

Magazine

Why Christians Assemble Together

Irvin Himmel

Judging from their actions, some Christians see no value in assembling together with other Christians. This short essay directs attention to several basic reasons for our gathering together regularly. The motivation goes beyond mere “church attendance.” We are dealing with a problem that is much deeper than “absenteeism.”

To Edify One Another

All children of God need encouragement and upbuilding. Without it maturity can never be attained. When we sing together, we teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16). In praying and studying the Scriptures together, we are strengthened. We are taught to follow the things wherewith one may edify another (Rom. 14:19). The church is to edify itself in love (Eph. 4:16). In the absence of edification there is stagnation, deterioration, and devastation.

For Fellowship

There is a sharing, communing, and participation together that is holy when we worship God together. Some churches build “fellowship halls” which are in reality *dining* halls. The place where we blend our hearts and voices in praise to God and share in bringing our petitions before his throne of grace is where we have divine fellowship. Truly, “our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

To Remember the Death of Jesus

The Lord’s supper was instituted by Christ as a memorial of his body and his blood. He gave the bread to the disciples with these words of instruction, “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.” Concerning the fruit of the vine he said, “This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” In eating the bread and drinking the cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:23-26). It is important that we be reminded regularly and frequently that Christ died for our sins.

There is a sharing, communing, and participation together that is holy when we worship God together.

To Follow the Example of First-Century Christians

The Jerusalem saints “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). The disciples at Troas came together on the first day of the week “to break bread” (Acts 20:7). Paul preached on that occasion. Instructions were given to the Corinthian brethren pertaining to their conduct when “the whole church be come together into one place” (1 Cor. 14:23). Christians in the apostolic age assembled together regularly. We should follow their example.

Because We Are Commanded to Assemble

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and
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In Non-Essentials, Liberty (3)

Mike Willis

The well-known maxim made popular in the restoration movement says, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love.” In this article, I would like to consider the truth expressed by “in non-essentials, liberty.”

This idea is based on biblical teaching which recognizes that there are some things that are “indifferent” to God. For example, Paul spoke of circumcision saying, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Gal. 6:15). “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19).

Romans 14 discusses a category of things that neither makes one better nor worse in his standing before God. With reference to these things, the Lord commands that his people not engage in “doubtful disputations” and not divide from one another over these matters. Paul wrote, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. . . . Therefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Rom. 14:1-5; 15:7).

Paul did not preach his opinions on circumcision. He allowed individuals to exercise their liberty and practice what they thought best. Though he condemned making circumcision a condition for salvation and fellowship, he circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3). He could not and would not tolerate those brethren who tried to make their opinion about circumcision a divine law and treat all brethren who disagreed with them as apostate. When Paul faced that issue in Galatians 2, he used Titus as a test case and went to Jeru-

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Troubled Over Death (2)

Connie W. Adams

Unless the Lord comes first, all of us will face death. “It is appointed unto man once to die” (Heb. 9:27). Sometimes it will come as a quiet transition, at other times as a monster suddenly crushing life from us. It will come to the young, middle aged, and to the aged. But come it will! In this article we will look at how we deal with the death of a loved one. There are problems to be resolved by those left behind.

Coping With Grief

There is a difference in the grief process for the death of one who has lost the battle for life after a long illness and in the sudden and unexpected death of one near to us in life. In the first case, there comes a time when you realize, reluctantly, that your spouse, parent, or child is not going to survive. In the back of your mind, you start crossing bridges and wondering, “What will I do if . . .?” You may fight hard against accepting this reality, but deep down inside you know what is going to happen. But in the case of a heart attack, stroke, exploding aneurysm, or an automobile or industrial accident, the grief process cannot begin fully until the shock has subsided, and that may take awhile. We are all different and it is to be expected that we will cope with grief differently.

Even in the case of extended illness, it takes time for the reality of it all to soak in. Facing the finality of it is hard. Strangely, funerals can be therapeutic. Decisions have to be made. Arrangements must be completed. Family and friends must be notified. It is easy to allow desire to override financial practicality. The two or three days after a death are almost a blur with so many things happening at once. Every relative or close friend who greets you will evoke another round of tears. But that is healthy. Please don’t bottle up your emotions. There is a place for reserve and dignity, but there is also a place for weeping. One criticism I have of cremation is that it lacks closure. It is abrupt and denies family and friends a time to truly reflect and accept. It is cold and impersonal. I am sure some will not agree with this assessment.

When the funeral is over and everyone goes home, then the reality sets in. Going home alone is hard. Reminders of the one you lost are everywhere. Memories come flooding back and with them more tears. In the case of a child or a spouse, you will have to decide what to do with clothing and other things.

Beware of the Shrine

Some try to cope by sealing off a room, leaving everything as it was and resisting any effort by family members to change a thing. Over the long
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haul this is not healthy. If there are other family members still at home, this is not fair to them. When my first wife died, one of the hardest things of all was to clear out her closet. I folded every item myself, placed it in boxes and, by mutual agreement, gave them to my sister-in-law. Every piece stirred up a memory. We had a guest room in which she had made the curtains and the bedspread and arranged the furnishings. But it continued to be used as a guest room. At first I would stand in the room and look at what she had made and relive memories. But they were not made for a museum. They were made to use. I have known of widows who sealed off a workshop and would not allow anything to be touched. This will prolong your agony and hinder the acceptance of reality.

Stages of Grief

1. Denial. “No, no, this cannot be!” This is natural but will have to give place to fact. Some enter a fantasy land where they pretend the one lost is still there.

2. Anger. “Why did this happen to me?” “It is not fair.” Well, life is not always fair, is it? Sometimes the survivor aims his/her anger at the deceased. “Why did you leave me alone?” “I don’t know where to turn to handle the finances, or make decisions about what to do next.” The dead can’t help it and you will have deal with it.

3. Guilt. This may not be true in every case, but it is easy to fall into this trap. “What if I had. . . .” We may think of things we wish we had said or done and now it is too late. What’s done is done and we cannot change it.

4. Masking true feelings. While we need not be morbid with our friends or family, there is also a false bravado which does not help anyone. Some resort to medications which turn them into zombies. This only delays the process of coping.

5. Resentment. As we see others going about life with their spouses, children, or parents, it is easy to be jealous. On one occasion, after losing my wife, I was in a mall and saw a couple about my age. They were holding hands and obviously enjoying their time together. For a moment I had the faint beginnings of a pity party. It is time to work on rejoicing with those who rejoice. You may be excluded from events which involve couples. You are now single and not viewed as part of a couple. Parents who have lost a child may find it hard to practice this as they see the children of friends graduate, marry, and have children of their own. This can become a real test of faith and conviction.

6. Acceptance. This is the time when we understand truly the finality of what has taken place. Our loved one is dead. That is a hard word to use at first. He/she will not be coming back! Their memories are etched in our minds and will sweeten over time. But they will not be back. For a

good while after my wife died, I wore my wedding ring. It never occurred to me to remove it. Then one day as I was driving to town, the sun reflected off that ring. I looked at it and suddenly it hit me that I was not married any more. That part of my life was over except in memory. That brief moment was of great importance to the rest of my life.

7. Going on with life. We don’t all handle things the same way. Some who have children never seem to recover and some turn bitter. Others learn to accept what they cannot change and go on. It is a time for surviving parents to pull together, become closer, and not drift apart. The loss of both parents was hard to absorb, especially after our mother died. We felt somehow disconnected from the world. Some who have lost a spouse decide to remarry.

