (Heb. 10:25).

I cringe when I hear people (and sometimes our own brethren) refer to the church of Christ as just another denomination. Just because some building somewhere has the name “church of Christ” on the front does not necessarily mean that the Lord’s church is meeting there. However, if they are teaching and practicing the same things that Jesus and the Apostles taught, they would appear to be the church of Christ.

As far as the name church of Christ is concerned, I do not know what else you could call it except perhaps the “church of God” (1 Cor. 1:2) which is in fact saying the same thing as the church of Christ. After all, Christ built the church

*see “Church of Christ” on p. 440*

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# The Family of God

Mike Willis

The Scriptures use many metaphors to describe man's relationship to God, one of which is the metaphor of the "family of God" (Eph. 3:15; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 10:2). It is a beautiful metaphor well worth one's study.



## Expanding the Metaphor

**God is the Father.** The concept of the family of God begins with the idea of the Fatherhood of God. In one sense God is the father of all of mankind through creation; however, he is the spiritual father of only the righteous (John 8:42-44).

**Christ is the elder brother.** In the metaphor, Christ is pictured as the oldest son in the house. In Romans 8:16-17, Paul wrote, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Christ is God's son by nature, but we are his children by adoption (Gal. 4:5).

**Children of God.** Those who have been born again are born into the family of God (John 3:3, 5). We have the blessed privilege of calling on God as Father (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). John wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1-2).

**Children in his image.** The concept of being the son of someone is to be in his image. When Jesus spoke of the wicked as being children of the devil (John 8:42-44), he was speaking of their being like their spiritual father in their own wickedness. In the same way, being in the image of God conveys the idea that we have laid aside sin to put on the characteristics of God in our own lives.

**Recipients of divine chastening.** The writer in Hebrews 12 speaks of illegitimate children, children whose father walks away from them without providing the necessities and training in life. Then he says that God's children are not illegitimate children. Rather, he said, "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh *which corrected us, and we*

*see "Family of God" on p. 441*

# What Shall It Be Called?

Connie W. Adams

For many years local churches have hung a sign out in front of the premises where they meet, indicating that this, is indeed, a meeting place for Christians. It has not only made clear the fact that this is *not* where the Rotary Club assembles or where a hardware store does business, but has been an aid to people both locally and from afar in easily locating the assembly place. Most brethren have chosen to put “Church of Christ,” or “Church of Christ Meets Here,” or something similar, on these signs, together with a schedule of meetings. I have never known of anyone thinking that the sign itself was either the building or the people who meet in that building at stated times. Of late, there seems to be a disposition on the part of some to create a stir as to whether local churches should any longer identify themselves as “churches of Christ.”

It is being argued that this is denominational. Some are saying, as if they have suddenly discovered some truth nobody ever thought of before, that there is no exclusive designation for the Lord’s people collectively in the New Testament. We have heard gospel preachers say that for many years, and this writer has been preaching that ever since beginning to preach. We have pointed out that we read of “the body of Christ,” the “church of God,” the “house of God,” simply “the church” and that a plurality of churches were identified as “churches of Christ.” The singular of that would be a “church of Christ.” We have shown that whatever term is used should be found in the Bible.

But now we are being told that it is confusing for a local church to identify a itself as a “church of Christ” for fear that it will be confused with conservative Christian Churches which use the instrument and sometimes call themselves “churches of Christ,” or with liberal brethren who practice things to which some of us object. Such designation is no longer distinctive, we are told. Some have advised that “we” ought to give thought to using a different term. Who are the “we” of this recommendation? If that “we” is larger than a local church, then it is too large.

This proposal is fraught with dangerous possibilities. Shall some sort of convention be called, and if so, who has the right to call it? If a local church decides to refer to itself as a “church of Christ,” what writers, leaders, or whatever can deny them that right? How could “we” augment a proposal that all congregations stop using such a designation in favor of another, or none at all, without interfering with the independence of every congregation on earth? When a congregation begins in any community, as a self-ruling body, it alone is to determine when it shall meet, where, and what identifying and

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informative information shall be placed in front of their premises, if any. If what they choose reflects unscriptural teaching or practice, then anybody has a right to ask for an answer from the Bible. If it chooses a designation which is found in the word of God (even if that same designation is chosen by other faithful congregations in that city, county, state, nation, or the world), then no man on earth can gainsay it. If each one should decide to call itself a “church of God” on a sign, stationary, or in newspaper advertisements, then I am prepared to defend their right to do so. By the same token, if they all choose to say they are a “church of Christ,” then I challenge anybody, anywhere to deny them that right.

### Misuse of Scriptural Terms

It is certainly possible to misuse scriptural terms. It is no secret that some untaught brethren think of the church in denominational terms. Their speech betrays them. Those who say that a certain man is a “Church of Christ preacher” or that “He is a Baptist but she is Church of Christ” need to be taught about gospel preachers and that a saved individual is a Christian. If a denominational group refers to itself as a “church of God” then I cannot criticize them for that term. Of course, it takes more than calling something the Lord’s to truly make it his.

In the New Testament the church is said to be married to Christ (Eph. 5:23-31). It is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). Those who compose it have been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). Christ is the head of it (Col. 1:18). He is the builder of it (Matt. 16:18). He is the foundation of it (1 Cor. 3:11), the savior of it (Eph. 5:23), and the purchaser of it (Acts 20:28). The whole family in heaven and earth is named for him (Eph. 3:15). Based on these facts I must

conclude that it is perfectly acceptable for a local body of saved people to refer to themselves collectively as a “church of Christ” — meaning simply a body belonging to Christ.

### Iconoclasts

There is a need for iconoclasts. Idols fashioned after the imagination of men’s hearts must be exposed for what they are. It is not wrong to have our thinking stimulated, or challenged. The difference between human traditions and divine truth must ever be distinguished. But if any would-be image breaker wishes to take upon himself the task of depriving local assemblies of the Lord’s people of the right to put up signs in front of their meeting places who are “of Christ” gather at stated times in such premises, or even call in question such right, then I, for one, am prepared to stop them and ask to see his credentials! Nor do I stand alone in this. Some of these efforts are being promoted by men who write with angry, or sarcastic pens, with a chip on their shoulder, with their bottom lip stuck out at the world and with a noticeable degree of intellectual snootiness.

Since I can read in the Bible of the church of God at Corinth, the body of Christ, the household of God and churches of Christ, I shall accept all of these and any others found in Scripture. I shall repudiate *none* of them. When people misuse them, then they should be taught better. But when anyone says “WE” should decide AGAINST any one of them, then that is another matter. It is time to ask: By what authority sayest thou this thing and who gave thee this authority?

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# Religious Freedom, Indian Style

William V. Beasley

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**The affirmation of Hindus and Muslims is of little import to me, but such is certainly not true of the “Saints and wise men among . . . Christians.” One wise, Christian saint wrote, . . . “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything” (1 Thess. 1:8, NKJV).**

During a recent trip to India, I had occasion to read an editorial from *The Hindu* of January 31, 2003. The article was written by K.R. Narayanaswamy and was entitled “Ethics of Conversion, Don’t Try to Demonize Hinduism.” If the article represented the thinking of just one man or even the political position of this national newspaper in which it appeared, it would be bad enough, but it seems to represent the thinking of most of the radical Hindus and of the present government (BJP Party) of India. The article was prompted by the reaction of “the Christian community” (i.e. denominationalists) of the state of Tamil Nadu over a recently enacted “ordinance on conversion,” also referred to by some “Christians” as an *Anti-Conversion Bill*. The “Christian community” had taken to the streets in protest over the passage of the aforementioned legislation. The Tamil Nadu ordinance prohibits conversions “by force, fraud or inducements.” No true Christian believes in or practices conversions (?) by force, fraud or by *worldly* inducements. However, to the Tamil Nadu legislators and many radical Hindus the proclamation of a heaven to be gained or a hell to be shunned is viewed as a prohibited inducement.

The author of “Ethics of Conversion” made a few good points. Among other things, he wrote, “All religious preaching is competitive and often combative.” That is true, and I wish

some of my preaching brethren fully realized this true. We are in an eternal life and eternal death struggle with the forces of Satan (see 2 Cor. 10:4-6). Mr. Narayanaswamy also wrote, “All conversions assumes the superiority of the converter’s faith to the converted’s (faith). . . .” If I did not truly and genuinely believe that Christianity, as revealed in the New Testament, is superior to any and all man made religions and also superior to all perversions of Christianity (from Roman Catholicism down to the newest denomination or sect), I would not waste my time teaching and preaching the gospel of God’s Son. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa. 55:9), New Testament Christianity is superior to all other religions, and is, therefore, not a waste of time to teach, preach, or practice. The article also spoke out against the attitude which led to the massacre of Protestants by Catholics and of Catholics by Protestants from the Middle Ages onward, and the more recent terrorists attacks of 9/11. However, Mr. Narayanaswamy also presented some half-truths and drew some most unwarranted conclusions. Not only were the conclusions totally unwarranted, but the conclusions sought, it seemed to me, to be an attempt to accomplish the very thing he was opposing (i.e., religious conversions).

