



Is The Church Of Christ A Denomination?

John Isaac Edwards

Many look upon the church of Christ as being a denomination among denominations. If it could be shown that the church of Christ is just another denomination, then the church of Christ would be no better than any denomination in existence. And it would make no difference which church one belonged to, one would be just as good as another. This study points out three reasons why the church of Christ, as revealed in the Testament of Christ, is not a denomination.

TOO OLD TO BE A DENOMINATION

The church of Christ was in existence long before any denomination appeared on the scene. Protestant denominationalism had its beginning after the year 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of The Church of All-Saints in Wittenburg, Germany in protest to the Roman Church. This begins what is known as the Period of the Protestant Reformation. To see that all Protestant denominations cropped up

in the last five hundred years, notice the date of origin of a few religious organizations. We believe you are entitled to know the origin of the church of which you are a member, and that no prudent person would want to be affiliated with any church without knowing how and when it began.

Observe the origin of the church of Christ, as predicted in the Old Testament: “And it shall come to pass *in the last days*, that the mountain of **the Lord’s house** shall be established in the top of the mountains,

and shall be exalted above the hills; and *all nations* shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from *Jerusalem*” (Isa. 2:2-3). The Lord’s house is the Lord’s church (1 Tim. 3:15), and would have its beginning in the last days, among all nations, see “Denomination?” on p. 600

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Religious Acceptance of Gays

Mike Willis

During the first week of August, the Episcopal Church chose to elect Rev. V. Gene Robinson, 56, as a bishop in New Hampshire in an election that pitted liberals against less liberal (conservative is too strong a term) clergymen in the Episcopal Church. Robinson is a divorced father of two who has lived with his male partner for thirteen years.



The 2.3 million member Episcopal Church is part of the 77-million-member global Anglican Communion so this issue has implications far beyond the membership of the Episcopal Church in the USA.

Of the denominations in America, only a few openly approve homosexuality and bless same-sex unions. The following chart appeared in the Thursday, August 7, 2003 issue of *USA Today*:

| Denomination | No. of members (in millions) | Ordain Openly Gay Clergy | Bless Same-Sex Clergy |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Roman Catholic Church | 65 | No | No |
| Southern Baptist Convention | 16.5 | No | No |
| United Methodist Church | 8.4 | No | No |
| Church of God in Christ | 5.7 | No | No |
| Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints | 5.3 | No | No |
| Evangelical Lutheran Church | 5.1 | Yes | Yes |
| African Methodist Episcopal Church | 3.0 | Yes | No |
| Assemblies of God | 2.6 | No | No |
| Presbyterian Church USA | 2.5 | Yes | Yes |
| Lutheran Church Missouri Synod | 2.5 | No | No |
| Episcopal Church | 2.3 | Yes | Yes |
| American Baptist Church | 1.5 | Yes | Yes |
| United Church of Christ | 1.4 | Yes | Yes |

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The Certified Gospel

Connie W. Adams

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man” (Gal. 1:11). In this statement, Paul placed the gospel he preached in contrast to the perverted gospel which some had brought to the churches of Galatia (v. 7). He further showed that perverted gospels were appeals to men rather than to God and that those who preached such negated their claim to be servants of Christ (v. 10). In these declarations, Paul gave assurance that his gospel was genuine. He received it by divine revelation. The context of Galatians 1 shows that he did not confer with those chosen to be apostles before him to determine what to believe or preach. After his conversion, he went away into Arabia. Even when he later met with the apostles, they “added nothing” to him. He received his gospel even as they did — by revelation.

We long for certainty in a world darkened by doubt. We all want certified milk, meat, doctors, pharmacists, pilots, and teachers. But in religion, the most important area of life, too many are willing to settle for less. Luke wanted Theophilus to “know the certainty of those things, wherein thou (he) had been instructed” (Luke 1:4). But how can we know the certainty of the gospel claims? Have we been gullible? Is there adequate evidence to certify it? Consider three lines of evidence.

CERTIFIED BY MIRACLES

The gospel system rests on the truth or falsity of the claims of Jesus that he was divine. Were these claims idle boasting, or were there mighty powers performed by him which could only be attributed to Deity?

Miracles Done by Christ. Three words often appeared together to describe his deeds of power. These were “miracles;” “wonders;” and “signs” (Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:4; 2 Cor. 12:12). The word “miracles” referred to mighty deeds and indicated the *source* of what was done. The power, or might, behind the act was not human, but divine. “Wonder” described the *effect* the deed had on those who saw it. They were amazed. “Signs” established the purpose of what was done. These deeds were divine portents, or evidences of Deity acting in human affairs to convince the witnesses of divine intervention.

While the gospel writers report some thirty-eight miracles of Jesus, John relates only seven, each of which demonstrated supernatural power in a different area. These were reported to create faith resulting in spiritual life in his name (John 20:30-31). How do you explain turning water into wine, feeding a multitude with a few loaves and fishes, walking on water, healing the sick, casting out demons, calming a storm by speaking to it, or raising the dead? These were “miracles,” mighty deeds which could not be attributed

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to human resources. Peter said that it was by these that Jesus of Nazareth was “a man approved of God among you” (Acts 2:22).

Miracles were done by the apostles and those upon whom they laid hands. Not only were these apostles “sent” as his chosen “ambassadors” (2 Cor. 5:20), but their testimony was certified by “miracles, wonders and signs.” These were their credentials, their badges of authority. Jesus promised that as they went preaching, that “these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:15-18). What he promised them, he fulfilled. “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen” (Mark 16:19-20). God bore them witness “both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will” (Heb. 2:4). Paul described these as “the signs of an apostle” and said they were wrought at Corinth “in patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). Paul’s gospel at Thessalonica came “not in word only, but also in power” (1 Thess. 1:5). His gospel came in word, for the gospel cannot be preached without word. But it was not the word devoid of the necessary credentials to undergird the certainty of what was said.

Paul and Barnabas appealed to this line of evidence at Jerusalem to argue that their work of preaching among Gentiles was approved by God, for they declared “what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (Acts 15:12). By such astounding evidences both the ministry of Jesus and his apostles were certified.

CERTIFIED BY EYEWITNESSES

None of us observed these events. Did anyone? Are there credible witnesses? Peter was such a witness. “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Pet. 1:16-18). Peter, James, and John were eye and ear witnesses to this event.

John was another witness. “That . . . which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life. . . . That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you” (1 John 1:1-3).

Every established fact of history rests upon four pillars: (1) that reported was done in *the past*, (2) it was *sensible* (someone touched it, tasted it, smelled it, saw or heard it), (3) it left a *record, marker, or memorial*, (4) that record, marker, or memorial has persisted *from then to now*. By these very standards we can certify the claims of Christ on which the gospel rests. We are called on to believe events long *past*. These events were *visible* and were reported by eyewitnesses. “This thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). In addition to the apostles, the resurrected Christ was seen by “over five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:6).

There are at least three markers, records, or monuments which keep alive the memory of that done in the past which was seen of witnesses. First, there is the testimony of the indestructible word of God. It survives every attack with a tenacity which cannot be explained short of divine providence. Second, there is the memorial of the Lord’s supper. This simple memorial takes place the world around every first day of the week and “show(s) forth his death” (1 Cor. 11:26). It is a living marker. Third, baptism memorializes the fact that Jesus lived, died, and was raised again. In this act, the sinner passes through the form, or mold, of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It is a living marker. Until the unbeliever is willing to discard the criteria upon which all accepted history rests, then he will do well not to expose his ignorance, arrogance, and inconsistency in disregarding the claims of Jesus and the gospel which rests upon the same kind of evidence.

CERTIFIED BY FULFILLED PROPHECY

Peter said, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts; Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 2:19-21). Prophecy was that ray of light which illuminated the Old Testament period (the dark place of this passage) until such time as the day should dawn, the time of fulfillment of that prophesied, and the day star should appear in the person of Christ. How could the prophets foretell events in detail, which were to come to pass long after their own time and ability to affect the outcome? There are some three hundred thirty-two prophecies in the Old Testament pointing to the Messiah and his kingdom. With the arrival of the “day star” these began to unfold with exactness and precision. Were they psychics? No, they were “moved” (impelled, borne along, driven) by the Holy Spirit. “This is that” spoken by Joel, Amos, Isaiah, or other prophets. These words came with certainty and challenged every other explanation, while, at the same time, certifying

Observations on the Dark

Recently 50 millions Americans and Canadians were without electrical power for 24 to 48 hours. This is approximately 15% of the population of our two countries. All the implements of modern life that depend on electricity (of which there are millions) were suddenly rendered useless. Almost all productive work suddenly ceased, and the greatest problem for many in urban areas was simply getting home.

There are many lessons that can be drawn from the great inconveniences that were suffered during the blackout.

The frailty of all physical things.