As one who has done that, I offer a few observations. Be sure you allow enough time to heal the wounds and sort out your own emotions. It is a time for good judgment and not runaway emotions. Some second marriages turn out well while others do not. Don’t expect all of your friends to be as excited about your new life as you are. That may come as a surprise to you. Some may even treat you as if you are being disloyal to the mate you lost. Other family members may not be overly happy for you either. You will inherit a new set of in-laws. Children may have the hardest time adjusting to a step-mother or step-father. They may feel that someone else is trying to take the place of their own mother or father. Of course, nobody ever could do that. Bobby and I have been married now for nineteen years and she is the only grandmother my grandchildren know. They could not love her more if she were their blood grandmother. She feels the same about them. I am the only grandfather most of her grandchildren have known. Some children come to readily accept you and some do not. Both sides of the equation have to work at the new relationships. Children do not always understand the emotional needs of their own parents and parents do not always understand the struggles their children have with choices made by their parents. Age, health, and circumstances will enter into such choices.

In the case of spouses, it is a certainty that one or the other will die before the other under normal circumstances. So, make the most of every day the Lord gives you. Remember your vows and give the best you have to make life good for the each other.

Above all else, live so that when death calls and it is your turn to make this transition, you will be ready to meet the Lord and hear him say at the judgment, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

(Next time: Troubled Over Divorce and Its Tragic Cost)

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Have You “Gladly Received His Word”?

Larry Ray Hafley

Several times in Acts 2, speaking as the Spirit gave him utterance, Peter encouraged his audience to hear what he was saying (2:14, 22, 29). They heard! Their hearts were pierced by the force of the Spirit’s word as spoken by the apostle (2:4, 37). In their state of guilt and grief, smitten by a conscience convicted of killing the Christ, they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do” (2:37)? The answer was as clear and direct as their question. “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (2:38).

With few words the Spirit passed over a lengthy plea for the murderers of the Messiah to “be saved from this perverse generation” (2:40). “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” (2:41). Obviously, they that did not receive the word of the Holy Spirit did not consent to be baptized by the authority of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

Does that group include you today? The same Spirit pleads with you who believe that Jesus is the Son of God to “Repent and . . . be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” If you have never obeyed the gospel of Christ, will you “gladly receive” that same word and be baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins (Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27)? Or, will you be among those who will not “gladly receive” that word and refuse to “be saved from this perverse generation”?

Objection: “But, I’ve already been baptized. I was baptized into the Baptist (Catholic, Pentecostal, etc.) Church, so I don’t need to be baptized today.”

Reply: Those who were baptized in Acts 2 were added to the church, the body of Christ (Acts 2:47; 5:11; 1 Cor. 12:13). There were no Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, or Presbyterian churches in those days, so they were not

members of those churches when they “gladly received his word” and were “baptized into one body,” the church. If your baptism made you a member of a denominational church, whether Catholic or Protestant, you did not receive Bible baptism.

This is especially true of the Catholic Church. Those baptized in Acts 2 had to “repent” before they could be baptized, but Catholics sprinkle water on infants who can neither believe nor repent. Hence, their baptism is not that of Acts 2; it is not “in the name of Jesus Christ,” not by his authority. Most Protestant denominations (Baptist, Methodist, Assembly of God, etc.) baptize only those who profess that they have had their sins forgiven and are already saved. Their baptism is not that of Acts 2, for that baptism was “for the remission of sins,” *not* “because” they already were saved.

Compare Acts 22:16. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Most Protestant preachers reverse the verse and say, “By calling on the name of the Lord, your sins will be washed away, then be baptized and arise and go on your way.” Note the contrast between the word of God and the word of men!

The question confronts you today. Have you “gladly received his word” and been baptized “for the remission of your sins”? If you have not been, you have not received the word of God. Jesus said of those, like you, who will not receive his word, “He who rejects Me, and *does not receive My words*, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Dear friend, do not wait until then, for it will be too late. So, “now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

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Speaking as the Spirit Gave Them Utterance

Bobby L. Graham

Jesus had prepared the apostles for their work and left them to return to heaven. On this next Pentecost, he dispatched from heaven the Spirit of truth, as promised (John 16:7-8). It was the Spirit, working in the twelve apostles, who would convict the world. What a work he then undertook.

Such a work required the presence of the Spirit, not merely the men chosen by Christ for preaching. They were not equal to the task, unless the Spirit guided them. When they spoke, it was the Spirit speaking through them, because the Spirit would convict the world. It should be no surprise that they “spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance” on Pentecost, that their declarations were Spirit-given.

Another aspect of their utterances that we stress is the languages used on this occasion. They spoke in languages of the listeners. To make this clear, Luke informed us of those countries/languages present in the gathering in verses 9-11. Still “every man heard them speaking in his own language” (2:6). The miracle was that of their speaking languages that they never had learned. Words were the vehicle of thought on this occasion; thus the Spirit guided them in the very words to be spoken. What we have here is a specific case of verbal inspiration, though it was not restricted to this occasion. Let us study the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.

What is Inspiration?

Theopneustos is used by the Holy Spirit in 2 Timothy 3:16 to describe the production of the Scriptures. Most experts tell us that the word does not mean “inspired of

God,” in the sense of his breathing into the Scriptures. Instead it means they were breathed out (expired) by God, being “God-breathed,” the product of his creative breath, his almighty power. The word does not indicate God’s giving the Scriptures certain vital qualities by his breathing such into them; such a doctrine finds no foundation in this passage.

The Biblical writers do not conceive of the Scriptures as a human product breathed into by the Divine Spirit, and thus heightened in its qualities or endowed with new qualities; but as a Divine product produced through the instrumentality of men. They do not conceive of these men, by whose instrumentality Scripture is produced, as working upon their own initiative, though energized by God to greater effort and higher achievement, but as moved by the Divine initiative and

borne by the irresistible of the Spirit of God along ways of His choosing to ends of His appointment (Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* 153).

Accordingly, it is significant that various biblical writers said their words came from the Lord. David spoke by the Spirit (Mark 12:36; cf. Acts 1:16; 2 Sam. 23:2). Three thousand and eight times the Old Testament claims to be God’s word. Moses wrote all the words of the Lord in Exodus 24:4. “Thus says the Lord” or a similar expression appears 120 times in Isaiah, 430 times in Jeremiah, 329 times in Ezekiel, and 53 times in Zechariah. Jesus declared that the Scripture cannot be broken in John 10:35, meaning that it cannot be annulled or its authority denied, because it is from God. So closely is God identified with his word that often

Inspiration could not have been partial, limited to the ideas, in view of man’s incapacity even to understand the prophecy that God gave him.

“God” is exchanged with “Scripture” and visa versa (the reader is left to explore this exchange for himself).

Explaining the origin of Scripture, not the means of explaining or understanding it, Peter affirmed: “. . . knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20, ASV). Notice that Peter said it was not by man’s will that Scripture originated, effectively eliminating the noetic/noematic (thought, idea) kind of inspiration. If God had supplied only the thought, leaving to man to fill out with his own words, it would have ended up being by man’s will. Observe also that the Spirit of God bore the prophets, moving them to the ends that he appointed and along ways that he chose.