“All conversions assume the superiority of the converter’s faith to the converted’s — an assumption alien

to, and implicitly repudiated by the Hindu who believes in the absolute equality of all faiths.” According to Mr. Narayanaswamy, the Hindu believes in “the absolute equality of all faiths.” If this were true, why would he or any Hindu bother to write an article in opposition to Hindu conversions to Christianity?

If such were truly believed, the conversion of one percent, ten percent or of one hundred percent of the Hindus would be of no import, since Christianity is, to the Hindu, absolutely equal to Hinduism. During the time frame of my trip to India (mid-January to mid-February) newspapers in India ran stories concerning an American (denominational) evangelist (Mr. Cooper) who was attacked by Hindus because of his preaching. Did these Hindus seek to kill Mr. Cooper because they believed in “the absolute equality of all faiths”? Mr. Cooper was forced by the Indian government to leave the nation of India. Does this demonstrate a belief in “the absolute equality of all faiths”?

“In the Indian context, therefore, religious freedom should only mean the right to practice the faith that one is born into, and not the right to preach and convert.” The strongest influence (in my opinion) in Hindu society is the caste system. That is, that one must remain in the caste (occupation, social status, etc.) in which he/she is born. The people of the bottom of this ungodly system are sometimes called “untouchables,” and there are high caste people who loath to so much as to be in close contact with an “untouchable.” The caste system is officially/legally outlawed, but it is still very much alive and well. (NOTE: See “India’s Untouchables” in *National Geographic*, June 2003.) Earlier Indian governments enacted affirmative action programs to raise the lot of the lower caste and uncaste people. Mr. Narayanaswamy’s concept of religious freedom (Indian style) is the caste system applied to the field of religion. There is an obvious

contradiction in what Mr. Narayanaswamy wrote. An Indian born into a fundamentalist, evangelical Christian family would have the right to practice that faith (which includes preaching and seeking to convert others), but Indian style religious freedom (which is no freedom at all) says he does not have the right to preach and convert. Which is it? Does the evangelistic Christian (the New Testament knows no other kind — Acts 8:4) of India have the right to practice the religion into which he was born or does he not?

“Ironically, it is the believer who is the problem. He is the one who is the potential fanatic, the fundamentalist in the making — unless he believes like the Hindu.” Mr. Narayanaswamy earlier wrote of “the absolute equality of all faiths,” but now says “the believer is the problem . . . unless he believes like the Hindu.” This says that the Hindu belief (faith) is superior to the Islamic faith or the faith of the Christian. He wrote, “if the whole world believed like the Hindus, the world would be a better place to live in.” Is he trying to persuade other people to become Hindus? Is he teaching conversion? If it were not for the influence of “Christianity” and western society, Hindu ladies today could still look forward to throwing herself (or being thrown) upon the funeral pyre of her husband. Is this his idea of a “much better plan to live in”? This was the practice of Hinduism until the British literally forced the practice to cease.

“Saints and wise men among Hindus, Muslims, Christians have affirmed in no uncertain terms, the essential oneness of all religious teaching.” Mr. Narayanaswamy goes on to point out that “a UN (United Nations, wvb) inter-faith conference, leaders of the world’s major religions solemnly declared their belief in the equality of all religions,” and declares that this “should mean the end to all proselytization anywhere in the world.” He then urges India to set an example for the rest of the world by “banning all

conversions in the country.” His parting shot was to point out that the banning of conversions would help fulfill the dream of Mahatma Gandhi, who purportedly said, “If I had the power and the authority, I would abolish all conversion.”

The affirmation of Hindus and Muslims is of little import to me, but such is certainly not true of the “Saints and wise men among . . . Christians.” One wise, Christian saint wrote, by way of commendation, to a congregation of Christians in Thessalonica, “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything” (1 Thess. 1:8, NKJV). Wise saints among the early Christians commended preaching to and seeking to convert the peoples of pagan religions. Another wise saint, in speaking of Jesus Christ, wrote, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NKJV). This same Jesus, before he ascended back to heaven, gave an age lasting commandment/commission: “Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations (including India, wvb), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Matt. 28:18-20, NKJV).

After reading what the early Christian saints and the Son of God said, I must believe that the “Saints and wise men among . . . Christians (?)” today, of whom Mr. Narayanaswamy wrote, are neither wise (spiritually) nor among (i.e., a part of) true Christianity. Every truly wise man and every saint among true Christians is working to convert others because we follow/obey Jesus, and we know that

# When Your Child Leaves God

Jim Lee

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Many of you parents who will read this, know by experience the horrific impact this circumstance can have on you. In the past, I have often sympathized and grieved with other brothers and sisters who have gone through the heart wrenching experience of seeing a child of theirs turn their back on God, and return back to the world. Parents are usually at a loss for words when this happens. Others will question themselves, asking “What did we do wrong?” “Where did we go wrong?” “Were we too strict?” “Did we set a bad example?” etc.

And sometimes, even the preacher/elders are at a loss for words to help during this difficult time. Sometimes, all we can do is “weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15).

As I write this article, I write with a heavy heart and tears in my eyes, because we too have now experienced what so many others have — a child who has turned from God. Having been blessed with three precious sons, we have been overjoyed by this blessing. What precious memories we have of them.

My wife, Sandi, and I have done what we believe the

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“there is no other name under heaven given among me by which we must be saved.” What is said by (so-called) wise men and saints today, by spokesmen of the United Nations Inter-faith Conference, or by Mahatma Gandhi is of absolutely no import when considered in contrast to what has been said by Jesus Christ and his apostles. We know that salvation is not by being a Hindu or by being or becoming a Muslim.

If the foolishness of the legislators of the state of Tamil Nadu comes to the state of Andhra Pradesh, I would and do humbly urge my brethren in Andhra Pradesh, as I now urge Christians in Tamil Nadu and the rest of India, to speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:29-31; 2 Cor. 7:4). Our response when forbidden by the laws of India/men

Bible teaches on raising our sons. They all three have been baptized for thirteen, eleven, and ten years now. Two preach the gospel, and the other son has such a tremendous ability in the Scriptures — however, knowing the Scriptures and living by the Scriptures makes a huge difference (Luke 6:46).

As Christians, we are at war. We have to be on guard daily with the armor of God on, for if we walk out into the world without our armor, we are walking right into the enemy’s camp. We are at a serious disadvantage unless we prepare ourselves for battle (2 Cor. 2:11).

Sin enters our lives via “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (1 John 2:15-17). And according to James 1:14-15, when we allow ourselves to be drawn away by our own lust, we then become enticed (tempted), and then when our lust conceives, it brings forth sin, and sin, when it is finished brings forth death (spiritual separation from God). And this is where our son is now, separated from his God, and on the road to eternal destruction.

to preach the good news (which leads to conversions) of Jesus Christ, must be the same as the early saints who were forbidden to preach the doctrine of Jesus: “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29, NKJV).

The command of Jesus, to his apostles and ultimately to all Christians, was recorded thusly: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world (including India, wvb) and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’” (Mark 16:15-16, NKJV).

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In preaching on the home as God would have it, I often quote Psalms 127:3 “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord.” I hope I am thinking right on this Scripture, it seems to be saying, that our children are a gift from God, thus an heritage, and he (God) wants them back so they can receive their inheritance.

It has to please our Heavenly Father, when he sees his children raising their children in the light of his word. As godly parents, we are preparing another generation of Christians to carry on in the battle. Thus, our fervent duty is to train and teach them according to God’s Holy Word (Eph. 6:1, 4; Col. 3:20-21). This we feel we have done.

Yes, how I wish we could carry our children on into heaven by proxy, but this would violate God’s design in making mankind a creature of choice, e.g. Adam and Eve had a choice to obey or disobey God (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-7); those in the days of Noah had a choice to listen to a preacher of righteousness or reject his message (Gen. 6-7); Joshua told those of his day, to make a choice (Josh. 24:15). In the New Testament, the very same principle is found. Jesus said in John 12:48, “He that rejecteth Me and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth *him*: the word that I have spoken, the same will judge *him* in the last day.”

Paul told the church at Rome in chapter 14:12, “So then *everyone of us* will give account of *ourselves* before God.” To the church in Corinth, he says, “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that *every one* may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

I can see why the apostle Paul said there was power in the gospel in Romans 1:16-17. Yes, it (the gospel) is the power of God unto salvation, but it (the gospel) also forces

us to make a choice every time it’s preached — to obey or disobey. Nothing else in this old world has that much power! Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, “He that is not with me is against me.”

Our God has done everything he can to keep us out of hell. He has given us his only begotten Son; he has given us his inspired word; he has given us time to obey his will. Thus it is my fervent prayer, that God will continue his longsuffering and patience towards our son, but not to our son only, but to all the other godly parents who are feeling the same hurt that we are feeling due to your child turning their back on God. Will you pray for all of us please?