We think that the things that we use each day are durable, that they will accomplish what we need them to accomplish, and usually they do, but “this world is passing away” (1 Cor. 2:6; 7:31; 1 John 2:17) Sometimes we need



reminders of that fact, and sometimes we get them.

The good conduct of the overwhelming majority of those effected. There were almost no incidents of lawlessness reported in the effected areas. The only looting reported was on a small scale in Toronto. Compared to

the immediate looting and lawlessness seen in previous blackouts (1965 and especially 1977) many had predicted that today such evil would be even more vicious and widespread. We are glad that such predictions were wrong. We often think that people are worse today than ever before, and so many things are worse now in our culture than twenty-five or forty years ago, but not in every respect. Solomon warned about thinking this way, “Do not say, ‘Why is it that the former

days were better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this” (Eccl. 7:10).

The difficulty of getting home without power. Some of the most touching stories from this incident are of those who could not get home when the power went out. Some were far from home and the trains they depended on could not take them back. Some who lived in high-rise buildings got to the ground floor of their home, but without powered elevators they could not get to their high perch because it was just too far up, or they could not negotiate the pitch-black stair-wells. Some, especially those in nice hotels, were at the very door of their rooms, but could not unlock the doors without power. And some who did make it home found their dwellings too hot for comfort without air conditioning.

Think of the spiritual parallel to this: Without the power of the gospel for salvation (Rom. 1:16), we cannot get to the home that we so want to go to, and without it, the home

that we can get to is certainly not at all the home that we want.

the things most surely believed among us.

In this age of theological guesswork and blatant attacks upon the faith by moral reprobates and cynical skeptics who question every premise of the gospel system, it is high time that we stand on the promises, and with confidence, state our case for the certified gospel. Any other system has the anathema of God upon it and terminates in everlasting ruin. If we believe the certified gospel, then in our preaching and teaching, we ought to document what we say by that record which was certified by miracles, eyewitnesses, and fulfilled prophecy.

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Sermon on the Mount (16)

Jim McDonald

“Love Thy Neighbor AND Thy Enemy”

Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others: do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:43-48).

This is the sixth (and final) contrast between teaching from the Law and Jesus found in this chapter; the only contrast in which the principle from Moses is not an exact quotation. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor” is from Leviticus 19:18 but the remainder, “Hate thine enemy” is not found in these precise words. Still, the spirit “Hate thine enemy” was there. Israel was to make no covenant with other nations and when they did, it displeased God. Some of Israel’s most devout men expressed hatred for their enemies as well as some of the psalms which did also (1 Chron. 20:3; Pss. 137:8f; 139:21, 22). J.W. McGarvey says that the expression “‘hate thine enemies’ was a true representation of the law in its practical working, that it taught hatred of one’s enemies” (*Fourfold Gospel* 247).

When Jesus was “tried” by a lawyer as to what one must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus said, “What is written in the law? How readest thou?” (Luke 10:25). The lawyer answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” Some think these two were part of the Ten Commandments. They were not but constituted a synopsis of it: “Love the Lord thy God” covered the first four commandments; “Love thy neighbor” covered the latter six.

Jesus told the lawyer he had given the correct answer, then bade him, “This do and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:29).

The lawyer desired to justify himself, so he asked, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). At this point Jesus gave a parable called “The Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-37). The parable illustrates how one is to love his neighbor and his enemy.

Jesus’ parable gives three different attitudes. First, there was the attitude of the robbers who beat the man, took what he had and left him for dead. Then there was the attitude of the priest and Levite who ought, because of their “occupation” (joined with the fact that the man was a fellow Jew), to have been filled with compassion and rendered assistance to the man. But they were indifferent to his needs. Then, there was the Samaritan. The man by the wayside was his national enemy, neither Jew or Samaritan lost any love on the other. But the Samaritan didn’t look to see what nationality the man was; he was a fellow human who was in trouble and needed help. And the Samaritan helped him.

Jesus taught us to pray for those who spitefully use us. He backed up his words with deeds. He prayed for his enemies on the cross “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Paul wrote, “If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. . . . If thine enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him drink. In so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head” (Rom. 12:18, 20).

Jesus asked the lawyer, “Which of the three proved to be neighbor to him?” and the lawyer responded, “He that showed mercy to him” (Luke 10:36f). Who is my neighbor? The person who needs my help! In this parable the neighbor whom the Samaritan was to love, was his enemy! Thus, “love your enemies, do good to them that hate you” (Luke 6:27). In other words from our Master “Go and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37).

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H. Osby Weaver

Mother's Request for Church Building For Funeral Refused

(Brother Bill Cavender recently mentioned the quarantine which was imposed upon us by the editor of the Gospel Advocate and embraced by all of those who referred to us "antis." We want to show in this article just how deep that quarantine went in 1958. It should help us to "see ahead by looking back.")

It is always a sad experience when death strikes a family with its crushing blow. Even at best, the bitterness of it lingers despite the sympathy of friends who do their best to comfort hearts shrouded in blackness. If the deceased, while in this life, failed to walk circumspectly, the pain of the survivors is increased and their sorrows multiplied. In harmony with divine truth, whatever gentle words can be spoken and kind deeds done that will assuage the grief which must be theirs, will be spoken and will be done by those who can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities. Only those whose hearts are cold and who cannot weep with those that weep, would refuse an accommodation that would in any degree dispel the dark clouds of gloom that hover over the bereaved in such an hour. One might expect to find such disregard for the feelings of others among those nations whose lives are void of God, and where the love of him who died for his enemies is unknown, among those whose citizens are heathen and whose value of an ox exceeds that of a human being, where distorted values cause a human life to bear the price tag of the cheapest commodity. Yet, such an utter disregard for the suffering and misery of others has recently been demonstrated, not in heathenism where it might be expected, not amid ordinary civilization where even there it would be unthinkable, but right in the Houston and Broadway church of Christ in Kilgore. Members of the church, not only of the Houston and Broadway congregation but members everywhere, upon receiving the impact of such notorious action on the

part of supposed Christians, stand in stunned disbelief that soon turns to a feeling of deep shame.

On January 20 past, the funeral services of a man was to be held in the Houston and Broadway church building. The deceased was not a member of the church but the members of his family are. Some are members of the Houston and Broadway church and some are members of the North Henderson Blvd. church. His mother, with whom he was visiting at the time of his death, is a faithful member of the Houston and Broadway church. Since members of the family were from both congregations, they decided to ask the preachers from both congregations to conduct the funeral. The mother wanted it in the Houston and Broadway building. She understood the spiritual condition of her son but no doubt felt that some degree of comfort would be hers to have the services in the building which, in her own heart at least, had been dedicated for use by God's people in preaching the gospel, edification, worship and service, and where her contributions were helping to make the payments on the building. In this building she was in the habit of drawing close to God in song, prayer, and meditation. To suffer this ordeal in this place of hallowed memories would provide some consolation to a mother's heart and outwardly evidence her faith in her maker in time of deep sorrow, not that such evidence was necessary. Was this asking too much? But her elders at Houston and Broadway would not allow her this crumb of comfort due to their own deep seated malice and prejudice against others, hence they closed the door of the church building in her face by their edicts and decrees in her hour of greatest need. Only little men with shriveled hearts could be so destitute of even common concern for the suffering plights of humanity as to rob a bereaved mother of the consolation to which she had a right. This is to say nothing of being empty of Christianity, and that too, to satisfy a twisted ego. To have

to bury one of her own is sad enough for any mother, but in such an hour of trial to have those from whom she had a right to expect the most, to turn their backs upon such a small request, is indeed enough to crush the life out of the strongest.

If these brethren had refused this mother's request because they did not believe in using church buildings for funerals, allowances for their refusal could have been made with much more tolerant grace, but they are not conscientiously opposed to such. On what ground did they deny the longing of this mother's heart? They claim to have based their action on the great and stupendous conclusion that the other preacher she had asked to assist in the funeral services, was preaching for a congregation whom they believe, "needed to repent!" Have these elders appointed themselves diocesan bishops? Do they feel that it is their responsibility to oversee and discipline another congregation? Just how much geographical area does this authority they have delegated to themselves cover? Preachers from within and without have and will continue to preach for this congregation against whom Houston and Broadway have pronounced anathemas. Will they also "excommunicate" them because of the churches with whom they work? What is the extent of their diocese? We can suggest a couple of Scriptures that will help them arrive at the answers to those questions if they will only show more respect for Scripture than they have shown for a mother's aching heart. The first is in Romans 12:3 which says that a man "ought not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think," and the second is in 1 Peter 5:2 which tells elders to "tend the flock of God among you." That means to leave other flocks alone!