Inspiration could not have been partial, limited to the ideas, in view of man’s incapacity even to understand the prophecy that God gave him. Peter said the prophets did not understand the full import of their prophecies (1 Pet. 1:10-11). Peter himself failed to understand the God-given prophecy concerning the inclusion of Gentiles (Acts 2:39), as we know of his initial refusal to go to teach Cornelius in Acts 10. How could they have filled out the God-given idea with their own words when they did not even understand the part that God gave? You see, friend, inspiration did not cover a man’s personal understanding or his personal conduct in response to the revelation. Not only did Peter not comprehend what he taught by inspiration in Acts 2, but he also did not act in keeping with it when he was

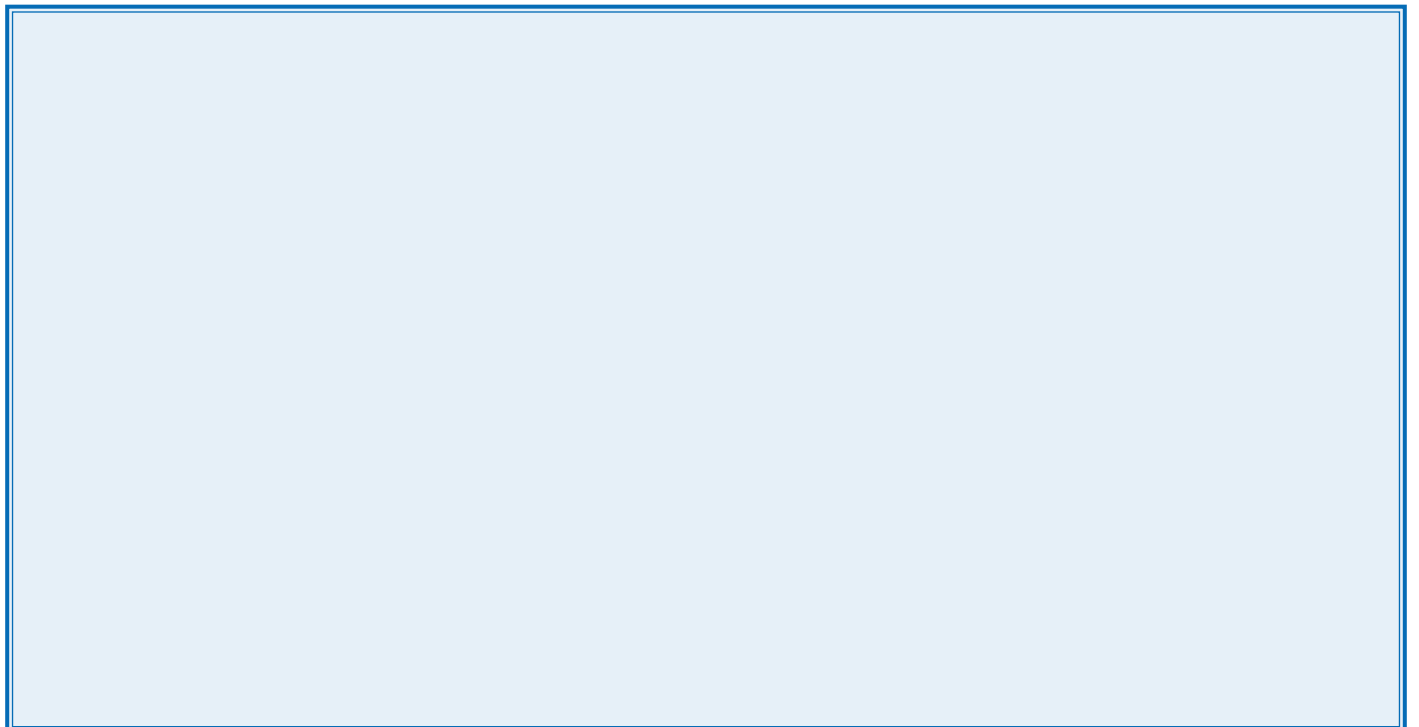
hypocritical in Galatians 2:13. Inspiration did not depend on human effort to fill out what God had not originally said. If it had, then the faith of the early Christians would have rested in the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 2:3-5).

Verbal Inspiration Affirmed and Demonstrated

1. Every word is important (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4).
2. Jesus said even the smallest part of a word (jot or tittle) was significant (Matt. 5:18).
3. Jesus’ argument against the Sadducees’ materialistic idea of the human being’s nature depended on God’s use of “am” (present tense of the verb) from Exodus 3, Matthew 22:31-32.
4. Paul’s explanation of Jesus as the seed of Abraham rested on a word (singular noun) for its correctness (Gal. 3:16).

But unto us God revealed *them* through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual *words* (1 Cor. 2:10-13, ASV).

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A Visit Into the Past

Olen Holderby

“The exhortation was the thing saints received when they assembled, but when they forsook the act of assembling, they did not exhort nor receive exhortation in the assembly which was needed in view of the day approaching. . . .”

This would seem to be an interesting and appropriate thing to do. It can also be a reminder of events and people whose efforts helped shape the thinking of many members of the church—for both good and bad. To ignore the past is often to repeat it! I shall make no effort to give all the details of each happening, but will try to properly identify the source, should anyone wish further confirmation. This particular article will give some events from 1955-1985. Let us begin.

August 1955

This was the year of the Tant-Harper debates; one in Lufkin, Texas, a repeat in Abilene, Texas. In between these two debates an article appeared in the *Gospel Guardian* (Aug. 11, 1955), commenting on the first debate. The article also offered some insight into the infamous Gatewood check deception. This was an effort to make brother Tant appear to be inconsistent and in violation of his own teaching. However, this trickery was exposed and the whole thing backfired on brother Gatewood and his relatives whom he had involved. Brother Harper had tried to make use of Gatewood’s trickery in the debate, but it backfired on him as well. The respect which many had for both Gatewood and Harper was greatly modified by these events.

May 1968

Under this date brother Eugene Britnell had an article in *Searching the Scriptures*, “Shall the Prodigals

Return?” I give the first paragraph, “A few months ago, twenty-six gospel preachers met in Arlington, Texas, for a four-day study of the problems and attitudes which have divided the church.” Some of these preachers were conservative and some were liberal. Following this meeting a grave danger developed—some liberals began to write concerning this meeting and leaving false impressions; and, this was the reason for brother Britnell’s article. The liberals were saying that the conservative brethren had admitted that *they* were wrong and now wished to be restored “to the fellowship of the church.” Brother Britnell quoted, at length, from an article by the late brother Gayle Oler, then Superintendent of Boles Orphan Home in Quinlan, Texas. Brother Oler had proceeded to lay down the terms of restoration for all of us who had opposed his, and other, arrangements which violated the Scriptures. Brother Oler had also charged that the conservative brethren had sinned and were the ones to be blamed for the division.

Brother Britnell did a fine job of pointing out that it was those who had begun practices which had no scriptural foundation that were to be blamed, not those of us who opposed such teaching or practice. Such is still the case today; those who oppose the innovations are always accused of causing problems that lead to division. Brother Britnell quoted from an article written by Foy E. Wallace in 1934. He said, “Efforts to shift responsibility

for the division is the invariable rule of innovationists in the church. The innovators themselves never cause the division—it is always the opposition.” Strange, but true! The sadder part is that so many, even today, think the same way—if you raise your voice against error, in teaching or practice, you are causing trouble!

February 5, 1963

This is the date of a *Firm Foundation* special issue extolling the virtues of Pepperdine College. From the editorial of this issue, we read, “Suddenly there was thrust upon the public, and specifically upon Christians, the responsibility of financially supporting this great school.” These words would not have been found on the pages of the *Firm Foundation* in earlier years, but here they are in full endorsement of Pepperdine College. I personally knew, though not closely, brother George Pepperdine; and, I know that the college has long since departed from the ideals of its founder. It has not changed directions since. The editorial ended with this statement, “Pepperdine is worth all it costs.” Those familiar with Pepperdine College, now Pepperdine University, were not surprised in 1963, nor have they been surprised since. I would, in no way, trust a child of mine to Pepperdine University.

September 1973

Under this date we offer some quotes from the late Jim Cope. Brother Cope was President of Florida College for many years. During his time as President, he had a little (in size) publication called *Shake Friend!* In the September issue brother Cope had an article by the title of “Which Way America?” Brother Cope was not only President of Florida College, he was an outstanding gospel preacher, a capable defender of the truth, and highly respected by all who knew him best. It’s a pleasure to offer some quotes from his pen. So, let us begin.

With all his smartness man is still circumscribed by the laws of the

God who made everything after its own kind, placed the seed of its perpetuity within it, and confined all known life to this planet. Anything else is pure speculation and therefore unscientific if *true science* deals only with known facts. This idea seems to have been lost today. Too bad, indeed!