Remember, that the devil is a thief and a murderer. Jesus spoke of him as such in John 10:10a, “The thief cometh not, but to steal and to kill, and to destroy” — and how many Christian homes has he invaded and done serious harm to? For sure brethren, let’s not be guilty of offering him an invitation into our homes! Whenever he shows up, “resist him and he will flee” (Jas. 4:7).

And for those of you whose children are remaining faithful to God, relish this time and verbalize to them how proud you are to see them be good examples to others and living for God, for they are the next generation of Christians. May they remain “rooted and grounded.”

### Conclusion

In closing, brethren, we are strong believers in prayer and we believe, just as the Bible states in James 5:16, that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” And it is our prayer, that by the time this article is printed, our son has been greeted back home by both of his fathers! (Luke 15:20)

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## Creation and Change

by Douglas F. Kelly

In this book Professor Kelly persuasively argues for a literal interpretation of the seven-day-account of creation found in Genesis 1 and 2. “It is the best work that I have read on this subject,”  
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# The Baptism of John

Paul K. Williams

Mark 1:4 says: “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness

of sins.” Luke 3:3 says: “And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

In what sense was John’s baptism “for the forgiveness of sins”? How was that different from the baptism we must submit to today (Acts 2:38)? And did those who were baptized by John have to be baptized again when the church began?

It is clear that John told the people that they had to repent and they had to be baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sins. This was to prepare them to believe and follow Jesus.

Jewish society was very corrupt. John was sent to prepare the way for Jesus (John 1:6-8; Matt. 3:1-3). They needed to repent and have their sins removed. To do this, they needed to be baptized.

In Old Testament times forgiveness of sins was promised when the sinner brought a sacrifice to the tabernacle or temple and confessed his sins. The New Testament makes it plain that though God did forgive their sins, the forgiveness was only through the blood of Christ. Hebrews 9:15 says, “And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” Forgiveness was granted to those who lived under the Old Testament, but that forgiveness was through the death of Jesus.

The animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant did not take away sins. “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb.10:4). But God did forgive their sins because Jesus was going to die on the cross for those sins.

When John came, God added another condition for forgiveness. John informed the crowds that they needed

to repent *and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins*. We conclude that God did forgive them of their sins, just as he forgave them when they brought their sacrifices. He forgave them because Jesus was going to make the sacrifice for their sins.

Did those who received John’s baptism have to be baptized again when the church began? I believe that they did. Here are the reasons I conclude this:

Those who had been forgiven when they offered sacrifices needed to be baptized. Those sacrifices did not put them into Christ. Neither did John’s baptism put people into Christ. It was to prepare for Christ, not to do what only Christ and his gospel could do.

When Peter commanded his hearers to be baptized, he said, “Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). He did not exempt those who had been baptized by John. The command was for “each one” of the hearers, even those who had been baptized by John.

**1. In Acts 19 there is the account of those who had received John’s baptism.** They had heard about this baptism *after* the baptism of the Great Commission was in force, so there is some difference between their case and those on Pentecost. But there is this sameness: They truly obeyed the baptism of John. Paul however told them that John’s baptism was to prepare people to believe on Jesus, and he *baptized* them again. He did not merely correct their belief.

John’s baptism was unique. But it was in the same category as animal sacrifices. Those prepared by obeying God’s commands to make sacrifices, and those who obeyed God’s command to submit to John’s baptism, were prepared to believe in and obey Jesus Christ. When the gospel began to be preached, they were to submit to his baptism, which brings remission of sins and puts one into the body of Christ.

# “Whosoever Is Angry With His Brother”

Jim McDonald

In Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus warns against anger and its potential power to lead to

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murder. He quotes the Ten Commandments: “Ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old time ‘Thou shall not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment’” (Matt. 5:21). He then adds, “But I say unto you that

everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire” (Matt. 5:22).

Jesus mentions three places men should fear: the “judgment,” the “council,” and the “lake of fire.” Two of these were tribunals of men: the “judgment” (a group of men which sat in every city having authority over such cases as murder) and the “council,” this was the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court composed of 72 men. The third place men are to fear is the “lake of fire,” God’s final punishment for evildoers. In Jesus’ day, power to execute criminals had been taken from Jewish hands. When Pilate told Jesus’ accusers “take him yourselves and judge him according to your law,” they responded, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” (John 19:31f). Since fear of the “judgment” and the “council” would be fear of the death penalty and since such power had been removed from Jewish hands, it is understood that Jesus has reference to all courts of law which can punish the murderer with death. Still, while we must control our anger which, left unchecked might lead to murder and thus our own execution; anger which stops short of murder but causes us to speak derogatorily of our brother by saying “Raca” or “Thou fool” will lead us to an eminently higher court whose sentence is more severe than death. Jesus said, “. . . be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear

him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

Jesus says: “Whosoever is angry with his brother.” The KJV adds “without cause.” Not all anger is being considered in this passage. Jesus was angry because of the hardness of the hearts of those who sought occasion to condemn him because he healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:5). Paul instructed, “Be ye angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Eph. 4:26). Anger which may cause men to say “Raca” or “thou fool” may also incite one to kill. To prevent murder, remove the cause that leads to that murder, anger. And more importantly; remove anger for although it may not lead us to kill, it will lead us to stand in the court of God.

Rather than being angry with our brother, we should seek reconciliation with him. Thus Jesus said: “If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matt. 5:23-24).

Our attitudes and dealings with others may interfere with our worship of God. Jesus taught that in our prayers we must ask, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12, 14, 15). We must do our part in restoring peace with those from whom we have been estranged. Sometimes reconciliation is impossible, but if it is, let it be because our adversary refuses to be at peace with us, not vice versa.

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# Secret Watchdog Organization

John C. Robertson

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doc-

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**trine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent (Rom. 16:17-18).**

Liddell and Scott's *Greek English Lexicon* define the word "mark" (*skopio*) as "a lookout-place, a mountain-peak, . . . metaph. the height or highest point of anything, a watchtower, a look-out, watch, to keep watch" (735). The apostle Paul delivered a command, through the Holy Spirit, for all Christians to stand upon the mountain tops and watchtowers of life and be watchers against any and all who would walk "contrary to the doctrine ye learned" (Rom. 16:17). The command to watch reminds us of Isaiah's statement in 62:6, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night." Ironically, as Christians are fulfilling this direct command from God, voices from the universal church have made charges against brothers who are executing the instructions of Jesus, through the apostle Paul, to warn and watch. The term "watchdog" is being used in a derogatory fashion to undermine the work of many faithful brethren. Those using this term fear that these watchdogs have organized themselves together for the purpose of ruining the reputation of certain brethren. This however, is not the case. The command to watch, in light of Romans 16:17-18, shall therefore be examined in this article. Secondly, the question as to whether or not an organization of watchdogs has formed will be addressed.

## The "Simple" (Rom. 16:18b)

The word "innocent" (ASV) or "simple" (KJV) sets the tone for this study. "Simple" is defined as "fearing no evil from others, distrusting no one" (Thayer 21), "unsuspect-

ing" (AG 28). When a brother such as Ed Harrel tells us that Romans 14 includes matters of doctrine (cf. sixteen articles in *Christianity Magazine*, February 1989-May 1990), he has nothing to fear from the "simple." To the simple, there is no conceivable way any brother in Christ would lead them astray and therefore they see no need for anyone to warn. True sects are thus formed in the local and universal church of Jesus Christ. The division is comprised of those who uphold the hands of the errorist among us and those who are fulfilling the command to watch (labeled "watchdogs"). The unsuspecting brother views watching as a personal attack rather than it being a fulfilling of the Law of Jesus Christ.

Proper parallels can be drawn from a recent newspaper article in Wichita Falls Texas. The title of the article was "Enron could haunt Bush Administration" dated 01-10-02. The article paints a picture of Democrat watchdogs that are searching for information that will damage the reputation of President Bush. "Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., leading one of those inquiries, is promising 'a search for the truth, not a witch hunt.' But some Republicans — including White House spokesman Ari Fleischer — used just that term, 'witch hunt,' on Thursday describing the widening investigation." The article goes on to state that the "Justice Department, Labor Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission are opening a criminal investigation." The parallel to what is happening here is coincidentally the same among members of the church today who are labeling lawful investigating brethren watchdogs. Brethren need to turn back to the laws of God and be willing to follow those laws even at the expense of losing a close friend or family member. Let us have the same resolve, "a search for truth, not a witch

hunt,” as Senator Lieberman states.

The reason for said actions is love for the souls of men. Love then is the motivating factor for these actions (cf. 1 Cor. 13).

Organization has not occurred on either side that this writer knows of. Yet, the sides surely exist. Joshua and his family made a choice as to which side to stand. “If it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah” (Josh. 24:15). Every Christian today is called to make a choice. Follow Jesus or align yourself with the false teachers of our day. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth” (Matt. 12:30).

### The Plea of Autonomy

The unsuspecting brethren who put their own ideas before the Law of God are telling us that church autonomy is being violated when one warns, watches, marks, and turns away from one who is not a member of their local church. Can we not see that we are fueling the fires of our denominational friends, who claim that we are a cult, when such statements are made? When Christians say they want no outsider interfering with the local work, they truly toss out the examples of the works of the apostles.