They say we need to repent. Well, we know of no one at Henderson Blvd. who claims perfection. In fact, we will be the first to admit our weaknesses. We constantly keep ourselves reminded of the necessity of repentance. Are we at liberty to conclude that repentance is a virtue that is no longer needed in the lives of the Houston and Broadway church? If not, and they continue to need repentance, then by what right do they take such punitive measures against others who need to repent? Though we strive to live in a state of penitence, we find ourselves unable to repent of a wrong about which we do not know, other than to classify it under the heading of "unwitting sins." May the brethren at the above mentioned church, be informed that we frequently mention such sins in our prayers for forgiveness. Are they disposed to say this is too general to be effective? Then again we remind them that we cannot repent of a specific wrong about which we do not know. Unless we have pointed out to us the specific wrong of which we are guilty and regarding which we need to repent, we cannot specifically repent. They say we need to repent and we ask, "of what?" In published statements, the elders mentioned above have feigned great love for us and interest in our

souls. Perhaps it would be asking too much, especially of those who could stop their ears to the pleadings of a mother bereft of her son, but if they will be so kind as to grant us this one "indulgence," we should respectfully request that their love for us be expanded to include the specific information of what it is we need to repent.

Should we repent of having planted another church in the same city in which they live? Did we infringe upon their diocese? Should we repent for having taught the all-sufficiency of the Lord's church, that it is adequate to accomplish all things that God wants it to do without building and maintaining human organizations through which to perform its functions? Should we repent for having opposed boards, conclaves, centralized controls, and promotional schemes that threaten to destroy the independence of the local church: that would activate the church universal and lead us into Catholicism? Should we repent for having opposed a "social gospel" and for having taught that the "Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking"? Should we repent of the opposition that we have mounted against ungodliness and immorality in the world and in the church? Should we repent for opposing the hand of infidelity that would mar the beauty and destroy the purity of God's last and greatest gift to man — the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please tell us of what we need to repent.

Did they deny this mother, one of their own members, the use of their building because they felt that somebody else needed to repent? Let us see. Those elders would not hesitate to allow a Baptist preacher to speak at a funeral in their building when members of that family were members of both the Baptist church and the church of Christ, and the preacher would stand alongside that Baptist preacher, and assist, if asked to do so. Shall we then conclude that the Houston and Broadway elders do not believe that Baptist need to repent? If they were sincere in the first instance, we should be forced to reach just such a conclusion. We believe such a charge would not correctly represent them, but if we refrain from this charge, we shall be forced to make another. That is, they did deny their own member the use of the building because of their conviction that someone else, over in another part of town, needed to repent. The sincerity of their action can be very seriously questioned, because their preacher took part in the funeral away from the church building and the elder that prohibited the use of the church building and his deacon brother assisted in the singing. Our participation was too polluting for them in the church building. However, the defilement was erased, by moving a half block down the street to the funeral home. There they participated completely and cooperated fully. In the light of these facts, who can believe in the sincerity of their actions?

What was really at the back of their refusal? Can anyone seriously doubt that their action was an expression of con-

What Will It Take?

In Matthew 26:16 we read, “For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” This passage teaches the reality of “selling our souls” and departing the faith. In life it often takes something drastic to get us to change our practices. We put up with a few extra pounds until the doctor tells us it is going to lead to heart disease, stroke, cancer, or sugar problems. We endure disrepair around our house until we are told that major structural problems will arise if we do not do the needed maintenance. A person ignores the invitation and refuses to be baptized until some tragic event happens to humble him. Why do we behave this way? The Lord warns us of the real danger of selling our souls. I am afraid that many may be doing this spiritually today, when it comes to standing up for the truth at all costs. Consider these points:

WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR SOME TO TAKE A STAND ON THESE ISSUES?

1. The Day/Age Theory? This error strikes at the core of biblical reliability. Some do not see any “big deal” about it. It ignores the plain teaching of Exodus 20:11: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.” Six literal twenty-four hour days is what the Bible teaches. Will it take someone denying the inspiration of the Bible before some slow-minded brethren will see the dangers of this teaching?

2. Romans 14 and Fellowship. Some naive brethren are teaching that “doctrinal matters” can be placed within the teaching of Romans 14. Which doctrinal matters matter? Only the ones they choose? Why not all doctrinal matters? What will it take for some to see the silliness and danger of this view? Can we fellowship error on any doctrinal issue and please God?

Brethren, will someone in the church have to start teaching that we can fellowship those who have not been baptized for remission of sins, in order for brethren who are slow to “draw lines” to realize the end of their Romans 14 theories and start defending the truth? I hope not.

3. Immodesty. Will it take someone’s young lady being molested for some to see the scriptural teachings on modesty? Will they think teaching along these lines is narrow-minded and judgmental, when it affects them and their children personally?

4. Drunkenness and Social Drinking. 1 Peter 4 and Galatians 5:19-21 teach that a Christian should abstain from alcohol to any degree socially. Will it take a child getting killed or hurt or hurting someone or killing them for many to see and understand what the Lord said in Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35. Will it have to go this far for some to change their ways and their teachings? I pray not.

5. Divisiveness and Strife. Certainly the Lord commanded in 1 Corinthians 1:10 and in John 17 that we should all be one and do our best to speak the same things.

tempt and hate for the truth and righteousness for which the Henderson Blvd. church stands? Why will men consent to be used by Satan to undermine and if possible destroy those who oppose his wicked scheme and devices? How long will elders and church members allow themselves to be used by the archfiend and enemy of all mankind? How long will the good people of Houston and Broadway continue to be led by blind leaders whose consciences

have apparently been stultified; and whose feelings have seemingly been seared against the cries of the sorrowing; while in their hearts truth and righteousness receive only secondary consideration, if any at all, and while, by their actions, the name of God upon their lips seems to be but a hollow sound?

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We need to understand that the beginning of a trend does not necessarily mean apostasy is here yet, but it is certainly on the way if warnings are not heeded. I fear that the winds of apostasy are blowing among brethren today. Many do not want to heed the warning signs. Some believe that, if we just “accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative,” strength and faithfulness will come. Some are unwilling to draw any lines of fellowship on current issues, while others are too quick to presume error, where there is none.

However, we must balance this with the reality that there is not a bear behind every bush. Everything is not wrong and sinful. The Lord did allow for us to have varying views on matters of personal scruples (Rom. 14:1-6). He goes on to say in verse 19 that we should “follow after the things which make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another.” We dare not be extremist in either direction (adding to or taking from). There is a balance that is scriptural, and we must find it. Some are much too tolerant and are hesitant to draw any lines of fellowship, while others are so myopic that they may well end up fellowshipping only themselves and their family. Both extremes are sinful. Will it take the dividing or splitting of church after church for some to see the futility of being divisive, contentious, and a sower of discord among brethren? If truth divides, then that division is good, but if division occurs because of sinful selfish opinion, binding then that is sinful and those who sow that type of discord will be lost.

6. Evangelism. Will it take a neighbor or family dying for some to wake up to the command of the great commission (Mark 16:15, 16)? Brethren, people are dying in sin every day and what are we doing to sow the seed in their hearts? If they do not obey the word that is their problem, if we do not tell what we know to tell, that is our problem and we will be lost for “knowing to do good and doing it not” (Jas. 4:17).

7. Praying. What will it take for us to pray as we should (Jas. 1:5, 6)? Will it take tragedy? Will it take illness? Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17. “The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man avails much” (Jas. 5:16).

A simple, elementary understanding of the Old Testament reveals that things had to get really out of hand for Israel and Judah to see the error of their way. The prophets were sent to them to warn them of the dangers they were heading for, but they refused to hear the prophets. They killed them and made fun of them when they tried to give the message of God to a rebellious people. You see, the Israelites fell because they did not believe what had happened to others could happen to them. They thought that since they were God’s chosen people, that somehow God would not punish them for their disobedience. They refused to see the trends that were pointing to their apostasy. Many do the same today.

What will it take for we, as brethren, to see the errors that are static among us? Some, sadly, may never see them. They have developed an insipid attitude of “live and let live” and “let’s not judge.” These are those who cry, “peace, peace when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). The church at Laodicea in Revelation 3 had an attitude of the world. They stood for some good things, but they were tepid and lifeless and made God sick. Ephesus “left her first love” (Rev. 2:1), the church at Pergamos was tolerating those who taught error and the Lord told them to “repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16). Thyatira had some who taught error and they were told to repent (Rev. 2:21-29). Sardis had a few names who had not defiled their garments (Rev. 3:4). In many churches today the same problems exist. Some brethren are condoning others in sin because they do not want to be courageous and speak out against worldliness and false doctrines of every sort. They must repent if they want to please the Lord. It is also time that we in the body of Christ not just stand up for what is right but also “reprove” that which is wrong (Eph 5:11). Silence is acceptance and “bids godspeed.”

It is not easy to follow a position of error to its ultimate conclusion. Years ago a brother wrote a great article about “brethren drifting.” Some did not want to see it and left the faith, others heeded it, awoke, and took a stand for truth. Indeed, what will it take for some today to wake up and take a stand? Pray brethren!