For the last 75 years America has largely been the leader of the world in political, economic, cultural, and I would like to say moral thought. I regret to say, however, that I feel that as other great nations have risen and fallen so our country is on the decline in those areas which ultimately mean the stability of a people. It matters not how advanced we may be with guns and rockets and ships and planes and factories and farms or how many academies and universities may grace our landscape or how wise the political system under which we live. None of these manifestations of power and splendor and greatness and mental achievement can survive the cancerous forces of moral permissiveness and irreligion eating away at the very vitals of national life.

The history of 4000 years which records the *rise and fall* of twenty-one major civilizations testifies that no people can indefinitely survive when their moral structure decays. When we look at modern American as a part of Western Civilization, I am convinced that the one great bastion which has anchored this nation to moral values is under attack and is ripping at the seams. I speak of the decadence of the American home. . .

Marriage is the oldest social relationship known to the human family. . . . As much as I deplore the lawlessness which exists in this land today and as much as I believe that persons in highly responsible positions in public and private education are wielding a tremendous impact upon the attitudes in modern youth, I am equally convinced that the ultimate salvation of America from the decadent forces which would destroy “The Establishment” and offer nothing in return must

be curbed not only in the White House, the courthouse, and the schoolhouse, but at the hearthsides of your house and my house where attitudes toward law and order and decency and morality are first implanted in the minds and hearts of the young.

Today we look about us and see an attitude, a destructive attitude, which most Americans admit exists and about which many are concerned. A hard-core few have promoted this attitude until it is rapidly becoming a way of life. Many call it a social revolution, the beginning of a new America. It is approved and promoted by the liberal intellectuals and identified as a permissiveness which, I am persuaded, will eventually destroy constitutional government and enslave the very people who are its strongest advocates.

My friend, how is that for insight and for foresight? The destructive forces to which brother Cope referred are no less obvious today than in 1973. Furthermore, they wield far more power today. May the Good Lord hasten the day when the lessons of history are learned and respected.

January 1977

If my memory has not failed me, it was this month in 1974, that I received, by mail, a copy of *Falth Magazine*. This magazine was suppose to be a satirical parody of *Truth Magazine*, its editor and some of its writers. As far as I was concerned, it was an attack, an effort to destroy. The late Cecil Willis, then editor of *Truth Magazine*, had this to say, “It constitutes the lowest smear attack I have ever seen in twenty years of following religious journalism” (*Truth Magazine* [3-7-74]). I doubt that many could be found that would disagree with brother Willis’ evaluation. Shortly after that I moved to the St. Louis area; I soon found that I was neighbor to one of the perpetrators of this unholy deed. Such effort did show just how far some would go in an effort to ruin the influence of

those who opposed unscriptural practices. Brother Willis further remarked, “The *Falth Magazine* is filled with lies and character assassinations from beginning to end. I never have read the rule which said that God gave satirists the right to lie, with impunity.”

To brother Willis’ comments on this matter, I offer a resounding “Amen”! However, I must notice that the same type of thing continues to happen even today. No, it is not put in the form of a magazine, though some magazines participate; yet, character assassination and/or lying is in common use by those who have their teaching or practice questioned. Do brethren actually think that they can get to heaven while practicing such degrading activities?

April 28, 1977

Interesting to me, at least, was an article written by brother Mike Willis (*Truth Magazine* [4-28-77]), on the topic, “The Americans’ Problem of Pornography.” After commenting on the efforts to define “pornography” and the difficulty involved, brother Willis quoted the law, passed by congress, attempting to define and legislate on the subject. In spite of the law quoted, it was noted that the problems still existed.

Under a sub-heading of “Obscenity and the Christian” brother Willis says, “Whereas obscenity is a sticky legal problem, it poses no such dilemma to the Christian. The Christian is the man who is totally committed to following the legislation of Jesus Christ. He is committed to following what the New Testament teaches regarding such matters. Whereas moral relativists might be without foundation determining what is obscene, the one who clings to the Bible as the revealed word of God has something by which he can measure what is and what is not obscene.” Brother Willis then *offers* the following passages that will assist a Christian in such determination: Matthew 5:28; Galatians 5:19; Colossians 3:5-6; Philippians 4:8; and Matthew 15:18-20.

A part of brother Willis’ conclusion reads, “Similarly, the world is in turmoil regarding pornography with psychologists and lawyers revealing divergent opinions on the subject. But, while the world wrestles over which course it is going to take, the Christian knows in which path he should walk. God has revealed that to him. He knows no uncertainty for he knows that God condemns the publisher, marketer, and reader of pornography.” The “stage” may have changed, but the “scene” is still the same today. It is so sad to witness a fellow-Christian involved in such ungodly, soul-condemning activity which pornography shows itself to be.

April 28, 1977

There has been, off and on, considerable discussion of Hebrews 10:25, and its application to the worship of

the Christian. At the time of the above date brother Larry Hafley was writing a question and answer column for *Truth Magazine*. One question which came to him was concerning the application of Hebrews 10:25. Space does not permit me to give all of brother Hafley’s answer, but I do wish to give some of it. First, brother Hafley very ably pointed out the difference in “assembling” and “assemblies,” showing that it was the “assembling” that was being forsaken. Then, he says, “Admittedly, the context, as cited by our brother, is to be considered, but let us note all the context. Hebrews 10:23 says, ‘Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.’ Granting our brother his assumptions, we conclude that missing an occasional service is the beginning of wavering and apostasy. We are not to abandon completely, but neither are we to waver. So, if verses 26 and 29 do not forbid purposeful non-attendance, then verse 23 does.

“Our brother’s conclusion is, ‘it involves quitting with no intention of coming back.’ However, this is prohibited by the fact that the forsaking was a frequent habit of some. If the forsaking was ‘quitting with no intentions of coming back,’ how could the writer say, ‘as the manner of some is?’ It is like the man who said, ‘it’s easy to quit smoking. I’ve done it a hundred times!’”

“The exhortation was the thing saints received when they assembled, but when they forsook the act of assembling, they did not exhort nor receive exhortation in the assembly which was needed in view of the day approaching. . . .”

August 1, 1977

On this date, brother Truman Smith had an article in the *Gospel Guardian* concerning “Women Preachers.” Brother Smith mentioned several sources, from which it appeared that some were trying to ease women preachers into the denominations and in some of the Lord’s congregations. I quote a small portion of his article, “But, why should any of our brethren even be having such problems in the first place? Don’t kid yourself! Some of the brethren have basically the same attitude as the denominationalists. In reality, there is no difference between the two attitudes! The denominations have abandoned the word of God as their guide; but, just so, when our liberal brethren say, ‘We don’t have to have Bible authority for everything we do,’ they also have abandoned the word of God as a complete guide. With this attitude toward the Scriptures, what is there to keep them from allowing women to be preachers among them?”

The above mentioned article was written almost twenty-eight years ago. Anyone having kept himself informed on such matters, will know that many liberal congregations are already using women in various aspects of the worship services. They insist, however, that they will not put women in the pulpit. A few years back they were opposed

New Dress Code For Pumphrey Junior High

Heath Rogers

This week's newspaper (*Jackson County Herald Tribune*, Edna, Texas [8/3/05]) contained an article that announced a dress code change for students at Pumphrey Junior High. It stated that "Girls dresses and skirts should not be more than four inches above the top of the knee. . . . Capri and Bermuda-type shorts are acceptable. These are defined as shorts that touch or fall below the knee. No other shorts are acceptable. Shirts must cover the midriff. . . . If you can see your waist area, this shirt is inappropriate. Also, low cut garments are not allowed. Cleavage should not be visible at anytime. Shirts and sweaters that fall on the edge of the shoulder are prohibited. . . . Tank tops and tops with spaghetti straps are also not allowed unless worn with a crew neck type T-shirt underneath. Halter tops are not allowed." For boys, "all shirts must have sleeves and oversized pants are prohibited. Baggy pants are defined as any pant or jean that falls below the waistline. Any time an undergarment is visible, the student is out of compliance. . . ."