The truth is not bound by autonomy (2 Tim. 2:9). Matters of judgment in the areas of the work of each local church are to be left to those individual works. However, when one preaches or teaches error in a local work, that information becomes a stumbling block, not only to the members of that church, but to the universal church. Such a hazard is to be marked and exposed. Watching Christians, on the mountaintops and watchtowers, are informed and ready to take action because of their love for the pure gospel and an unwillingness to let it be contaminated.

Consider the following Scriptures that clearly define the self-governing (autonomy) aspect of each local church. That work includes edification of its members (Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 10:24-25). Secondly, the work of a local church is to evangelize the lost (Acts 13:1-5; Phil. 4:15; 1 Tim. 3:14-15). Thirdly, the work of the church is to offer benevolent care to the needy saints (Acts 4:32; 6:1; 11:29; Rom. 15:25-26; 1 Cor. 16:1ff.; 2 Cor. 8-9; 1 Tim. 5). The exerted energies of a local autonomous church are to fulfill the above duties. These duties are performed on the local level by churches organized only on the local level. Each church is to have elders, deacons, and saints (Phil. 1:1). We find no authority for organization on a universal level in the word of God.

Communication occurred in the early church, just as it does today. Such conversations included whether or not any given church was faithful. Paul told the Roman brethren, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world” (Rom. 1:8). Again, “Your obedience is come abroad unto all men” (Rom. 16:19). Paul *saluted* five different churches in Romans 16 for their faithfulness. The *saluting* identified which churches were faithful so that brethren would be both encouraged by each other, and to keep themselves from violating the laws of fellow shipping false brethren (1 John 9-11). Paul sent word to the Corinthians that “the churches of Asia salute you” (1 Cor. 16:19). The early church communicated on a universal level and held the truth dear in unity. False teachers were identified, exposed, and marked no matter where they worshiped. Paul warned brethren of false teachers as well (2 Tim. 2:16-18; Tit. 1:12-13, etc.). The apostle Paul did not violate church autonomy. The “simple” however have used their various *ipse dixit* theology to come up with a new gospel which states we are to not warn, mark and turn away from our brothers in error. Paul had somewhat to say about this to the Galatian brethren, “Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema” (Gal. 1:7). Dear reader, being united universally on the doctrine of Jesus Christ does not make an organization, it fulfills the prayer of Jesus in John 17 and the command of Paul (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 1:27).

### The Plea of Gossip

The “simple” are telling us that universal church communication is a violation of autonomy. They opine that such communication is mere gossip and damaging to the church. Brethren today are standing on the wrong side and defending the wrong ideas. Diversionary tactics are being used to take the focus away from the real issue. False teachers are beloved more than the gospel! Let us all proclaim with the psalmist, “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that observe thy precepts” (Ps. 119:63). Was Jesus gossiping when he warned publicly against the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:29-33)? Was Paul gossiping when he stated that Epaphras had “declared unto us your (Colossians) love in the Spirit” (Col. 1:8)? Did Paul gossip at some point in the past by stating that the obedience of the Roman Christians had “come abroad unto all men” (Rom. 16:19). Was Paul being divisive and violating church autonomy by telling the three churches in Rome (16:5, 14, 15), that they were to mark and avoid those who refuse to hold to the teachings of Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:17-18)? The answer is emphatically no! Paul told the Corinthian brethren that the things in which he wrote were “the commandment of God” (1 Cor. 14:37). Let us put the focus on false teachers and their evil work and stop quibbling about gossip.

### A Call to Take a Stand

At a time in which humanism is making inroads within the body of Christ, the call to take a stand rings loud in the ears of the faithful. Paul states, “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-11). The fiery darts of Satan came in the form of false teachers in the early church and so he is about his same work today (1 Pet. 5:8). Brethren who take such a militant stand against error, no matter where it is found, will be labeled “unloving, unchristian, violators of church autonomy, legalists, antis, gossips and watchdogs” to name a few. Ahab pointed his finger at Elijah stating that he was the “troubler of Israel” (1 Kings 18:17). Let us respond to those who would accuse us of being troublemakers in the same fashion Elijah did to Ahab, “*It is not I but you who are the troubler of Israel*” (1 Kings 18:18). Keep on watching, keep warning, and keep the true issue ever in the face of the false teacher. Never once let the diversionary tactics of autonomy, gossip, and name calling thwart your God authorized duty of watching and warning. Souls are at stake! Let us endure with joy the calling of names, suffering “hardship with (me, Paul), as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:5).

Are there organized efforts to control the brotherhood termed “Secret Watchdog Organization”? There may be such an organization existing in the minds of the “simple” yet in reality there is no such organization. I know of no such organization and brother Dennis Scroggins told me he knows of no such organization. I asked brother Tom Roberts if he knew of any such organization. He stated, “I have never heard of such, except in the accusations of some who object to ‘watchmen.’ I am certainly not a member of such an organization. I don’t know of anyone who is. I believe it is a false accusation of some that are trying to smear the reputation of faithful preachers. If I knew of any such ‘watchdog organization’ that was trying to run the brotherhood, I would be just as opposed to that as I would any other group that tried to control the brotherhood.”

I asked brother Larry Ray Hafley if he had ever heard of a “Watchdog Organization.” He replied at length, which I believe would be profitable to all to read:

John, I confess that I am completely unaware of a “Secret Watchdog Organization,” however, it might be good to trace the arrangement or organization the Lord has provided with respect to “watching.” The church, a rather public, not private or secret organization, is commanded to “be watchful” (Rev. 3:2). Of course, the familiar image and principle of watchmen is clearly set forth in the Old Testament (Ezek. 3:17-21; Isa. 62:6: “I have set watchmen upon thy walls O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence”). The “principle” of watching to which I alluded is found in Luke 12:42-46. All disciples are to “watch” and “be sober,” and “be ready” (cf. Matt. 24:42; Mark

13:35; 1 Thess. 5:6). “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith” (1 Cor. 16:13). Those who fail to watch are threatened with heavenly judgment (Rev. 3:3). Truly, therefore, “Blessed is he that watcheth” (Rev. 16:15).

Every evincing evangelist is told to “watch thou in all things” (2 Tim. 4:5). Now, would that admonishing exhortation include or exclude writing, say, in a magazine or publication of some kind? “All things” is fairly comprehensive in that text, so we may safely assume that one’s teaching and preaching in all forms would include the spirit of watchfulness as delineated in the passages cited.

Accordingly, in harmony with the divine testimony and the principle cited, would any periodical which purports to expound and extol the wisdom of God say that it is not “watchful,” that it does not have, in any particular, the disposition of watchfulness as advocated by the Lord? Such printed preaching mediums certainly are not “secret,” neither indeed can be, for their very success is based on public notice; the very nature and tenor of preaching and teaching is “into all the world,” “unto every creature.” Hence, if there be any “secret” watchdog organization, it is contrary to all reason.

- 1. For this reason, when one refers to a “secret watchdog organization,” one may be speaking in a whimsical fashion.** If so, his terms (in this case, “Secret Watchdog Organization”) need to be defined before they can be described.
- 2. One may have a subtle definition in mind, one that would provide insight into the positive good of watchfulness.**
- 3. One may be delusional and imagine in his nightmare an ogre, a monster, which does not exist.** If so, pity him.
- 4. One may be jealous, envious, bitter, and resentful against someone or something.** In his malicious madness, he seeks to lash and slash the objects of his scorn. If so, pray for him” (LRH’s response dated 01-08-02).

Brethren, let us put away “simple” thinking. The inference of Romans 16:17-18 is that we are to be “suspecting.” This is why Paul stated to the Corinthians, “watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). Our souls and the souls of our brethren on both the local and universal levels are at stake. Let us exercise love and watch for each other. Let us stand on the spiritual mountaintops and watchtowers and watch! However, let our watching be done because we love truth and souls that the truth has the power to save (Rom. 1:16).

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# Live and Kickin' Against the Goads

Kevin Maxey

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Monday night, May 26, the USA Network aired “Willie Nelson and Friends: Live and Kickin’,” a birthday concert tribute to the seventy-year old country singer. Notable guests included Eric Clapton, John Mellencamp, Shania Twain, Paul Simon, Sheryl Crow, President Clinton, and numerous others.

Among the musicians who performed was Steve Tyler, lead singer of the rock band Aerosmith. Tyler paid tribute to Willie Nelson with these startling words, “Here’s to the love of his voice, and in his song. *And here’s to hell. May we have as much fun there as we had getting there.* Here’s to you Willie. Happy birthday man.”

After making such a blasphemous statement the concert should have been more appropriately named, “Willie Nelson and Friends: Live and Kickin’ Against the Goads.” You may remember that Jesus rebuked Saul for kicking against the goads (Acts 9:5; 26:14). A goad is a sharp tool used by a farmer to prod his animals in the way they should go. It would be foolish for an animal to repeatedly hurt himself by going against his master’s sharp goad. So while Jesus was “goading” Saul to take the right path, all Saul was doing was hurting himself by kicking against God’s will. Saul wisely obeyed the gospel and stopped his goad kicking (Acts 22:16). Unlike Saul, Steven Tyler’s words prove that he is determined to continue kicking against the goads, even if it sends him to hell. Let’s investigate the fallacies of this singer’s tribute to hell.