From Sound Words, January 2003

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The Kind Of Preaching God Expects

Three Kinds of Preaching:

- **Plainness of Speech, With All Boldness (2 Cor. 3:12; Acts 4:29)**
- **Soft Preaching**
- **Mean, Nasty, Ugly, Belligerent, Arrogant, “In Your Face,” Smart Alecky Attitude, Hateful**

INTRODUCTION

Everybody has his preference and opinion about preaching. I’ve got mine and you have yours. What should or should not be preached? When should it be preached? How long should it last? What attitude should preachers have in preaching?

AND, the Lord also has an “opinion” on the subject. Sometimes my opinion may not be the same as his, but as anything else, we have got to forego our opinions and give way to his. Since the Lord has an “opinion” on the subject of preaching, it wouldn’t hurt us to take a look at it from time to time. First, let us note that there are three kinds of preaching today.

PLAINNESS OF SPEECH, WITH ALL BOLDNESS (2 COR. 3:12; ACTS 4:29)

Boldness means “to give free utterance; not to be fearful.” The apostles prayed for boldness after being threatened by the Sanhedrin for preaching. Did the Lord answer their prayer? He certainly did (Acts 4:31). We should pray for preachers of the gospel, teachers of Bible classes, and everybody who is involved in imparting the word to others, that they will have boldness in so doing.

“Plainness of speech” is also needed (Acts 13:46; 1 Thess. 2:2). I remember an old preacher telling me several years ago that “plain preach-

ing is the only kind that will do any good.” I’ve thought about that a lot and have concluded he was right. If you reflect on it, you will have to agree. *If plain preaching won’t get the job done, why would we think any other kind could?* Preaching that is characterized by plainness of speech and boldness is God’s “opinion” on the subject.

Preaching in the first century included three things (1) Preaching the truth, (2) Condemning sin — works of the flesh and religious sins, (3) Exposing error. The epistles of John are mostly taken up in dealing with a prevalent error at that time and the false teachers who were teaching it (Eph. 5:11).

What should be the attitude in which this is done? It should be done in love (Eph. 4:15). (1) This involves a *love for God*. The first and great commandment (Matt. 22:37) (2) It requires a *love for truth*. If we don’t love truth we cannot be saved (2 Thess. 2:10). (3) It requires a *love for the souls of men and women, boys and girls*. So love must be behind what is preached. We must love God, truth, and souls.

A correct attitude must be involved. It is required (2 Tim. 2:24) — longsuffering. There seems to be distinction in the New Testament in how Christ and the apostles dealt with false teachers (the religious leaders of their day)

in contrast with individuals overtaken in sin. Notice that he dealt gently with the woman at the well and the woman overtaken in adultery (John 4; 8:3, 4). However, Jesus dealt sternly with the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites (Matt. 6:23). He spoke very plainly to religious leaders of that day, pronouncing seven “woes” on them. Plainness of speech was needed. Jesus knew that. Peter also dealt sternly with Simon. “Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:20-23). That’s pretty plain. Simon was a religious leader who had been bewitching people to such a degree that they said, “This man is that power of God which is called Great” (8:9-11). It is a wonder God didn’t deal with him as he did Herod (Acts 12:21-23). But Simon was able to be taught and converted.

A similar occasion was that of Elymas, the sorcerer. Sorcerers usually had a following. When Paul was teaching the governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, Elymas tried to withstand them and turn the governor away from the truth. Paul said, “O full of all guile and all villany, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:8, 9). That was a stern rebuke. It was plain and bold, wasn’t it? It could have hurt Elymas’ feelings. Did this mean Christ and the apostles had no love for lost souls? Why would anyone accuse Christ of not having love when we consider the ultimate sacrifice he made? He *did* love and that is why he and the apostles said the things they did. The occasions called for it. Sometimes rebuke is needed. The first kind of preaching we mention is the one taught in the Bible — plainness of speech, with all boldness, speaking the truth in love.

SOFT PREACHING

There are all kinds of terms and phrases used to describe soft preaching: pabulum, pious platitudes, generic gospel, all positive and totally eliminate the negative, non-controversial subjects, minimizes importance of doctrine, never condemns error or identifies who teaches it, more fluff than substance, heavy on quotes from uninspired sources and light on Scripture, also known as “Chicken Soup” religion, “smooth words and fair speeches,” social gospel more intent on making a better life on earth than in than in preparing for judgment day, more emphasis on eloquence and dynamic speaking (messenger becomes more important than the message), etc. You might notice there are Scriptures which authorize plainness of speech, with all boldness, there are none to authorize soft preaching.

MEAN, NASTY, UGLY, BELLIGERENT, ARROGANT, “IN YOUR FACE,” SMART ALECKY ATTITUDE, HATEFUL

This kind of preaching has no place in the pulpit because we do not have Scripture for it either. Not only does it have no place in the pulpit, it has no place in the life of a Christian. No Christian should behave this way toward those with whom we disagree, whether or not the other person is a Christian. We should not be hateful. Jesus and the apostles were not hateful, but they said what needed to be said for the occasion.

HEARER’S RESPONSIBILITY

Suppose a preacher preaches the truth but manifests the wrong attitude described in #3. He taught the truth, but he had a bad attitude. He was arrogant, with a “holier than thou” disposition. He was hateful, mean, and ugly. Unfortunately, that happens on occasion. Preachers are not perfect. They sin. They blunder and will have to give account to God. But the hearer’s *obligation to the truth* is not diminished one iota because the preacher had the wrong attitude. He will still be held accountable for not obeying truth. We must decipher

truth from the one delivering it (Phil. 1:15-18).

Political Correctness. The kind of preaching God wants was not “politically correct” in the first century and it’s not “politically correct” in the twenty-first century. It never has been the popular kind of preaching. The popular kind is the “soft” kind described in #2. We can become guilty of trying to have better manners than Christ and the apostles.

A few months ago I had the opportunity to visit my mother. We discussed this and she said, “If it hadn’t been for plain preaching, I probably wouldn’t be a Christian today.” If it had been the “soft preaching” (#2, above), she wouldn’t have learned the truth. She would not have seen the urgency or need to obey the gospel. Everybody who has obeyed the truth did it because they heard a *plain* message.

Several passages in the epistles are taken up with refuting false doctrine. For example, the epistles of John greatly refute *Gnosticism*, which was prevalent at that time. Some of its tenets are still held by people today. One thing heavily dealt with in John’s epistles is the refuting of those who did not believe in the deity of Jesus. Today, neither Muslims nor Jews (among others) believe Jesus is the Son of God. They have to believe he was an imposter. At best, he is regarded as a prophet, but not deity. Jews and Muslims may not agree on anything else, but they agree that Jesus was not deity.

Defending the Faith. Since the Restoration period and into the twentieth century, there were a number of debates between atheists and gospel preachers. *Somebody* had to do it. There were few, if any debates, that took place between atheists and denominational preachers. For the most part, the denominations shied away from it. It pretty much became the lot of gospel preachers to meet that chal-

lenge. A number of those debates are still in print.

Today we are facing a great threat from world religions, particularly Islam. I am presently aware of three debates that have taken place between gospel preachers and Muslims. I am further convinced that we cannot depend on the denominations to meet the challenge. It will be left up to gospel preachers in the church of Christ. It's an awesome and staggering responsibility. Defending the truth is often an unpleasant and difficult task. It takes great courage and boldness to say what needs to be said even if, at times, we are embarrassed by it or if it is unpopular and not politically correct. Defending the truth is rarely appreciated. Most people have no idea what a man goes through in preparing to defend the truth in public debate. It can be very agonizing. I have never wanted the truth to suffer at my hands because I had failed to prepare. While there are controversies that should not be, some, both in and out of the church, have no stomach for any kind of controversy. They prefer the "soft preaching" described in category two.

Should preachers call names? There were times in the New Testament when preacher called names of false teachers and/or religious groups. At other times they just identified the false doctrine. We know it is right to call names and we should be careful about criticizing the practice for it is hard to do so without criticizing Christ and the apostles. Obviously, there is some judgment involved as to when to do it, because it wasn't always done. Whenever it is helpful so the audience will know who teaches a particular doctrine, I have identified the source. I do so to inform those who don't know (don't they need to know?). I have often been shocked at how little some know about what their denomination teaches or some other group with whom they be enamored. It is also done to warn of danger. Souls are too valuable not to warn so they will not get tangled in the web

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of error. Why handicap ourselves with a man-made rule that "you can't call names" when it may be very helpful to do so? People need to be warned of error and its consequences just like they need to be warned when there's a bridge out or that a house has termites. Even more so!

However, if we are calling names just to be ugly and mean, to put somebody down, or to try to hurt somebody, that should *never* be our motive. We cannot keep people from being offended by truth, but we should not let a bad attitude become a stumbling block to them. One cannot read the New Testament for long till he sees Christ and the apostles calling names of religious groups (Jews, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Epicureans, Stoics, heathen). Sometimes specific individuals were named (Simon the sorcerer, Elymas the sorcerer, Demetrius the silversmith, Alexander the coppersmith, Diotrophes, Demas, Jezebel, Hymenaeus, Philetus). Also notice Revelation 2:6, 14, 15: 2:9; 3:9.