I called the school's principal, Demetric Wells, on Friday. In that conversation I was told that the reason for this new policy was because last year some "girls were too provocative in their dress" and there was a problem with "guys with their underwear showing." He went on to say that this provocative dress was a "distraction" and that he was responsible for maintaining "an environment where kids can learn." I asked

him if there was a connection between this kind of dress and sexual activity. He assured me that he had not witnessed any sexual activity on campus, but did not deny that such was taking place elsewhere. He told me that he believed there would be less sexual activity if the girls were "not inviting those thoughts or ideas" with their dress. Both he, and superintendent Bob Wells, assured me that they have already received complaints about this policy. I told them that I was not surprised.

The frustrating thing is that here we have secular educators making the same kinds of arguments about dress that the elders, my predecessors, and myself have made for several years. Immodest dress is "provocative" and such is a "distraction." It is just as much a distraction in worship as it is in public school. When preachers stand before God's people and insist that certain parts of the body need to be covered, we are accused of being legalistic, drawing lines that the Bible doesn't draw, and binding things upon the brethren. I wonder where this principal got the right to "draw lines" and say what is acceptable and unacceptable? I will tell you where—common sense. It's sad when brethren deny what some people of the world are willing to admit about immodest dress.

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to using women in song leading, making announcements, waiting on the Lord's table, and in other activities. But, the present witnesses them being used in all those activities! So, we ask how long will it be before they have women in the pulpit. More to the point, how long will it be before the conservatives follow this same path?

October, 1980

Under this date, brother Connie Adams had an editorial in *Searching the Scriptures* under the heading, "Crossroads in the News." Brother Adams offers some brief information on the subject, pointing out the extreme liberalism in the Crossroads Church of Christ in Gainesville, Florida, where Crossroadism originated. Brother Adams observed, "We are somewhat dismayed to find the editor of *Vanguard* among the defenders of Crossroads." In this editorial brother

Adams promised some additional articles on the subject by brother H.E. Phillips, who had previously lived and preached in the Gainesville area.

Three years later (August 1983), brother Eugene Britnell, in *The Sower*, devoted a complete issue to "Crossroad Conflict Rages." Brother Britnell not only pointed out the basic tenants of the Crossroad philosophy, but plainly showed some of the many errors involved. I understand the system to have developed into a "cult," with its "total commitment" idea, its "soul talks," and "prayer partners," along with its methods of discipline—challenging, shunning, and pruning. We are not hearing much about this philosophy currently, but be not deceived—it is a "sleeper."

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The Prodigal Father

David Charles Morrison, Jr.

One of the most beloved parables of our Lord is found in Luke 15, commonly referred to as “the prodigal son.”

And He said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living (Luke 15:11-13).

The son came to himself and the parable ends with the father receiving back his son. There are many lessons to be gained from this parable. The tragic circumstances of going into a far country, the wastefulness, and the terrible consequences are the focus of our short study.

“Prodigal” simply refers to the concept of wastefulness. Someone who is a squanderer, a waster, a user of one’s means in a reckless way. The home and the family are in serious trouble today. There are many sons and daughters who could be referred to as “prodigals.” I want us to think about the fathers who are “prodigal” fathers. That is, they are wasting their influence, they are squandering their love, and they are sacrificing their families on the altars of carelessness and indifference!

Whatever Happened To Dad?

Instead of being the spiritual head of the family (Eph. 5:23-25) and raising his children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), fathers are busy chasing the dollar.

What is a father? If we were to ask the child who is fortunate enough to still have a father figure around, what would he say? Most would say he is the “provider.” He brings home the bacon. A father provides a living for his family. “But if any provide not for his own, and specially

they of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8).

Providing for the family is part of the God-given responsibilities of fatherhood. A man must provide for his family, but is that all? Does fatherhood stop there? Many men seem to think that it does. They are sadly mistaken.

Provide An Example

The man who desires to serve God, provides much more than finances to his family. He must provide an example. There is nothing more powerful over the lives of a man’s children than his godly character. They must see Christ living in their father. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23). Fathers must realize they are the pattern for their children. I have two young sons. How will they treat their wives one day? How will they raise their children? Now think about the force of this verse. How will they view Christ’s love for the church?



What a tremendous blessing our God sets before husbands and fathers. Your children will learn much from your actions. Are you wasting your influence?

Provide Training

What is a father? He must provide training for his children. “And thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:7). The word “teach” in the Hebrew means to “pierce, to point, to sharpen.” “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). God says, the father is to take the “lead” in the training of the children. Too many fathers ignore this altogether or leave it in the hands of the mother. She is his “help meet” and as such is

a vital part of the effort, but again, the father is a “prodigal” if he fails to take the lead in training his children.

Provide Discipline

Fathers are responsible for providing a godly example and training for their children. The father is also to provide discipline in the home. Ephesians 6:4, “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” One translation reads, “Give them the instruction and correction which belong to Christian upbringing.”

Many have the idea that the Bible is outdated and archaic when it comes to discipline. Spanking a child has been replaced with “talking” to them. I purchased a home once in which the father took this modernistic view. He used to tell his friends and neighbors, “I do not want to stifle the children’s creativity.” Creative—they certainly were. We replaced every window in the home and had to repair and repaint every wall. The windows were all broken from the inside! How is that for creativity? The neighbors said the father spent his time in the garage.

“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Prov. 13:24). Why is this the case? “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Prov. 22:15).

When a child refuses to listen to the instruction of his father, the father must turn up the heat on one end to melt the wax in the ears on the other end! Proverbs 23:13-14, “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with a rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from hell.” Some will read this and think it is referring to “cold hearted brutality.” That is just not the case. The language does at first sound rather harsh, but the Hebrew word for “beat” does not suggest the intensity or the duration we might imagine from our usage. The word is literally, “to strive.” The intent is to “help” not harm. The Bible nowhere sanctions abuse!!

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.” Parents, discipline is absolutely essential to the rearing of your children. However, fathers especially, need to be careful of “provoking wrath” in their children. “Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Col. 3:21). Fathers, this is a caution to us about the potential of “endless petty correction” that leads to discouragement.

Bringing our children up in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” requires great care and tremendous effort. “Properly administered discipline” will not stifle a child’s creativity, it won’t create frustration, and it won’t make them sadists!

Marshall Keeble once said, “In this age of automatic devices, about the only thing not controlled by the switch is the child.”

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame (Prov. 29:15).

A Child is Better “Unborn” Than “Untrained”

Fathers are responsible for providing a godly example, training for their children and discipline. Ephesians 6:4: “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged (Col. 3:21).

There are fathers who are recklessly wasting their “substance” when it comes to raising their children. They are just too busy to be bothered with training, discipline, and companionship. They are:

Negligent With Their Influence

Fathers do you recognize that the “practice of religion” is shaped by your actions? Children can say, “Dad, you are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read by all men” (read 2 Cor. 3:2). You are the example of “how to” for your children. The story is told of little Gene, who was asked if he wanted to go to heaven. “No,” he said, “I want to go to hell with daddy.” Children may carry the beliefs of the mother, but they often practice religion like their dads.

Indifferent to Needs

Dads, it’s not what you have, it’s what you do that impresses a child. I was teaching a teenage class once. The teenagers did not want for anything materially. When I asked them what they wanted most from their parents, they unanimously agreed, “We just want them!”

Wasting Opportunities

Dads, we have the power to make something out of our children. The Jew understood this principle. “Train up a child in the way that he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). The Jewish father understood “training” to be all inclusive. What are the child’s interests? What his their capabilities? What trade or career would be most suited to him? It includes the spiritual, but it is not limited to that. This means a father will have to be really “involved” with his children. He will have to get to know them.