## Hell is Not a Place of Love

Steven Tyler honors Willie for “the love of his voice, and in his song,” but in his very next breath praises Willie for living a life worthy of going to hell. How is that a com-

pliment? There is no doubt that Willie Nelson and Steven Tyler have both expressed and experienced worldly love in their lives, but true love does not seek to rebel against God to such an extent that you then revel in the idea of being eternally cast out of his presence into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 14:10; 21:8). True love obeys the God of love (John 14:15). “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3). True love does not sing about profanity, marijuana, brawling, drunkenness, and fornication. No one who practices true love would enjoy going to hell and he certainly would not have fun staying there.

## Hell is No Place to Honor

In the middle of honoring Willie Nelson, Tyler pays tribute to his future home of eternal punishment by saying, “Here’s to hell,” as if to say, “I’m glad hell exists. Let’s all raise a glass to hell. What a wonderful place!” Hell is a dreadful place of shame, not honor. There is nothing to celebrate about going to a place reserved for all the souls who rejected the sacrifice and gospel of a loving Savior who was brutally crucified on their behalf (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

## Hell is No Place to Look Forward to

Steven Tyler spoke of looking forward to going to hell. “May we have as much fun there as we had getting there.” Sure, Willie and Steven may have had fun “getting there” but Jesus warned, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26). You may enjoy the “passing pleasures of sin” but understand that the wages of such are eternal death (Heb. 11:25; Rom. 6:23). Tyler longingly spoke as if he couldn’t wait to get there; as if it were a place where he could live happily ever after. The rich man lived a life in taunt of



hell, but once he woke up in torment, he did everything he could to get out, but by then it was sadly too late (Luke 16:23-26). Here you have a voice speaking to you in the Scriptures from beyond the grave. One who died in sin and woke up in eternal torment is desperately pleading with you to do everything you can to avoid hell, not look forward to it. Jesus said you should be so determined to avoid hell that doing the unthinkable of cutting off your hand or plucking out your eye would be much better than having to go there. "It is better for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched — where the worm does not die" (Mark 9:42-48).

### **Going to Hell is Nothing to be Proud About**

Tyler's expression is as if he and Willie have really accomplished something remarkable. Like they've set a goal, worked hard all their lives and now they are almost there. This 70-year-old birthday party was a celebration of Willie's life and the best thing Tyler could say about Nelson was, congratulations, you've lived a life worthy of going to hell?! Selling millions of records, winning Grammys, making millions of dollars, and attaining worldwide fame is quite an accomplishment for anyone, but losing your soul for eternity is nothing to be proud about (Matt. 16:26). In contrast, angels awaited righteous Lazarus to carry him to paradise (Luke 16:22). Jesus stands ready to welcome faithful souls with a "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matt. 25:23). No such congratulatory words await those who enter the gates of hell. "Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt. 7:23).

### **Hell is Not Going to be a Party For Sinners**

Tyler's birthday wish for Willie Nelson was to see him in hell so they could keep having fun together. Think about that for a second. Steven Tyler's birthday wish was for Willie Nelson to go to hell. Some have said they don't want to go to heaven, because they'd rather stay in hell with all their friends. People joke and say if they go to hell it won't be so bad because they'll have lots of company. No amount of company will comfort the soul in hell. They say, "Well, if we go to hell we'll all be together like one big happy family!" That's not how the rich man felt after he died and woke up in eternal punishment (Luke 16:27-31). Upon finding himself in torment he urgently pleaded with Abraham to send someone to warn his beloved brothers so they would not follow him to hell. He did not take consolation in thinking, "Well, I can't wait for my brothers to get here so we can have some fun!" The rich man wasn't having fun and he did not wish for his brothers to have to come to such a terrible place with him.

I don't know what Steven Tyler thinks hell will be like, if he believes it really exists at all, but God's word vividly and clearly warns that hell does exist and it will be a place

of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30), "torment" (Rev. 14:11; Luke 16:23), "outer darkness" (Matt. 25:30), "no rest day or night" (Rev. 14:11), "everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9), and "unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17; Mark 9:43) where the "worm does not die" (Mark 9:44). No fun is there to be had.

### **The Proud Will Not Survive Hell**

Finally, it is almost as if Tyler was daring God to punish them. As if to say, "God, we know we have sinned and rebelled against you. But we have enjoyed every bit of it . . . Oh, you say you are going to send us to hell? Well, we don't care, and you know what, God? We are going to enjoy it there anyway." Such arrogant thinking is in for a horrific surprise. "Every knee shall bow" — yours, mine, and even Steven Tyler's (Rom. 14:11; 2 Cor. 5:10). What will he think then of all the "fun" he had getting to hell? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

### **Is Your Life a Tribute to Hell?**

While you probably would never dream of making such a blasphemous statement, do you live in harmony with Tyler's words? You may never pay tribute to hell in words or express a desire to go there, but when you sin you are raising your glass to the devil. By your actions you are saying, "Here's to hell." You are daring God to punish you and you are thinking you can get away with it.

When you procrastinate obeying the gospel — you are saying, "Here's to hell." When you continue in sin, you are saying, "Here's to hell." When you teach false doctrine or defend those who teach it, "Here's to hell." When you give into lasciviousness and practice sexual immorality, "Here's to hell." When you lie, gossip, cheat, and steal, "Here's to hell." If you want to continue in sin, just be honest, lift your beer and go ahead and say it, "Here's to hell." "But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment" (Eccl. 11:9). Understand that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

The good news is that though we all deserve to go to hell for our sins "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:23) and that eternal salvation is given "to all who obey Him" (Heb. 5:9; Rom. 6:1-4; Acts 2:37-38). Rather than living a life in tribute to hell, live in view of heaven (Col. 3:1-11). Rather than kicking against the goads, let God prod you back onto the road that leads to eternal life.

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# We Need Some Fire

David Charles Morrison, Jr.

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“Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29) is just one example of the many times “fire” is mentioned in the Bible. Fire may be a destructive force or a very useful one. Jesus said, “I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?” (Luke 12:49). What did Jesus mean? This “fire” is some of the trials and tribulations we encounter as children of God (vv. 50-53). It is not literal fire but a fire in terms of its energy and force.

We need some fire in our lives as

children of God. The Lord came to “send fire on the earth.” What kinds of fire do we need?

## The Fire of Testing

Proverbs 17:3 says, “The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts.” Proverbs 25:4 proclaims, “Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.” Our faith needs to be put in the furnace. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing

of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6-7). God uses the fires of trials to remove the impurities in our lives (the dross). The ancient smelters would know that the gold or silver had been in the furnace long enough when they had removed enough dross to see their reflection on the surface of the metal (Ps. 66:8-12; Heb. 12:5-11; Jas. 1:2-4). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego learned that God’s deliverance is sometimes *through* the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:16-26). These men also learned that you do not go into the furnace alone (v. 25).

1 Corinthians 3:11-13 tells us, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” What happens when you put gold, silver, and precious stones into the furnace? They are improved as the dross (impurities) is removed. What happens to hay, wood, and stubble in a furnace? They are consumed. You see some are genuine and others are not. They are wood, hay, and stubble and at the first sign of difficulties they fall away (Luke 8:13).

## The Fire of Controversy

That may sound strange to us, but we need controversy. Think about the ministry of our Lord; it is marked by



controversy! We think of him in terms of peace and salvation, but there is also fire. Make no mistake about it, wherever you go, if you teach the simple truth that Jesus proclaimed, there will be controversy. It is not that God wants it that way. When men's sinful deeds are exposed by the light of God's word, there will be fire! Read Luke 12:49-53 and Matthew 10:34-37. We need some fire. What do I mean? When family members turn their back on the Lord that should spark the fire of controversy and not the fumes of compromise. How many have "softened" their stand on institutionalism after a child has embraced it? How many have "softened" their view on marriage and divorce when a relative is involved? God's word has not changed, but the cry of many in the family furnace is "compromise"!

Christ does not want pacifists when it comes to truth (Jude 3; Gal. 2:5). When we fail to stand for truth, we are bound to fall for anything. Are we failing the test in the family fire? "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37).

### The Fire of God's Word

"Is not my Word like a fire?" (Jer. 23:29). "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace, purified seven times" (Ps. 12:6).

It is time that we put every doctrine, teacher, preacher, elder, religious organization, and practice into the furnace of God's word. What will come out? What will stand the test? The NT church will, NT preachers will, NT doctrines will, NT worship will, etc. Do you know why? "Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is Truth" (John 17:17). God's word "sanctifies" — it removes dross and sets forth that which is true from that which is false and wicked! 1 John 4:1 commands us to "believe not every spirit, but try (test) the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets have gone out into the

world." Put them into the furnace of God's word.