Should false teachers be present before we call their names? I have heard some object that we should not call their names because they are not there to defend themselves. Many of those mentioned in Scripture were not present when their names were called. They were called to the faithful as a warning. When Jesus warned his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," he was speaking only to his disciples (Luke 12:1). There are times when disciples need specific warning about who is teaching and practicing error. It is not very often that false teachers visit the services, so that adds another unnecessary handicap.

Suppose I was an eyewitness who saw a person (known to me) who was breaking into your home. When you asked who it was, what would you think of me if I said, "I don't believe in calling names. It really doesn't matter who. The important thing is that you know somebody was trying to break in?"

In 1960, churches of Christ were the fastest growing religious group in America. What kind of preaching was being done then? It was *plain preaching, with all boldness; preaching the truth, condemning sin and exposing error, and often calling the names of false religions and teachers!*

CONCLUSION

If you have a love for truth, articles like this won't upset you. If you don't love truth, articles like this ought to upset you. I sincerely hope and pray it is the former. There is a real need for all Christians (not just preachers) to carry on the work God gave. Let us lay aside every weight that is hindering us.

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Joe R. Price

Discipline? You're Just a Fundamentalist!

Many of us as of late have been following different stories in the news of various forms of child abuse. Whether it's been murder, pornography, or beating, it is all disgusting and not at all what God planned for those of us who have been given any type of authoritative position over children. The defense that some people use for even hurting a child is beyond repulsion to me. But through this swirling mass of repugnance comes a Fox News program one evening that was discussing child discipline. There was one gentleman on the show who obviously had great disdain for God and for anyone who follows the teachings of our Lord. He made the statement that all fundamentalist Christians promote beating their children. There were two other people; one a guest, the other one, was one of the hosts who timidly and passively answered back, but not much was said against the absurd statement made.

First let us look at the definition of discipline, then we will look at the Scriptures to find out what God says. "Discipline — n. Comes from the word disciple, follower or pupil of any teacher. Training that develops self-control, efficiency. A system of rules. Treatment that corrects or punishes" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*). Now let us turn to the Bible and find out what God has instructed us to do in this matter.

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently (Prov. 13:24).

A wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke (Prov. 13:1).

Whoever loves discipline, loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid (Prov. 12:1).

Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death (Prov. 19:18).

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him (Prov. 22:15).

Correct your son, and he will give you comfort, he will delight your soul (Prov. 29:17).

A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother (Prov. 10:1).

Therefore, "Fathers provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4) and "Children be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Father's do not exasperate (or provoke) your children, that they may not lose heart" (Col. 3:20, 21).

Contrary to societal beliefs, you will not find in the Scriptures anything that implies beating your child in anger or rage is acceptable or condoned by God. There is Scripture though that quite evidently instructs us on how to administer discipline effectively and appropriately as God would have us to do, with love, care, and much prayer. Never are we to strike a child in anger, mutilate him, or exploit him, these horrid forms of discipline only exasperate a child. Take note if you don't discipline your child in the way God has instructed, you will be held accountable for your lack of instruction or for your overbearance of stepping outside God's rules.

Fathers are the ones responsible in the family for setting the pattern of obedience. Any other disciplining done by the mother in the home is simply an extension of the father's authority. As we have read, the father is not "to provoke his children to anger" through radical and overbearing means as this creates a child who will "act out." As well, it can be noted that a child without any guidance or discipline brings about the same negative reaction of "acting out." A reign of terror never creates love for the father or mother, nor does it create love, honor and respect for the Lord. A lack of discipline and guidance, as well, will create a lack of love, honor, and respect for the parents and the Lord. What father has been instructed to do is to "bring them up in the

The Danger of “Thinking For Ourselves”

From time to time I will hear someone extolling the virtues of “thinking for yourself.” We should be thankful that we live in a country where we have the right to our own opinions and to express them. And while it is true that no other human being can do our thinking for us, the idea of “thinking for yourself” has been taken to an extreme to defend open disagreement with and disobedience to *divine* standards of authority. The continuing breakdown of the moral fabric of our society is defended as people having the right to “think for themselves.” Secular humanists who style themselves as “freethinkers” mock God and religion. Even in the church today, biblical facts and literal truths are being questioned and rejected in the name of “thinking for ourselves.”

GOD MUST DIRECT OUR THINKING

It is argued that *no one* has the right to do your thinking for you. Yet God has the absolute right to direct our thinking and we must submit our thoughts and ways to him. God told the wicked and unrighteous people of Israel, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways” (Isa.

55:8). These people were “thinking for themselves” and were not thinking the thoughts of God. What were they to do? “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts” (vv. 6-7a). There is a time when we should not “think for ourselves,” but submit our thinking to the revealed thoughts of God. To do otherwise will put us in danger of erroneous thinking and deceiving doctrines.

EXAMPLES OF NAAMAN AND PAUL

When Naaman, the Syrian commander afflicted with leprosy, was told by Elisha to dip seven times in the Jordan, he decided to “think for himself.” The Bible says, “Naaman became furious and went away and said, ‘Indeed I *said to myself*, “He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy. Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?’” So he turned and went away in a rage” (2 Kings 5:11-12).

nurture and admonition of the Lord.” This is a continuous job all through the time your child is a dependent. It is a loving and nurturing job; children need tenderness in their discipline. Raising children consists of child training and corrective discipline if they don’t receive it they cannot grow spiritually, physically, or mentally in the Lord. A father who will not discipline his children is a father who is disobedient to God’s instruction and is immature in his faith to God. Read the story of Eli (1 Sam. 2:12-3:14). Due to Eli’s lack of rebuking his sons, God brought punishment from the Lord on the house of Eli. There are other examples found in the Scriptures of fathers not leading and disciplining their children.

Discipline is necessary to bring, not break, the spirit into submission to family, society, and God. When we do not administer discipline correctly whether it is by talking (not yelling), taking away privileges or spanking (not beating in anger), we go against God. Yes, God has his fundamentals and we are to follow his fundamentally laid out plan in order to reach and attain the goal, heaven our home.

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Some today would congratulate Namaan for rejecting the prophet's command and not letting anyone do his "thinking" for him. Yet, he would have remained a leper if he had not eventually humbled himself and submitted to the command of God (vv. 13-14). One can fuss and fume about what the Bible says, but he will not please God until he is willing to think the thoughts of God.

The apostle Paul recalled the time when he, as Saul of Tarsus, did his own thinking: "Indeed, I myself *thought* I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). He admitted that the consequences of his own "thinking" were the punishment and persecution of Christians (vv. 10-11). Was Paul proud of his "free thinking" days when he did what he thought was right, even though it was contrary to the thoughts of God? I think not. "Thinking for yourself" is never an excuse for believing and acting contrary to the revealed will of God.

THE THOUGHTS OF MEN VS. THE THOUGHTS OF GOD

Peter told Simon the sorcerer, "Your money perish with you, because you *thought* that the gift of God could be purchased with money!" (Acts 8:20). Simon did not have "freedom of thought" when it came to the truth about the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. In religion today, many *think* that one church is as good as another, but the Bible says there is one body (Eph. 4:4). Some *think* God will save all sincere, honest people in all religions, but the Bible says that salvation is available only in Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Many *think* that we are saved by faith only and a sinner's prayer, but the Bible teaches that salvation is granted by God after we believe, repent, confess, and are baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9-10). Many *think* that we can worship God with mechanical instruments of music, but Christians are only commanded to sing and make melody in the heart (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). Some *think* that we can follow latter-day revelations, but we are not to add to or take away from God's word (Rev. 22:18-19). There are those who *think* that we can have ongoing fellowship with those who teach error on subjects such as marriage, divorce, and remarriage, but the Bible says we are not to receive one who does not bring the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). These examples illustrate the fact that many today do their own "thinking" in religion and have gone

contrary to the will of God.

As people move further away from God's word, the calls for "independent thinking" increase. Instead of clearly pointing out biblical truths that unify, false teachers put forward several "interpretations" with the explanation that the Bible lacks "clarity." We are told that each person must "decide for himself" what the truth is. Instead of understanding the Bible alike, those who have rejected the thoughts of God promote and defend unity-in-doctrinal diversity. This is being taught to a new generation and applied to the creation account, marriage and divorce, worship, modesty, gambling, social drinking, etc. Of course, those opposing this error are regarded as "narrow-minded" simpletons with "tunnel vision" who oppose "independent thinking." Regardless, the Bible still tells us "not to think beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6).