Many are saying, “I don’t have that kind of time.” I am reminded of the lesson of King Ahab in 1 Kings 20:40, “As thy servant was busy here and there, behold, he was gone.” How many parents could say the same of their children?

How Does God See Us?

Lewis Willis

Through the prophet Isaiah, God said of ancient Israel, *“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider”* (Isa. 1:3). I don’t know what you think when you read this rebuke, but my thought is one of utter sadness. The Holy Spirit had Isaiah declare that Israel, in its relationship to God, was less responsive than dumb animals are to their owners! These people were the chosen of God! It is a shameful embarrassment that these blessed people were so thoughtless toward our great God!

But, wait a minute! Is it possible? Could the same thing be said of us? If we are Christians, we are children of God (Gal. 2:26). As such, we belong to God (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Are we aware of this? Do we conduct ourselves as he would have us do?

Before we too harshly condemn the old nation of Israel, we must look at ourselves to determine if we are making the same sad mistake as they made. Isaiah said the Jews refused to consider what they were doing. Could we be as thoughtless as they?

It is a question of priorities for most fathers. The younger you start, the better the results. It is easy to bend the tender oak or mold the new clay. Soon, the clay will harden and the oak will be solid and all opportunities are lost.

A Squanderer of Love

It is better to make a life than a living! It takes genuine care, concern, involvement, and love to raise and nurture children as God directs. Children do not need or expect the “perfect” father. They need a dad who is there for them. One who is understanding and open to their needs. Children need to feel wanted, loved, and valued. “I have never seen a delinquent who had a strong relationship with his father” (Roul Tunly, *Kids, Chaos and Crime*).

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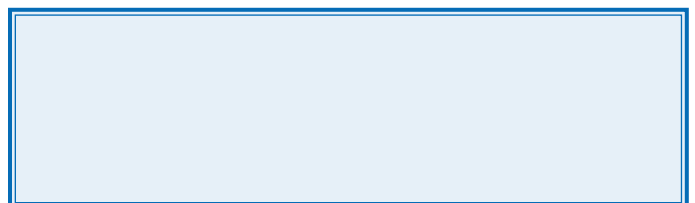
Today we need to consider the cost of our redemption. Jesus died at Calvary to redeem us from our sins. Paul said, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Rom. 5:8-9). Do we “consider” this truth at work, at home, and at play? Jesus gave his life that we might be saved. He tells us to remember this price.

We need to consider the pit of sin, out of which he saved us. Sin brings an awful fate and end. The “wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Our hearts should be filled with thanksgiving that Jesus saved us from death. Israel forgot they had been saved from captivity in Egypt and in Babylon. Too many Christians today seem to forget that they have been saved from the punishment of Hell by the Savior. Too many “will not consider.”

We must always remember that we are not our own. Through redemption, we were bought with the price of the blood of Christ. The apostle Paul said, “ye are not your own.” In consequence of this fact, Paul admonished: “. . . glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We simply must do as God directs us, no matter what he requires. We belong to him!

Refusing to “consider” may well be descriptive of worldly, ungodly people; indeed, it is! But, let it never be said of the church, that we will not “consider.” Mere talk and repetitive action can never be a substitute for solemn heart-driven obedience to God. We must consider, and meditate until the fire of loving obedience burns within. Only then will we please God.

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The Unfolding of God's Plan (2)

Bob Waldron

Israel left Egypt as a vast multitude of untrained slaves. God molded, taught, and reshaped the nation during the forty years of wilderness wandering under Moses. Joshua led an enthusiastic, conquering nation into Canaan, the promised land.

Joshua became the leader in Moses' stead and led the people across the Jordan River to conquer the land. They marched around Jericho by faith, and God caused those mighty walls to fall. Joshua and his army found victory on every hand, and, within a very few years, the whole land was conquered and divided among the tribes.

Two of the promises made to Abraham have been fulfilled by this time. Abraham's descendants have indeed become a *nation*, and God has led them to victory in gaining the *land* (Josh. 21:43-45). Only the spiritual promise was still lacking. God was still gradually unfolding his plan for mankind to learn, but the "fullness of the times" had not yet come.

The Israelites were faithful to God under the leadership of Joshua and remained so as long as the elders who had served with him lived. But man is weak. As soon as the first victories were over, and each tribe received its portion of land, the soldiers grew lax. They did not drive out the remaining pockets of Canaanites, as God had commanded them. When they failed, God left the Canaanites to prove Israel to see if the nation would be faithful (Judg. 2:3). Israel failed the test. Very little time passed before they turned from God to the idols of their neighbors.

The next period of Israelite history is one of cycles. There was no one

single leader during these 400 or so years as there had been under Moses and Joshua. The people would turn to idols; God would allow an enemy to oppress them; they would repent and cry to God for help; then God would raise a judge or deliverer.

There were fifteen such judges. There was Ehud, who killed Eglon king of Moab and led the people to throw off Moabite oppression. There was Deborah, who went with Barak the general to fight against Sisera and the Canaanites. There was Gideon, who defeated the numberless host of Midianites with his tiny army of 300. There was Jephthah, who vowed to sacrifice the first thing which came from his house if he were successful in battle. There was Samson to whom God gave superhuman strength as he served as a one man army against the Philistines.

Our first glance at the period would indicate it was a time of constant warfare. This is disproved, however, by such verses as Judges 3:11, 30, which say the land had "rest forty years" or the land had "rest eighty years."

The little story of Ruth occurs during the period of the Judges. It is a delightful story of a Moabite girl who left her home to follow her mother-in-law to the land of Israel. There she married Boaz, a near kinsman of her dead husband. Is it merely a human interest story, however? There were other virtuous young ladies in Israel.

There were other happy homes. Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed. He had a son named Jesse, who had a son named David, who had a descendant named Jesus. Ruth was a link in the eternal plan of God!

Eli was priest and judge the day a woman named Hannah prayed earnestly for a son. God granted her wish, and Samuel was born. Hannah dedicated him to God as soon as he was old enough to help Eli around the tabernacle. Samuel is truly one of the names to be added to the list of great characters in the Bible. He judged Israel during a long life span.

When Samuel was old, the people begged for a king. Samuel was grieved, but God told him to give them their king. They had rejected God as their king rather than Samuel as their judge. Under God's direction, the young man Saul of the tribe of Benjamin was anointed. Saul was very humble at first, but pride became the ruling attitude of his life. He failed to obey God until finally God rejected his family as the ruling family.

God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a son of Jesse as king. Seven of Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, and God turned down each one. Finally the youth David was called from the field and anointed. David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). There are about 130 chapters in the Bible either relating the history of David or recording the Psalms he wrote. He was human and made mistakes just as other great men have done. Perhaps we are most impressed with his righteousness as we read the psalm of penitence he wrote after his sin with Bathsheba (see Ps. 51).

David wanted to build a temple for God, but God sent Nathan the prophet to tell him that he could not do so because he was a man of war. Instead God promised to let his son build the house. God then promised to establish David's throne forever. If his descendants sinned, God would chasten them

with "the rod of men," but he would never remove his mercy from the line of David as he had from Saul (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 1 Chron. 17:11-14).

By this point, God has unfolded this much of his plan: One will triumph over Satan. He will bless all families of the earth. This One will come through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob, through Judah, and through David. He will reign on the throne of David forever (Gen. 3:15; 12:1-3; 26:3-4; 28:13-14; 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:12-16).

Before David died, he proclaimed his son Solomon king. God appeared to the young king Solomon and told him to ask what he would. Solomon asked for wisdom, so God was pleased and granted him wisdom far above others. In addition, God gave him riches, honor, peace, and long life, if he lived faithfully. Solomon did build the temple as God had promised. The fame of his wisdom and wealth spread abroad. He wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. The nation of Israel reached its greatest size during his reign. Unfortunately, he was led away from God by his many wives.