Matthew 15:9 tells us that the "doctrines of men" make worship to God "vain" or empty, useless. We better put every doctrine into the furnace of God's word. In fact, 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, "Prove all things." That is your test, with the expectation of approving or rejecting it.

A problem in the world and even among brethren is we are using the wrong fire. Many will approve of something based on how they "feel" about it. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. 28:6). Our feelings are not a safe guide. Others will approve of things based on their parents actions. Mom and dad always did it this way. It must be so. This is the wrong fire (Acts 7:51)! Still others will trust the majority (Exod. 23:2), or their own conscience (1 Tim. 4:1-4).

The right fire is the word of God. It provides us with "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (1 Pet. 1:3). The Scriptures are God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect (complete), thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God's word is all we need to "prove all things."

Brethren, it is time that we re-evaluate the fire we are trying our faith and practice and lives in. If we cannot "prove all things" by the word of God then we had better abandon the practice! What about smoking? Gambling? Immodest apparel? Social drinking? Fellowship halls? Sponsoring church arrangements? The social gospel? What happens when we put these items into the furnace of God's Holy Word? Does a "thus saith the Lord" come forth? We are commanded to "examine yourselves whether ye be in the Faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5).

### The Fire of Enthusiasm

When I refer to enthusiasm, I am

not talking about the ludicrous. Someone who shouts, "I am on fire for the Lord," with little or no knowledge of the Lord is a "wild fire." That is not Bible enthusiasm. Paul referred to the Jews having a "zeal without knowledge" (Rom. 10:2-3). That is as destructive to the soul as a wild fire is to forest and properties.

The enthusiasm we need is seen in Luke 24:25-32. The Lord meets the two disciples who are on the road to Emmaus. We are told that "their eyes were holden that they should not know Him." When they explain the events that have lately come to pass, Jesus then "expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." What a wonderful sermon that must have been! When Jesus broke bread with them we are told "their eyes were opened and they knew Him: and He vanished out of their sight." The disciples ask, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?" I submit to you, that is enthusiasm!

When we examine God's word with our eyes wide open and a knowledge of Jesus that is enthusiasm! Does your heart burn within you as you open the Scriptures? We need some fire. Not zeal without knowledge, but knowledge that produces zeal. What is worse, zeal without knowledge or knowledge without zeal? They are one in the same in terms of destructive power. The first is a wild fire, and the later is a smoldering ember that is lukewarm to the touch!

We need some fire in our lives. An older preacher told a younger preacher, "To yourself have a heart of steel, to your friends a heart of love, and to your God, a heart of FIRE!"

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# Seeing Ahead by Looking Back (5)

H. Osby Weaver

To see where brethren are headed, all we need to do is look back at the so called “harmless departures” of the last

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sixty years or so and see where some of them have gone and are standing today.

This was graphically described in an article which appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* of March 22, 2003, headed “Squabbling Roots Run Deep, Long.” The article pointed out that Charles Martin, preacher for the Cornerstone Fellowship Church of Christ in Fairburn, Georgia, “allowed musical instruments in Sunday morning worship. It grew when he said women could preach.”

But as is true with all departures from the faith, it does not end with just one. “The conflict exploded into the open when Martin preached that Christians outside his church’s community — Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians — weren’t automatically consigned to hell.”

His brethren apparently felt that he had gone entirely too far. After all they had demonstrated in the apostasy which they had followed that one could fall from just a little grace, then stop, for that is the impression which they have left. But what Martin had now done was too much for his constituents even though they had transgressed God’s law relative to the organization and work of the church. Where Martin had gone was just too far! The article went on to say that “Martin’s brethren in the Churches of Christ were outraged.” Wonder what made them so angry? Oh, he

had “rejected their core doctrine, that they were the only true church.” Other preachers called him “a false teacher.” Perish the thought! Some of our brethren do not think one should be branded a “false teacher,” especially if we perceive that he is honest and believes what he teaches, and only teaches a few errors.

The article went on to say that “Churches ordered their members not to talk to him.” Obviously, these churches were attempting to obey Paul’s injunction in 1 Corinthians 5:9: “If any man that is a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat” and Titus 3:10: “A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse,” or as the Living New Testament translates it: “Have nothing more to do with him.” Even Martin’s uncle “the closest thing to a father I had,” told him that he was “going to hell.” “Jack Evans Sr., the most influential leader in the Churches of Christ, sealed Martin’s exile with an eight-page letter he posted on his Web site. In the paper Evans dismissed Martin’s paper as ‘inconsequential,’ and questioned his intelligence and concluded he was no longer a Christian.” This was perhaps the most charitable thing that he could say about him.

An amusing incident, if it could be called that, was when Martin’s children “were kicked out of the church’s athletic league.” By what authority did the church support and maintain an athletic league in the first place? These are the people that fussed about Martin’s departures. Sounds like the “kettle calling the pot black,” doesn’t it?

They could see ahead, if they would only look back. Give Martin’s opposers a little more time and they will “endorse the whole ball of wax “ that Martin offers them. Oh, they may not, but their children will!

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# Drifting Churches Of Christ

Larry Ray Hafley

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Both men and churches may drift from the anchor and mooring of truth (Heb. 2:1; 3:12, 13; 4:1, 11; 12:15; Rev. 2, 3). Some of the same factors are instrumental in the drift of each: pride, love of prestige, covetousness, worldliness as manifested in dress and demeanor, and a desire to please men and be popular with them.

Churches cannot drift until men do. Until its component parts, its members, begin to slack and slide, a church will not drift. Again, see Revelation, chapters 2 and 3.

The strength of any tree is in the health and support of its root system and in that in which it is rooted. What is the “root system” of the church? It is the same as its “headship system.” It is founded, grounded, and rooted *in Christ*, or it is destined to die (Eph. 4:16; Col. 1:28; 2:4-7, 18, 19). But what does it mean to be “rooted in Christ”? It means to be rooted in the authority of the word of Christ — “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom. . . . And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 2:7; 3:16, 17).

No church, rooted in Christ, will go after the lusts of the flesh, after the empty glare and glamor of human traditions. Drawing the water of life, the counsel of the Spirit, from the wells of righteousness, it will stand fast in the faith, in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 15:2; 16:13; Col. 1:23). As such, it will not be side-tracked into celebrating the holidays of men (Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Graduation Day of its student members), attempting to play up to the world with a social trendiness and current relevance which it cannot possess and please the Lord.

True churches, those who really are *of Christ*, will not find themselves pawns of missionary and benevolent organizations. Men often have begun evangelistic enterprises and then leaned upon the churches to bankroll them. A board of men, or a conglomerate of congregations under an organizational structure unknown to the New Testament,

often will go from church to church, seeking to convince the congregations that they are duty bound to fund their foundations, scholarships, and “good works.” The church simply becomes the bank and the bounty of anyone who wants to organize an enterprise and then call upon the church to pay for it.

In the New Testament, local churches were not subservient to any board or group of elders representing the work of two or more churches. No, each church, under its own elders, did its own work. When needy saints required help, it was provided as each church, according to its ability, determined to send relief to those in need (Acts 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25-27; 2 Cor. 8, 9). There was no “sponsoring church,” no special eldership set up to receive the funds of “contributing churches” and controlling the work of other churches. (Note, the distinctions men make — “sponsoring” churches versus “contributing” churches. Who determines which church gets to be which? What rule gives one church the right to take on a work larger than it can handle and call upon other churches to sustain it?)

If churches will do their own work, under the oversight of their own elders, the pattern of the New Testament success will result and prevail (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).

Churches are drifting further and faster today as they become more and more involved in the social and recreational banqueting and entertainment circuit. If it were not for the “treats,” “retreats,” “elders’ breakfasts,” “youth rallies,” and “ol’ folks festivities,” some churches would have little to crow about in their bulletins. Whatever became of sound preaching, of book, chapter, and verse, of “calling Bible things by Bible names and doing Bible things in Bible ways” (1 Pet. 4:11)? What has happened to simply “serving God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” in “breaking bread and prayers,” unaccompanied by humming ~~or illustrated by a puppet show?~~  
4626 Osage, Baytown, Texas 77521

# Handling Matters of Individual Conscience

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Bobby L. Graham

It seems inevitable that honest brethren will differ on matters about which they are equally sincere. It is the position of

this writer that they should conduct themselves honorably even as they differ. The Book of God informs us how to differ and to handle matters of individual conscience (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

One matter on which there are differences is the woman's wearing of a head covering (1 Cor. 11:1-16). It is possible for women of opposite persuasions to work and worship together in a local congregation, even sitting by each other and manifesting a spirit of humble forbearance. Let the woman who must do so wear the covering, as conscience dictates. On the other hand, let the woman not similarly convicted worship God without covering her head. In no case should there be any coercion from either sister to cause the other to conform, though there surely can be patient study of the word relative to their difference. For one to insist that the other conform to her understanding, apart from personal conviction, is to make her own conscience a standard for another. Paul teaches us that each should be sincerely convicted and act in that conviction, knowing that each shall answer to God (Rom. 14:5-10). There has been general practice of the principles of truth on this matter, and there should always be fervent love for each other though differences prevail in this area (Rom. 14:15). "Overthrow not for meat's sake the work of God" (Rom. 14:20).