CONCLUSION

There is no virtue in "thinking for ourselves" when it results in rejecting the thoughts of God. We need the attitude of David who wrote, "How precious also are *Your thoughts* to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand" (Ps. 139:17-18). The weapons of our warfare against human wisdom are described as "mighty in God, for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God bringing *every thought* into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Our thoughts must be God's thoughts!

The word of God is described as "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . and is a discerner of the *thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Heb. 4:12). Next time you want to "think for yourself," remember that the word of God will discern those thoughts and intents of your heart. Will you be found thinking the thoughts of God? Or will you let the thoughts of human wisdom move you away from the Lord Jesus "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3)?

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The Other Side of the Good News

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Thoughts of Spring

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away (S. of Sol. 2:10-13).

As I write this, today begins the season of spring, in keeping with the vernal equinox occurring tonight around 8:00. The equinox occurs when the sun is directly overhead at the equator on its northward journey, thus distributing its warming and light-bringing rays to people in the Northern Hemisphere to a greater degree than the last few months. In its trek to the north, it gives us an equal period of daylight and dark for this one day, comparable to the autumnal equinox in September.

Solomon here describes the reappearance of flowers, the songs of birds, and the fruiting of the fig tree and grape vine in areas of the Bible lands having a Mediterranean climate. What a season spring is! Its very appearance reminds us some important matters.

1. Beauty. The beauty of the earth and our surrounding universe are so astounding as to make foolish the claims of atheists and other unbelievers. Such beauty and order as prompt the wonder and marvel of intelligent beings do not just happen. To believe that the systematic arrangement of day and night, spring and the other seasons, and the movement of the sun and other heavenly bodies are mere happenstance, accidents of nature, is to believe that which has no credible evidence undergirding it. The rose, the daffodil, the tulip, and the corn plant reproduce after their kind, precluding any possibility that human beings, plants, or animals will somehow blend gradually into some new form of life (Gen. 1:11). One had as well believe that a house suddenly appeared down the street without designer or builder, as to believe that this orderly world (cosmos), governed as it is by fixed laws of nature, simply came into being on its own. The Lord has spoken about such matters, and we need to trust what he has said.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1).

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Heb. 11:3).

But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men (2 Pet. 3:7).

2. Dependability. Did you ever know a time when the seasons failed to continue their annual cycle? We do not mean that spring always means warm weather, with no reminder of the past season. Spring is often a chilly season, reminding us that winter is not far removed, because it is a transitional time. You can mark it down and take it to the bank, though, that the season known as spring will arrive, because a dependable God has thus arranged it.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jas. 1:17).

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Gen. 8:22).

3. Wisdom of Taking God at His Word. One as dependable as the Maker of heaven and earth, who has acted for the benefit of human beings, whom he has fashioned in his own image, deserves our trust and obedience. In this way of life man finds his completeness, for he was made for fellowship with God. Apart from God and the spiritual dimension, man is incomplete and all of life becomes vain. Solomon discovered this to be so in his quest for happiness and fulfillment. Only after his experiment in the laboratory of life failed did he conclude in Ecclesiastes 12 that fearing God and obeying him is the whole of man (completeness,

How Far Has Edward Fudge Gone?

Those of you who are older than me will remember the name Edward Fudge. Perhaps you saw the article about him in the Religion section of the *Houston Chronicle* on Saturday. Fudge was the subject of much discussion among brethren back in the 1970s. Fudge was one of a number of men who advocated the grace-fellowship theory of unity. Men like Leroy Garrett and Karl Ketcherside were in the vanguard of this movement and openly advocated fellowship with those in denominations. Edward Fudge came along a little later and aligned himself with their views of unity and fellowship.

These men argued that the grace of God was sufficient to save those people who did not understand or obey all of the commandments of God for salvation. In other words, in their view, “God does not require perfect doctrinal understanding or obedience, and that the grace of God will cover the imperfect and sinful practices of institutional and instrumental music brethren” (John McCort, *Truth Magazine*, Vol. 19 [May 1, 1975], 386). The extreme measure of this view, which consistency demands, is that God’s grace will cover the Baptists and Methodists as well. Think about it, if

we are to extend fellowship to liberal brethren who practice sinful things because of the view that God will overlook their ignorance or imperfection, then we must also accept any and all denominational people for the same reason. Whose error is worse, the Baptists or the liberals?

One of the things that a study of church history tells us is that when members of the church embrace error they will continue their downward slide until they, because of their doctrines and practices, are unrecognizable. Such is certainly the case with Edward Fudge.

The *Chronicle* article informs us that Fudge edits and mails an e-mail letter to some 3,800 subscribers (whom the *Chronicle* calls Fudge’s “congregation”) three times each week. He describes his role this way: “I have always tried to write answers in a way that Christian people of any denomination who follow the Bible in their own hearts can appreciate whether they agree with (the answers) or not.” From this quotation we can see that time has not helped Ed Fudge clear up his confusion over the teaching of the Scriptures. He is unashamed in his declaration that there

where man finds his fullness). To separate human beings from God and the spiritual is as spiritually perilous as taking the fish out of water is to its physical survival.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7).

And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding (Job 28:28).

Compliance with the Lord’s will bring spiritual order into our lives, where the disorder of sin once existed. The beauty of holiness will then permeate our lives. He who controls the world by fiat seeks our willing submission. We choose to do this, whereas the rest of creation does what it is made to do because it must.

While we look forward to the warmer temperatures and the gentle showers of this new season, may we not allow the season to pass without springing into action that will build a firm foundation for the rest of life, even the severe storms and frigid blows of the winter of life. Then we will be able to say with the psalmist David, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me” (23:4).

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are Christians in every church.

The word of God teaches that all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Spiritual blessings can be found nowhere else. One cannot get into Christ, where the blessings are, until he has been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). That leaves out all those in the denominations because the teachings of the denominations do not include baptism for the remission of sins. Paul teaches that those who do not obey the gospel of Christ will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:8-9). No amount of twisting the Scriptures is going to make Baptists and Methodists our brethren.

Nothing in the Bible teaches that the grace of God covers sins unconditionally. Jesus Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Heb. 5:8-9). Those who do not obey God are those who will be told to “depart from me you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:23).

Another quotation from the article is equally as disturbing as the previous one. Speaking of Fudge’s education, he says he attended both a “conservative evangelical seminary and a liberal seminary.” This sort of education “broadened his thinking that no denomination had all the truth, . . . There were things to be learned from all the major different faith traditions within Christianity.” How sad that one who claims to be a Christian and preacher of the gospel of Christ would make such claims. Ed Fudge has gone from preaching that we ought to embrace those in denominationalism because God’s grace would cover their errors, to now preaching and teaching that the denominations teach truth. Also, he clearly believes that all denominations are part of the Lord’s church. Sad. So sad.

In the course of the article, the Chronicle quotes Fudge’s description of his supposed mistreatment at the hands of the “radical sectarian element in the churches of Christ.” Actually, the Fudge case of the 1970s was not a matter of an unfortunate soul being tormented by radical, evil men. Instead, faithful, dedicated gospel preachers such as Ron

Halbrook wrote much in answer to Fudge’s errors. They held his feet to the fire and exposed his doctrines for what they are.

The word of God teaches that this is the proper attitude for faithful gospel preachers. Those men who love the Lord will defend the truth against all that is corrupt and false. It is the duty of the preacher to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2). They are to use the gospel to cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:4-5). If it is radical to expose doctrinal error and its teachers then all of us ought to be radicals!

What are some of the views that Ed Fudge is preaching these days? According to the article, Fudge is teaching a view similar to that of the Jehovah’s Witnesses known as annihilation. That is to say eternal punishment is non-existence rather than eternal torment or suffering.

In addition, Fudge is focusing on the “life of grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, a subject that is rarely explored in the churches of Christ,” and he is doing “seminars on the grace of God, the Holy Spirit, God’s guidance.” The article is not entirely clear about Fudge’s views of spiritual gifts. It seems to imply his exploration is of the possibility of spiritual gifts in our day and age. I say that because he makes the point about it being a subject not often broached by churches of Christ. Faithful Christians do indeed teach on spiritual gifts, but we teach that spiritual gifts ended with the first century (1 Cor. 13). If Fudge teaches something other Christians are not teaching, then he must be teaching that gifts continue in some form to this day.

The *Houston Chronicle* article should be a real eye opener. Beware the degree of apostasy that is possible.

From West Columbia Bulletin, January 12, 2003

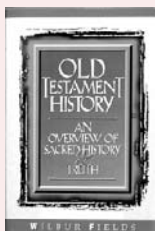
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“Without Being Judgmental”

A distressed mother wrote “Dear Abby,” asking how to direct her fifteen-year old daughter who wants to go to teenage dance clubs with her eighteen- and nineteen-year old boy friends. She said it was difficult for her “to say no all the time.”

“Dear Abby” told the mother she could not “hold back time.” She told her to listen to her daughter “without being judgmental.” When I read that, I stifled a scream at the newspaper!