The kingdom was in distress by the time Solomon died. He had overburdened the people with taxes and they wanted relief. When Rehoboam his son became king, the ten northern tribes rebelled because Rehoboam would not listen to their pleas for relief. Jeroboam became king over the northern portion of the land, which retained the name Israel, as the nation had always been called. Rehoboam was left with only two tribes in the south, and he called his little kingdom Judah.

The history of the Israelite nation had ended another phase. Israel left Egypt as a vast multitude of untrained slaves. God molded, taught, and reshaped the nation during the forty years of wilderness wandering under Moses. Joshua led an enthusiastic,

conquering nation into Canaan, the promised land. Then followed the period of judges when each man "did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). The people wanted a king and worked together under Saul, David, and Solomon during the period called the United Kingdom. Now the kingdom has divided into two small, sometimes warring, kingdoms. From this point through the rest of the Old Testament, the people fall farther and farther away from God.

Jeroboam of the northern kingdom did not want his subjects returning to the temple at Jerusalem. He established his own system of worship: new gods, new priests, new feast days, new laws. There was never a righteous king in Israel. The dynasty changed nine times before the kingdom fell! Ahab, with his wicked wife Jezebel, stands out as one of the most wicked kings of the period. Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, and other prophets were sent by God to warn Israel of impending doom. Again space does not permit us to go into detail. Finally, God would tolerate their wickedness no longer. In 721 B.C. God allowed the Assyrian army to overthrow Samaria, the capital of Israel. The people were led away captives, and foreigners were brought in to fill the land. These foreigners intermarried with the low class Israelites left in the land and became the hated mixed race later called the Samaritans.

After this, the southern kingdom of Judah continued, but they, too, drifted away from God. Their descent downward was not as fast as Israel's, however, because they did have some good kings such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, and Josiah. There is no darker period in Israelite history than the divided kingdom. Finally, God's patience was exhausted with Judah also (2 Chron. 36:15-16). In 606 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon led the first captives away from Jerusalem. He returned for more captives in 597 B.C., and finally destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Only the

poorest of the land were left, and even they fled to Egypt within a few months.

Has God forgotten his plan? Is it all over? Never for one moment! God's chosen people must be punished, but he did not allow man's weaknesses to destroy his eternal purpose.

Do you remember the promise to David that the royal line would remain in his family (2 Sam. 7:11-16)? The ruling family changed nine times in Israel, but never once in Judah. God's providence supplied a direct descendant in each generation. On one occasion, Athaliah the daughter of Ahab tried to destroy all the royal seed and usurp the throne (2 Kings 11:1-4). The baby Joash was hidden by Jehoida the priest for six years before he was brought to the throne. Another time, an enemy destroyed all the royal line, except for one son (2 Chron. 21:16-17). It was no accident that one was left each time to take his place on David's throne. These kings were important links in the plan of God.

The same passage that promised the royal line would remain in David's family also warned that his descendants would be punished if they were wicked. The punishment that came to the house of Judah was as much a part of God's plan as the blessings they could have had if they had remained faithful.

The writings of the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel tell of the captivity. Trained to serve in the court of the kings, Daniel held positions of high authority under Nebuchadnezzar, and then under Darius of the Medes and Persians. Ezekiel lived among the common people and gives us an insight into their lives during the period.



Jeremiah the prophet had foretold the captivity would last for seventy years (Jer. 25:11). Sure enough, the first captives had been taken in 606 B.C. In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians. King Cyrus decreed that all captive people might return to their original homes. Thus, in 536 B.C., exactly seventy years after the first captives had been taken from Judah, a group of Jews started for their homeland. Zerubbabel led this first group. Their main objective was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

As is usual in any worthwhile task, the people immediately faced opposition. The neighboring Samaritans interfered, and finally succeeded in stopping the work on the temple. For sixteen years nothing was done. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged the people to resume their work. The temple was finally completed, but the people did not remain faithful to God.

Ezra brought another group back to Jerusalem and set about to restore the worship of the people (458 B.C.). Not much later, Nehemiah learned that the city was still in distress. He received permission from the king of Persia to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He and the people worked hard and completed the huge task in only 52 days. Nehemiah and Ezra worked together to persuade the people to put away their foreign wives and to return to faithfulness to God.

The percentage of Jews who returned to their native land was actually small. By this time there were Jews scattered all over the then known world. God did not forget his people wherever they were living. The book of Esther shows how God could exert his providence even in the court of a Persian king in order to save his people.

The prophet Amos had predicted that a day of famine would come, not of food or water, but rather a famine of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11). That time came following Malachi. Malachi prophesied about the same time as Nehemiah and Ezra.

Perhaps we get our clearest picture of the spiritual condition of the people during this period from Malachi's writings. They went through a form of worship, but their hearts were not in it. Malachi closes his book by saying there would come one in the style of Elijah to prepare the way "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5).

The prophets had foretold additional information about this special One who was to come, but he was still a shadow figure at this point.

Now complete silence. The curtain has fallen upon the divine stage, and four hundred years pass with no recorded communication from God. Has he changed his mind? Has his purpose been forgotten?

Babylon fell before the Old Testament closed. The Medo-Persian empire fell about one hundred years after Malachi's book was written. Alexander the Great led the Greeks as they conquered the world. Years passed, and Rome, the fourth world empire since Daniel's day, rose to power. God's prophecy had been that, in the days of this empire, he would establish his kingdom which would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). "The fullness of the times" had come (see Gal. 4:4).

The curtain rises again to find an old priest named Zachariah serving in the temple. Suddenly, the angel Gabriel stood before him—the first communication from God since Malachi. Zachariah received the news that he was to be the father of John, the forerunner who was predicted by Malachi.

Some six months later the same angel appeared to a young virgin named Mary. He told her she would have a child, conceived of the Holy Spirit. This would be Jesus, the Savior; Immanuel, God with us; Christ, the anointed one; the Word become flesh to dwell among men.

It is this One—the Divine Son of God—who had come to sum up all the glorious plan of God. He is the One who fulfills the promises and prophecies. He is the One who offered the sacrifice of death for sin so that man might live in spite of his weaknesses. He is the One who gave the perfect law of liberty that man might live a new life filled with hope. He is the One who is the fullness of the whole Bible. There would be no Bible, no plan, no hope for man without this Jesus.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written that we might understand and believe that this Jesus fits every qualification ever set by God to be the Messiah. He was indeed the "Christ, the Son of the Living God." He lived a perfect life to show man the life that is in God. He died to pay the price for sin and was raised to be the first fruits of them that sleep. He was crowned in heaven itself to reign on David's throne at the right hand of God.

Just before Jesus went back to heaven, he told his disciples to "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The word "gospel" literally means "good news." In other words, Jesus was telling his disciples to go spread the good news. Go tell the world that the Promised One has come. Go tell every person there is hope for forgiveness, there is hope for a home in heaven. Go tell the world that man may be reconciled with God. Go tell the world that God's plan for redemption has been revealed.

The apostles were given the Holy Spirit to guide them as they went throughout the world to tell people of this glorious plan of God. The book of Acts gives us a glimpse of the type work that was done.

By the end of the first century, the new law, the law of Christ, had been fully revealed and written for mankind to read, understand, and accept (Eph. 3:1-12). The laws and rules were given to guide us in shaping our lives to be like Christ, to partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

The prophets of the Old Testament wanted to see the end of the picture (1 Pet. 1:10-12). We have it all revealed now in Christ. People of this era are heirs of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Acts 3:24-25). There is no other spiritual blessing we could ask.