Another matter on which equally sincere brethren differ is the opportunity to eat the supper of the Lord at a second service on the first day of the week. This writer believes it possible and desirable for differing brethren to continue working and worshipping together even as they differ on this matter. The answer does not lie in a simple discontinuance of the Lord's supper at the second meeting. If all of the members of the congregation decide to handle the matter in such fashion, there should be no problem of controversy or hurt feelings. There should be no effort of the brother opposed to such an opportunity to make his own consci-

entious scruple the standard for the entire church. This has been done by some who declared they could not approve a "second serving" (language not found in the New Testament, which does not even speak of "serving" but "eating" the supper). Remember the principle from the area earlier discussed — the head covering, which still applies though a matter of collective decision/action is here involved. The brother whose conscience does not approve can simply not participate in an act that violates his conscience, while allowing others disposed to eat to do so. He should not protest and insist that the practice stop, virtually disenfranchising others, who just as sincerely believe they need to commune on the Lord's day in obedience to their Lord's will (1 Cor. 11:24). In some cases the conscience of one or a few has been made the action of the church, against the will of a significant part of the church. In other cases, the thinking of the majority has become the practice of the congregation, even to the rejection of others in the group. Remember that the rule of Jesus Christ our Head is the standard of his people, not minority or majority will (conscience).

In both of these areas of difference, there should be a pursuit of peace while differing on such matters (Rom. 14:19). Neither should destroy the brother, for whom Christ died, or overthrow the work of God in handling such matters (Rom. 14:15, 19). For decades brethren have handled these matters in a peaceful manner. And there is no need for disruptions to occur when attitudes are right.

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# “Outreach Meetings”

John Isaac Edwards

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More and more churches are having what are being called, “Outreach Meetings.” I have attended a few of these meetings and have some concerns about what is taking place, or not taking place, in some of these public gatherings.

## What Is Meant By “Outreach”?

One definition of the word “outreach,” according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, is: “The act or process of reaching out.” That we need to reach out with the gospel to people, who can deny? The Lord said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Paul penned, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost” (2 Cor. 4:3).

Another definition of “outreach” is: “A systematic attempt to provide services beyond conventional limits, as to particular segments of a community” (*Ibid.*). The word “conventional” may be defined as: “Conforming to established practice or accepted standards; traditional” (*Ibid.*). There is a movement on the part of some among us to spew out anything that has the flavor of traditionalism. This steam is propelling the locomotive away from Conservatism Station, where there is constant appeal to apostolic practice and standards, and staunch opposition to anything that reaches beyond “the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9-11), to Liberalism Depot, where there is undue emphasis upon that which is new, innovative, and unprecedented. Sadder still is the fact that a lot of elders and preachers are sounding the boarding call, and many of our brethren are all too eager to jump on and ride the Apostasy Express!

## Outreaching Scripture — The Outcome Of Many “Outreach” Meetings

All too often outreach meetings fit the latter definition of “outreach,” and outreaching Scripture is their ultimate outcome. This is seen several ways:

**1. Absence of Scripture.** We are hearing more and more emotional stories and comical punch lines that stir the audience from tears to laughter and less and less Scripture. More

and more time is being spent with uninspired historians and theologians than with holy men of God (2 Pet. 1:21). The appeal of Paul was the appeal of Scripture (Rom. 4:1, 3). The lack of Scripture in much of the teaching and preaching being done says some have outreached Scripture.

**2. Unscriptural Themes.** Look at this list of topics being presented as outreach: “Preparing Your 2002 Income Tax Return,” “Investment Planning for 2003,” “Using 2003 to Prepare for Retirement,” “Organizing Your Financial Life for 2003,” “Managing Your Debt in 2003 to Become Debt Free,” “Preparing Your Last Will and Testament in 2003,” ESL (English as a Second Language), an “on-going class to meet the needs of those seeking a better understanding of the English language.” Why not talk about “Preparing for the Lord’s Return,” “Preparing to Meet God in Judgment,” “How to Become Free From Sin,” impressing men with “The Last Will and Testament of Christ” or “Bible Language”? You may help a man out of debt and teach him to speak English, but if you do not help him out of sin by the gospel, then you haven’t done one thing for his soul!

**3. Omission of Things Vital.** There are some words that are not heard in some of the “outreach” meetings — words like “sin,” “baptism,” and “the church.” Sinners, destined for a devil’s hell (Matt. 25:41), are attending “outreach” meetings and leaving without hearing what they need to do to be saved, why they need to do it, and with no invitation or opportunity to do it. “My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (Jas. 3:10)! This in no way fits the pattern of first-century preaching, but is contrary to that pattern. Take Peter’s sermon on Pentecost, for example. The apostle did not beat around the bush — he just told it like it is. Peter said of Jesus, “Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). The sermon ended with this powerful conclusion: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The preaching was heart-pricking in nature and evoked the response, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter, in a plain and straightforward manner, told

the people to “repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). “They that gladly received his word were baptized . . . And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:41, 47). God hasten the day when men get back to preaching it like Peter preached it at the beginning!

At such meetings, Christ is not being preached. Preaching Christ, as Philip preached Christ (Acts 8:5, 35), involves preaching what Philip preached (Acts 8:12). When a man says nothing about the church of Christ or the need for folks to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ in order to obtain the remission of their sins, then he has not preached Christ!

The invitation to obey the gospel should always attend the preaching of the gospel (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17; Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). Even those who teach error invite their audience to obey that error. Why can we not invite people to obey the truth!?

Anytime our reach exceeds or surpasses the reach, range, or scope of Scripture, then we are guilty of outreaching Scripture! Our teaching and practice must reach only so far as does Scripture (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9-11; Rev. 22:18-19). Anything that stretches beyond the bounds or confines of Scripture is not “given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16-17), is therefore unprofitable, and constitutes transgression of the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9), which the word of God calls “sin” (1 John 3:4), and with which we must have no fellowship (2 John 10-11).

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## **“Church of Christ” continued from front page**

(Matt. 16:18), Christ paid for it with his own blood (Eph. 2:13), and all spiritual blessings are to be found there (Eph. 1:3). The church is the body of Christ, and he is the head (Eph. 1:22). Can one be saved outside the church, or the body of Christ — absolutely not — since baptism saves one (1 Pet. 3:21) and washes away his sins at the same time (Acts 22:16) We are, therefore, baptized by one spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:12) which is the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). No denominationalism here. These passages tell us very clearly that we are saved and our sins are forgiven at the very point we are baptized into the church. Now, if one has been scripturally baptized into the body of Christ and goes out and joins himself to a denomination of man where false doctrine is taught, he is beginning to sin all over again because he has no Bible authority to do so.

Some have sought to justify denominations by citing John 15:1-8, where Jesus says, “I am the vine, and ye are the branches,” suggesting that the branches are denominations tied to Jesus, the vine. This is clearly a personal illustration emphasized by the personal pronouns “he,” “me,” and “you” which is completely compatible with Paul’s explanation of the church (1 Cor. 12:12-17). Others have sought to connect the seven churches of Asia in Revelation with denominationalism. However, Paul established most, if not all, of these churches, and it is inconceivable that he went around teaching one Baptist doctrine, another Methodist doctrine, and another Pentecostal or Mormon doctrines. It follows from the above comments that denominationalism is very wrong, and should be understood to be so.

Even the phrase “non-denominational” has become a charged word today meaning unconnected with “other” denominations. Why not just use Bible names in Bible ways, indicating that you are simply a Christian, a member of Christ’s body which is the “church of Christ.” Anyone who cannot grasp this concept of the church cannot, in fact, understand what the church of Christ really is.

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**One of the best forms of spiritual exercise is to touch the floor regularly with your knees.**



## “Family of God” continued from page 2

gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:8-11). What a blessed privilege we have to be recipients of God’s divine chastening.

**Heirs of God.** As sons of God, we are heirs of God. Paul wrote, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:16-17). We do not completely comprehend what being an heir of God is, for no doubt it will exceed all our expectations.

Our readers can expand the thoughts of this metaphor for their profit and benefit. It is a rich metaphor worthy of our meditation.

### Not The Only Metaphor

The “family of God” metaphor is not the only metaphor that appears in the Bible to describe the relationship of God to his people. Here are some other metaphors:

- Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33; 16:18; 19:24; etc.).
- Army of God (2 Tim. 2:3-4; 4:7; 1 Tim. 6:12).
- Vineyard of the Lord (Matt. 20:1-16).
- Temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21-22).
- Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:12-26)

A study of each of these metaphors is profitable. Outlines on each of them appear in Roy E. Cogdill’s *The New Testament Church*, which continues to be a favorite study among brethren.

Though the “family of God” is not the only metaphor used to describe God’s relationship with his people, it has almost become the exclusive one used. When someone is baptized, we welcome him into the family of God and announce that we have a new brother in Christ. We emphasize that our relationship in the local church is like that of “family” when visitors attend.