All you moms and dads listen up! By all means, be judgmental. Be sure, certain, and decisive. Teach your children what represents bad judgment. Be specific. Show them the negative consequences of making wrong judgments. Explain what is right and what is wrong and what is dangerous. With loving kindness and firmness, let them know who is in charge and who will make certain judgments for them, especially those that involve their moral health and spiritual welfare.

From day one, “being judgmental” is what being a parent is all about. If you are not “judgmental,” you are not a

parent. How could one “command” his children in the right way without being “judgmental” (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:6, 7; Ps. 78:3-8; Prov. 22:6)?

When they are little, we make judgments for our children. “No, you may not play in the street.” At age three they do not understand why, but all they need to know is, “Because I said so, that’s why!” When they are five or six and learn to ride a bike, we forbid them to ride on a busy street. That is “being judgmental.” Children, yes, even teenagers, must not be allowed to stay up all night. A good parent must be “judgmental” and tell them, “It’s time for bed.”

A five-year old who can strike a match must not be allowed to decide when and where he may strike it. He may not understand “why,” but that is what a parent is for! A six-year old does not understand why he cannot ride his bike on the street as older children are allowed to do. However, a good parent will be “judgmental” and forbid it. Why? Because he hates his child and does not want him to have fun? No, of course not! Likewise, a thirteen- or fifteen-year old may not see all the dangers and potential sins involved in certain social settings. Making such judgments and decisions is what a loving parent is for! Whether he is six or sixteen, guided by gentle love, understanding, and patience, your child desperately needs you to be “judgmental.” Do not ever doubt that.

As children get older, we must allow them to make some judgments. It is part of the process of “growing up.” There comes that frightful time when we permit them to ride their bikes down the street out of our sight. Later, we give them the keys to a 3,000 pound automobile and send them on their way! Even then, there are limits and restrictions. Again, “being judgmental” is the sum of being a good parent. At whatever age, if the child cannot (or will not) see the reasons for your judgment, remember, at your disposal, there is the ever present, “Because I said so, that’s why!”

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New Management for Bookstores

Mike Willis

The C E I and Truth Bookstores are now under new management. Andy Alexander is the new manager in Bowling Green, Kentucky at the Truth Bookstore and Vernita Goodall is the new manager at C E I in Athens, Alabama.



In May of 2003, the Guardian of Truth Foundation asked Andy to become the new manager of the Guardian of Truth Foundation bookstores. Brother Alexander has been associated with the Foundation for a number of years and recently was added to the Board of Directors of the Foundation. Andy was born in West Columbia, Texas and went to college in San Marcos, Texas at Southwest Texas State University where he completed a degree in business. After college he returned to work with his father and brother in the family lumber and building materials business. He worked in West Columbia until 1988 when he left his father's lumber business and went into full-time preaching in Shelbyville, Tennessee. In the summer of 1993 he moved to Shepherdsville, Kentucky to work with the Hebron Lane congregation. He has worked with this congregation for the past ten years, several years of which were spent in a two-preacher arrangement with Ron Halbrook. Because of the two preacher arrangement, both preachers were available to conduct meetings as they were needed.

Andy has preached in several foreign countries. He has made several preaching trips to Lithuania, the Philippine islands, and Germany. His commitment to the authority of Scripture is unquestioned. His abilities are evident to those who have witnessed his work.

Andy and Joy were married in 1974 and they have two children, April and Amber. April is married to Greg Foster and both April and Amber live in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Andy is planning to continue his preaching and meeting work as opportunities present themselves.



Vernita Goodall was born in Butler County, Kentucky. After high school she moved to Louisville, Kentucky and worked for Southern Bell Telephone in the Directory Department working with advertising for the yellow pages. When she and her husband, Charles, moved to Tampa, Florida, Vernita worked in the General Marketing Department for General Telephone Company as secretary to the manager. She then took a break from secular work to work inside the home in order to meet her children's needs.

In 1974 Vernita went to work in the Florida College Bookstore and at the same time took classes in business management and marketing. She retired from the bookstore in 2001. One of the things she enjoyed most about her work in the bookstore was her daily contact with many wonderful Christians from around

the world.

Vernita and Charles were married in June 1960 and have three children, Charla, Cheri, and Chuck. Charla is married to Gary Palmer and lives in Temple Terrace, Florida, Cheri is married to Chris Reeves and lives in Springfield, Tennessee, and Chuck is married to Carissa and lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. They now have eight grandchildren. Charles and Vernita are working with a great congregation in Hartselle, Alabama where Charles is also serving as one of the elders.

“Denomination?” continued from front page
in the city of Jerusalem.

Now observe the origin of the Lord’s church, as revealed in the New Testament: “And there were dwelling at *Jerusalem* Jews, devout men, out of *every nation* under heaven.” “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass *in the last days* . . .” (Acts 2:5, 16-17). The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in Acts, as we have the right time, the right people, and the right place. For the first time the church is spoken of as being in existence. “And the Lord added to *the church* daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

The church of Christ originated on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ from the dead, around A.D. 30-33. It is no wonder then that nearly 1500 years before the first Protestant denomination was established, Paul could write, “The churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16). The church of Christ is too old to be a denomination, and the oldest denomination is too young to be the New Testament church.

DOES NOT FIT THE DEFINITION OF A DENOMINATION

The word “church” is used in two senses in the New Testament:

1. General sense. The church in the general sense includes every saved person on earth. This is the church in the whole. A good example of this use is when the Lord said, “I will build my *church*” (Matt. 16:18).

2. Local sense. The church in the local sense is the number of saved gathered together in a congregation according to geographical terms of limitation. A good example of this application is when Paul addressed his letter, “Unto the *church* of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2).

A denomination is a religious organization smaller than the whole church and larger than the local church. A denomination is smaller than the whole church as no denomination claims to contain all the saved. Denominationalists tell us there are saved people in all denominations. A denomination is larger than the local church as it takes many local congregations to constitute a denomination. A denomination is too small to be the church in the general sense, and too large to be the church in the local sense. We conclude then that the church of Christ is not a denomination in any sense!

HAS NO CHARACTERISTICS OF A DENOMINATION

There are some things that characterize a denomination that are not characteristic of the church of Christ revealed in the Testament of Christ.

1. No earthly headquarters. A human denomination

has an earthly headquarters. For example, the headquarters of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is in Salt Lake City, Utah. The headquarters is where the head is. Since Christ is the head of the church and is passed into the heavens at the right hand of God (Eph. 1:21-23; Heb. 4:14; Acts 2:33), our headquarters is in heaven. Paul said, “For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Members of the church of Christ have a heavenly citizenship, while members of a human denomination have an earthly citizenship!

2. No man-made creeds. Denominations have their creeds, constitutions, and confessions. If you want to learn their faith and practice, you need to read their creed. If you want to know the faith and practice of the church of Christ, you just need to read the Bible. Paul said, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). A man-made creed book either says too much or too little. If a creed book says more than the Bible, it says too much. If it says less than the Bible, it says too little. And if you were in some way to find one that says exactly what the Bible says, toss it out the window. We don’t need it, for we already have the Bible.

3. No foreign organizations. Churches of men have offices and officers unknown to the Bible. The church of Christ is independently organized, with elders (also called bishops or pastors), deacons, and saints in every fully-developed congregation (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23). There is no ecclesiastical authority recognized in the New Testament.

4. No sectarian names. A denomination often wears a name that honors some man, organizational arrangement, belief, doctrine, or practice. The church of Christ gives the preeminence to Christ by wearing the name of Christ (Rom. 16:16; Acts 11:26), “a name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). To wear another name is to wear an inferior name, and to belong to a church with a different name is to be a member of an inferior church! Peter declared, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

5. No unauthorized works. The body can only move as the head allows it. This is the way it is with Christ’s body, the church (Col. 1:18). The church is subject unto Christ (Eph. 5:24). Paul penned, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17). To do something in the name of the Lord is to do it by the power or authority of the Lord (Acts 4:7, 10). If there is no book, chapter, and verse where Christ authorizes it, we have no scriptural right to practice it! The church of Christ

respects the authority of Christ in doing the Lord's work the Lord's way, while denominations engage in works nowhere authorized by the Lord.

6. No perverted forms of worship. The Lord never has accepted just any kind of worship. A good example is when the Lord sent fire out of heaven and devoured Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire in worship (Lev. 10:1-2). Denominations include as acts of worship things not even mentioned in the Bible. The church of Christ worships God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), in teaching, giving, observing the Lord's supper, praying, and singing as the Lord instructed (Acts 2:42; Eph. 5:19).

The church of Christ as revealed on the pages of the New Testament has nothing in common with any denomination. A church of Christ may become a denomination by taking on the characteristics of denominationalism. When men say, "We try to be 'Christians only' and believe that no particular group is designated by God as 'the only Christians,'" they are, in effect, turning the church into a denomination. May we never be guilty of reducing the blood-bought body of Christ to the same level as a human denomination!

Will you leave the errors of denominationalism and be a member of the church of Christ? We are not asking you to subscribe to a man-made creed, join a human denomination, or wear a sectarian name. We are appealing to you to strike hands with us across the Bible, be a member of the church for which Christ died and bled, and wear the name that is above every name.

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"Gays" continued from page 2

The Episcopal Church in approving a practicing homosexual as a bishop is publicly stating its approval of homosexuality and willingness to alienate from its membership those families in their fellowship who believe that homosexuality is sinful.

The media's reporting of this should also be noted. I have carefully watched the news coverage given the Episcopal Church's appointment of Robinson. Those liberals who approved his appointment are "inclusive" and "open-minded." Those less liberal (one cannot call members of the Episcopal Church "conservative") are consistently portrayed as the creators of the problems. Typical of this is the manner in which *The Houston Chronicle* reported the Roman Catholic position on homosexuality.

In the August 1, 2003 issue of *The Houston Chronicle*, the front page article is titled, "Vatican Fuels Firestorm

Over Gay Marriage." In what manner did the Vatican fuel a firestorm? By publicly asserting their opposition to gay marriage. But, what about those who preach that gay marriages are acceptable in God's sight and fellowship those who practice homosexuality? This group of people has pushed the homosexual agenda in the face of the American public for twenty years. Who is creating the "firestorm" over gay marriage? According to the press, it is the papacy. Nevertheless, the press wishes its readers to believe that they are objectively reporting the facts.

The fact of the matter is that liberal Protestants gave up the issue of homosexuality a long time ago. They have accepted practicing homosexuals in the fellowship of their churches for years. If one can hold membership in these churches while practicing homosexuality, by what kind of reasoning can one oppose his appointment to positions of leadership in those same churches?

Furthermore, how can liberals use biblical prooftexts to justify opposition to homosexuality when they previously have given up the use of similar Bible verses on such issues as divorce and remarriage, abortion, women preachers/teachers, gambling, drinking, the existence of a clergy, water baptism, and numerous other issues? Long ago, Episcopalians gave up following the biblical pattern on other things, so why cling to what it teaches on homosexuality? If one can be in the fellowship of the Episcopal Church while in a second or third marriage (with the previous marriages not ended by death or the guilty party's fornication), why can't he be in the fellowship of the Episcopal Church while practicing homosexuality?

Nevertheless, the majority of bishops in the Episcopal Church voted the appointed of a practicing homosexual as a bishop in spite of these clear verses of Scripture:

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:24-27).

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in

the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

... knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for man-slayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:9-10 NKJV).

... as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 7 NKJV).

The Episcopal Church is allowing twenty-first century



New Ladies Bible Class Material

"Older Women Admonish the Young Women" by Melba Edwards is a new thirteen-lesson workbook designed for ladies' Bible classes. The material covers the admonition of Paul in Titus 2:3-5. Lesson topics include: Reverent in Behavior, Not Slanderers, Not Given to Much Wine, Teachers of Good Things, Admonish the Young Women, Love Their Husbands, Love Their Children, Discreet, Chaste, Homemakers, Obedient to Their Own Husbands, That the Word of God Be Not Blasphemed. The material is just \$4.25 (plus shipping and handling) and may be ordered from Truth Bookstore. Order toll free by calling 1-800-428-0121.

Ohio Episcopalians Use Ad Campaign to Fill Pews

"Episcopalians are trying to get more people in the pews with an unusual enticement: 'Summer sermons will be shorter. Priests play golf too.'

"The Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio is using humorous ads on billboards, buses and movie screens in a campaign to increase membership and dispel negative stereotypes about churchgoing" (The Indianapolis Star [August 16, 2003], F3).

Survey Finds Members Aging, White, Female

"A survey of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) found that, while most of its members believe Jesus in 'the only absolute truth,' many also reject the idea that only Christ's followers will be saved.

political correctness to dictate its theology. Paul warned of the danger of allowing ourselves to be shaped by the world when he wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

Study the problem with the Episcopal Church carefully. It is a wonderful case study for where unity-in-diversity leads.

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"The study also found that members' median age is 55; more than 90 percent of them are white, and 55 percent are Republicans. The survey also found that 61 percent of the laity is female but most of the clergy is male.

"The findings are from a survey of about 3,500 Presbyterians, divided about equally among members, elders and clergy, the church research division did last fall and winter" (The Indianapolis Star [August 16, 2003], F3).

Bishops Plan to Step Up Efforts to Bar Gay Unions

"New York — The Roman Catholic Church will intensify its efforts to prevent legalization of same-sex marriage, the president of the nation's Catholic bishops said Friday.

"Bishop Wilton D. Gregory said the bishops could endorse a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as only heterosexual, though he stopped short of making such an endorsement himself.

"The Vatican denounced same-sex marriages in a July doctrinal decree, while Canada's government is working to legalize them — a move that Gregory said 'brought this close to us'" (The Indianapolis Star [August 30, 2003], A6).

Minister Charged in Autistic Boy's Death

"Milwaukee — A church minister was charged Tuesday in the death of an 8-year-old autistic boy who suffocated as church leaders tried to heal him at a storefront church.

"Ray Hemphill was charged with physical abuse of a child causing great bodily harm. If convicted, he faces up to 20 years in prison and \$25,000 in fines.

"He remained in jail Tuesday night.

"The charges stem from a service at the Faith Temple Church

of the Apostolic Faith on Friday. The boy's mother, Patricia Cooper, told investigators the minister held Terrance Cottrell Jr. on the ground with one hand on his head, another between his legs, and his knee pressed into the boy's chest. Cooper and another woman each held one of his legs, while a third woman laid across his torso.

"The mother 'stated that while this was going on she could see Ray Hamphill talking to Terrance Cottrell and telling him that the "Demon should leave him"' for about two hours, the complaint said.

"When the service was over, Cooper said the boy was not breathing and his face appeared blue. She said several people tried to revive him before calling 911.

"The boy suffered extensive bruising on the back of his neck and died of suffocation, the complaint said" (The Indianapolis Star [August 27, 2003], A6).

Church Could Face Messy Divorce

"The 7,364 congregations of the Episcopal Church receive \$2.14 billion in offerings a year. Their buildings and liquid assets are worth untold billions.

"Add it up, and suddenly much more is at stake than spiritual matters if the church splits over the Episcopal General Convention's approval of a gay bishop.

"This could be the biggest church real estate sale in history," says the Rev. Charles Nalls of the Washington-based Canon Law Institute.

"Nalls, who recently quit the denomination because he felt it was getting too liberal, says about 100 congregations have asked his institute for advice about possible withdrawal and property rights.

"In addition, at least 52 congregations in 20 states, 320 priests and 16 bishops have so far endorsed a protest petition at www.comunionparishes.org — a new Web site based in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"The site also asks Episcopalians to consider withholding contributions from the national denomination and liberal dioceses.

"When it comes to potential property fights, one important factor is that those who opposed the Rev. V. Gene Robinson's election as New Hampshire bishop were a minority.

"That will be a crucial point for Episcopal liberals, because secular courts avoid taking sides in doctrinal squabbles and do not second-guess churches' internal decision-making.

"However, another line of church property cases relies on neu-

tral principals of contract law, which could give conservatives leverage to keep property in some situations.

"In the church's first notable schism, the 1873 creation of the evangelical Reformed Episcopal Church, defectors generally were allowed to keep their buildings.

"But in the 1970s, Episcopal leaders played hardball against opponents of women priests and revisions in the Book of Common Prayer.

"Few of those who quit, eventually forming 40 small denominations, held their properties.

"During these conflicts, the 1979 Episcopal convention added a church law specifying that all assets of a congregation are 'held in trust for this church and the diocese thereof.' That's a major weapon for church headquarters, though Pittsburg attorney Robert G. Devlin thinks it's debatable whether the law binds congregations that existed before 1979" (The Indianapolis Star [August 24, 2003], A6).

Poll: Most Favor Law Against Gay Nuptials

"Washington — More than half of Americans favor a law barring gay marriage and are opposed to allowing civil unions that could provide gay couples with the same benefits as marriage, an Associated Press poll has found.

"The survey also indicated presidential candidates could lose the backing of some voters if they support gay marriage or civil unions.

"The poll, conducted by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa., found 52 percent favor a law banning gay marriages, while 41 percent oppose such a law.

"About four in 10 — 41 percent — support allowing civil unions, roughly the same level found in an AP poll three years ago. But 53 percent now say they oppose civil unions, up from 46 percent in the earlier survey.

"Close to half of those surveyed said they would be less likely to support a presidential candidate who backs civil unions (44 percent) or gay marriage (49 percent), while only around 10 percent said they would be more likely" (The Indianapolis Star [August 24, 2003], A6).