### The Army Metaphor

How strange would it sound were we to use the metaphor of army when someone is baptized? “We would like to welcome a new recruit into the army of God. We are happy that he has decided to take up the sword of the Spirit to wage war against the devil and all of his children. As a soldier, he will be expected to suffer hardship along with

the rest of God’s soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3-4). We hope that he will never entangle himself in the affairs of this life to the extent that he cannot serve him who called him to be a soldier. As fellow-soldiers, we will stand toe to toe with him to engage the battle. We will help train him to be a good soldier. We will help arm him as Paul wrote,

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph. 6:12-18).

When he comes to end of the battle, may he be able to say, just as Paul did, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim.4:8).

The “army” metaphor of God’s relationship with his people is one that has practically disappeared among the people of God.

### The Vineyard Metaphor

To hear the vineyard metaphor used when one is baptized would be refreshing as well. “We would like to welcome this person as a new employee in the Lord’s vineyard. He is now our fellow laborer or fellow worker. We encourage him not to be slack in his responsibilities to his new boss. Just as one is expected to show up on time and give an honest day’s work for a day’s pay in his job, so also must we as laborers in the vineyard labor hard for the Lord. As he has been added to this labor force, let’s sing a few verses of ‘To The Work’ and ‘I Want to Be A Worker for the Lord.’” Would that sound strange to your ears?

### Conclusion

Let us be careful that we do not create a distorted view of Christianity and our church relationships with each other by over emphasis on one of the metaphors God uses to describe his relationship with his people to the neglect of all of the others. Each of these metaphors has rich imagery and the Christian needs to be aware of all of them.

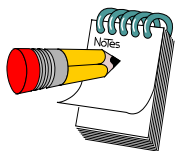
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## Field Reports



**B.G. Echols, 1044 Ridge Rd., Shippensburg, PA 17257.** After almost thirty years with the church in East Orange, New Jersey, I semi-retired at the end of 2001, left the metropolitan area and moved to the small town of Shippensburg, Pennsylvania where I had worked before. About a year before I returned the church had internal troubles and some left. Our first efforts were to try to regain as many as possible. We had some success and attendance grew from 40 to 50. Also four were baptized in 2002. All had family connections to other Christians. Now our task is to seek those outside which is proving difficult in an area bound to tradition.

## Quips & Quotes



### Two Churches Merge in Huntsville, Alabama

The Sparkman Drive Church of Christ of Huntsville, Alabama, after meeting 20 years, has merged with the Chapman Acres Church of Christ at 2137 Penhall Dr. in northeast Huntsville. Mike Johnson preaches for the Chapman Acres congregation. Robert Hendrix, who formerly preached at Sparkman Drive, will be working and assisting the Chapman Acres church as needed.

### Internet Can Speed Up Divorces

"New York — Offering a simpler and cheaper path to divorce, an ever-growing array of dot-coms, computer-savvy lawyers and state court officials are encouraging unhappily married Americans to arrange their break-ups online.

"For fees ranging from \$50 to \$300 — a small fraction of what most lawyers charge even for an uncontested divorce — couples are being provided with the appropriate forms and varying degrees of help completing them.

"The phenomenon is spreading.

"Rival firms CompleteCase.com and LegalZoom.com each say they have served 20,000 clients nationwide in less than three years of operation. Hits on the divorce section of the California court system's do-it-yourself Web site soared from 6,800 in

May 2002 to about 15,000 last month" (The Indianapolis Star [June 1, 2003], A6).

### Philadelphia Boy Scouts Dropping Ban on Gays

"Philadelphia — The nation's third-largest Boy Scout council expanded its nondiscrimination policy to include sexual orientation, defying the national group's anti-gay stance.

"The board of the Cradle of Liberty Council, which has 87,000 members in Philadelphia and two neighboring counties, voted unanimously this month to make the change after discussions with gay activists and other community leaders that began two years ago.

"The code of the national Boy Scouts of America organization requires members to be 'morally straight,' though no written rule specifically addresses homosexuality" (The Indianapolis Star [May 30, 2003], A7).

### Pope Exalts Women For Roles as Wife, Mom

"Dubrovnik, Croatia — Pope John Paul II beseeched women here Friday to pay heed to what he called their 'lofty vocation' as wives, mothers and nurturers, saying they possessed a special sensitivity that was needed in the modern world.

"In a special way, God has entrusted children to your care, and thus you are called to become an important support in the life of every person, especially within the context of the family; the pope said to an audience of tens of thousands in this storied city, a centuries-old resort on the Adriatic.

"The frenetic pace of modern life can lead to an obscuring or even a loss of what is truly human,' John Paul said. 'Perhaps more than in other periods of history, our time is in need of that genius which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance.'

"He went on to instruct the women of Croatia to be 'conscious of your lofty vocation as wives and mothers' as they exhibited 'the sensitivity born of your maternal instinct'" (The Indianapolis Star [June 7, 2003], A14).

### Openly Gay Man Elected to be Episcopal Bishop

"Concord, N.H. — In a national first, New Hampshire Episcopalians on Saturday elected an openly gay man as their next bishop.

"The selection of the Rev. V. Gene Robinson, 56, who was chosen over three other candidates in voting by New Hampshire clergy and lay Episcopalians, is still subject to confirmation next month by the church's national General Convention.

"Bishops in the worldwide Anglican Communion, which includes the Episcopal Church in the United States, approved a resolution in 1998 calling gay sex 'incompatible with Scripture.'

"Robinson, who was married and has two grown children, now lives with his partner, Mark Andrew, in Weare (The Indianapolis Star [June 8, 2003], A16).

### Homosexual Marriage Ban Overruled

"Toronto — An appeals court ruled that Canada's ban on homosexual marriage was unconstitutional and hours later two Canadian men tied the knot in the country's first legal same-sex wedding.

"Michael Leshner and Michael Stark wed Tuesday in a civil ceremony observed by Leshner's 90-year-old mother and about 50 friends and observers.

"We're blissfully happy," said Leshner, a Toronto lawyer, after exchanging rings with his partner of 22 years and offering a champagne toast outside the court.

"An Ontario appeals panel on Tuesday declared the legal definition of marriage invalid and ordered Toronto's city clerk to issue marriage licenses to the homosexual couples involved in the case.

"Canadian law now defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Tuesday's ruling changed it in Ontario to a union between two people.

"It was the latest in a series of court rulings against a federal ban on same-sex marriage, increasing pressure on Prime Minister Jean Chretien's government to change the law or let the ruling stand" (The Indianapolis Star [June 12, 2003], A22).

### Partial-Birth Abortions Targeted

"Washington — The House voted Wednesday to ban a procedure that abortion foes call a 'partial birth' abortion, moving the restriction a crucial step closer to President Bush's signature.

"With the 282-139 vote, Congress was on the verge of ending a practice that Rep. Steve Chabot, R-Ohio, said was 'truly a national tragedy.'

"Abortion rights groups said they would challenge it in court as soon as it becomes law, thrusting the issue of the ban's constitutionality toward a divided Supreme Court.

"The ban would be one of the most significant restrictions on abortion since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision recognizing abortion rights. Ken Connor, president of the anti-abortion Family Research Council, said passage was indicative of 'a tide that is running against *Roe v. Wade*, which will eventually be dismantled.'

"Bush — unlike former President Bill Clinton, who twice vetoed partial-birth abortion bans — urged Congress in his State of the Union address in January to give him a bill he could sign.

"The president strongly believes the bill 'is both morally imperative and constitutionally permissible,' the White House said" (The Indianapolis Star [June 5, 2003], A7).

### Jesus in the Jury Room

"In 1995, a Colorado jury convicted Robert Harlan of kidnapping, rape, and murder. Now his death sentence has been overturned because jurors illegally used Bibles while deliberating, and quoted an 'eye for an eye.' Juries, Colorado Judge John Vigil said, can use their personal convictions in deliberations, but not texts not introduced at trial. Harlan isn't alone: in 2000 the Supreme Court of Georgia and the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned death penalties because prosecutors quoted Scripture. But that same year, Ohio's Supreme Court said such references didn't matter. In 1999 the U.S. Supreme Court turned away a Nebraska case in which a judge quoted Scripture in sentencing" (Christianity Today [July 2003], 13).

### Cooling Off Gay Agenda

"Conservatives in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) turned back a two-front effort to loosen church policy on homosexuality. Their efforts came during the denomination's 215th General Assembly, held during May in Denver.

"Rejecting a committee's recommendation, assembly commissioners declined to drop the 'fidelity and chastity' clause in the PCUSA'S Book of Order. The denomination of 2.5 million members formally bans the ordination of noncelibate homosexuals. A constitutional change would have required ratification by a majority of the church's 173 regional governing bodies (presbyteries). The assembly voted in 1997 and 2002 to remove the clause. Presbyteries rejected those vote in increasingly wide margins" (Christianity Today [July 2003], 19).

Renew Promptly!