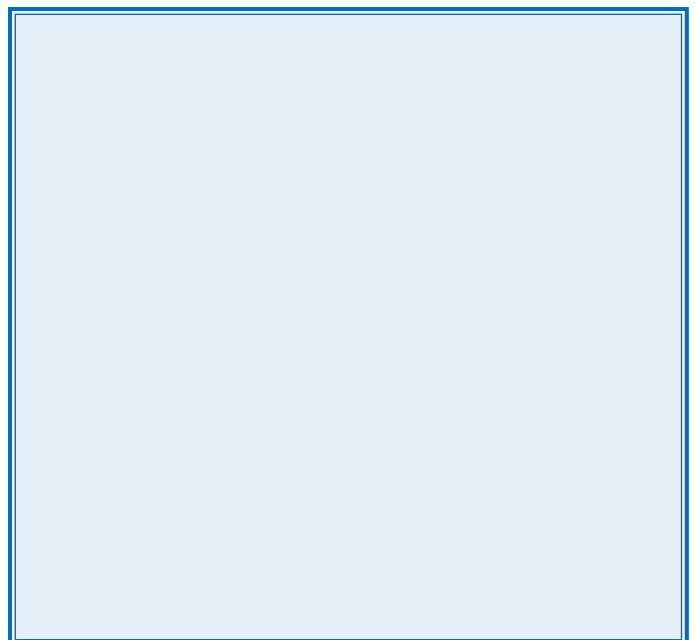
The glorious, eternal plan of God is ready for us to accept. It is our choice. We may accept its terms and inherit the blessings, or we may reject its terms and be lost and without hope in the world. Life on earth is a short trial period to see which men may live in heaven with God for eternity.

The New Testament closes with a book of victory. Revelation foretells the final victory of Christ over Satan at the judgment day.

The entire Bible is the story of Christ, the fullness of the scheme of redemption!

Yes, *I must* accept God's terms. I must believe his word. I must repent of my sins, I must confess his name before men, and I must be baptized to become a child of God. Then, I must live the rest of my life imitating the nature of Christ to the best of my ability. But would it not be more appropriate to say *I am allowed to meet God's terms?*

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Softness in Preaching and Living

Kurt G. Jones

Within the Lord's church today, as in other times, there are many dangers that pose a threat to the work of faithful Christians. One of those threats is the softness in preaching, and the application of that preaching to everyday life. The world has a tendency to follow the path of least resistance, and do as little as possible. They want responsibility to be borne upon the shoulders of others. Sadly, this attitude has made its way into the Lord's kingdom, and is prevalent in some places. Let us consider this problem.

This is not a new problem. Actually, it is as old as God's dealings with man. Isaiah records, "That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: Which say to the seers, See not: and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isa. 30:9-10). Even the children of Israel wanted to hear "smooth things and deceits." They desired to hear things that would make them feel comfortable. They wanted to hear the things that would allow them to remain in sin, and feel good about it. People have never liked to be rebuked, or have their sins pointed out. Jesus said, "And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:19-20). It is a clear and evident fact that those who want to practice sin want to keep it hidden. Whether they are involved in worldliness, immorality, or religious error, they do not want their wickedness exposed.

Today, this same desire to seek after soft preaching and pass over sin is ever present among the Lord's people. Some will preach "feel-good" sermons, or sermons that do not condemn sin. Some will preach the truth, but will make no direct application. This is the attitude that says, "Preach Christ, and leave others alone." Yet, there are still some who will preach the truth but will avoid many subjects, because they are controversial or may offend someone. Paul exhorted, "Preach the word! Be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Preach it when

they want to hear it and also when they do not. Jesus, in his ministry, gave examples that he was willing to preach the truth, and condemn sin, where he found it (cf. Matt. 23; John 6:60-68). We need to know that the condition of the church depends, largely, upon the preaching that is done (cf. Hos. 4:9; 2 John 9-11). There needs to be preaching that is uplifting, but also preaching that points out and condemns sin in a very specific way. Let us consider the preaching and stand for the truth of God (Eph. 4:13-16).

This softness in preaching is in league with the softness in living. In fact, they share a symbiotic relationship where each breeds and upholds the other. The soft preaching provides a sense of "ease" for the hearers. The Lord said, through the prophet Amos, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1). There are many who do not want their life as a Christian to inconvenience them in any way. They want to continue in their wickedness and still be viewed as a Christian. This is not so with the Lord! Jesus said, "If any man would come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). He later asks the question, "... what would a man give for his soul" (Matt. 16:26). Is soft living worth your soul? One who would be a child of God must be willing to forgo his own desires, and follow the Lord if he is to be saved in the Day of Judgment (cf. Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The Lord's church needs to recognize these alarming trends and stand up for the truth. The pulpits ought to ring forth the gospel of Christ which causes the salvation of men's souls (cf. Rom. 1:16)! Elders and faithful brethren ought not to tolerate weak, soft, applicationless preaching, but should demand the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) in all of its divine entirety. Christians ought to give up those things that cause them to sin and stumble, that cause them to live worldly lives, and "be even more diligent to make (their) call and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). The Lord's people need to return to the Bible, and leave the soft preaching and living behind them. Children of God need to stand for the truth of God in every facet of life.

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Should We Celebrate Christmas?

David Dann

With great concern the apostle Paul writes to the churches of Galatia saying, “You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (Gal. 4:10-11). There is no doubt that Paul here refers to the unauthorized religious observance of certain days or seasons by these Christians. In other words, the Galatians were guilty of formulating their own doctrines concerning the days, months, seasons, and years to which they would attach a special mandatory religious significance rather than simply seeking to fulfill the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

We would certainly want to avoid following after the example of the Galatians in this respect. For this reason, we must examine ourselves and take a closer look at whether or not we have fallen into the same condemned practice for which Paul rebuked them. Each year individuals, nations, and religious groups around the world engage in the celebration of what is called “Christmas.” The intent of this article is to examine Christmas to the extent that we may know whether or not Christians can in good conscience participate in a celebration of such a day or season. Should we celebrate Christmas, or would we be falling into the same error as the Galatians by doing so?

What is Christmas?

1. Christmas is an annual religious observance of the birth of Christ. The Christmas celebration was brought into existence as an official religious holy day by the Catholic bishop of Rome, Liberius, in A.D. 354. Therefore, it is a religious tradition rooted in the decrees of the Roman Catholic Church rather than a practice sanctioned by Scripture. December 25 was reportedly selected as the day of observance in order to offset the celebration of the pagan Roman sun god which took place on the same day. As Roman Catholicism grew so did the religious celebration of Christmas as Christ’s birth. Eventually, the celebration of this holy day was adopted by the various Protestant denominations that are offshoots of Catholicism. It continues to be viewed as a religious commemoration of the birth of Jesus each year by most denominations.

2. Christmas is also a national secular holiday. While the English word “holiday” is a shortened form of “holy day,” the word “holiday” has come to simply refer to a day on which one does not have to work, or a vacation. In our culture we have many such national holidays upon which people are freed from work in order to spend time with family and loved ones. Such national holidays include Thanksgiving, Labor Day, New Year’s Day, and Christmas. To many, Christmas is a secular national holiday providing time for family activities and having no more religious significance than Labor Day.

Should We Celebrate Christmas As An Observance of the Birth Of Christ?

1. Religious traditions must be approved by Scripture. The word “tradition” is not necessarily a bad word. In fact, Paul refers to the apostolic teaching of the gospel as “the tradition” (2 Thess. 3:6). By definition a tradition is nothing more than an established practice or custom. Even religious traditions are perfectly right if they are in accord with the teaching of God’s word. For example the New Testament teaches that Christians are to worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). We have made it our tradition to do so on Sunday morning and Sunday evening. It is right for us to have such a tradition because it is necessary in order to carry out God’s expressed will.

2. The religious traditions associated with Christmas did not originate with God’s word. While there are harmless and even helpful traditions, there are also unlawful traditions. The Bible refers to these unlawful religious observances as traditions of men (Col. 2:8; Mark 7:6-8). Such traditions stand condemned as additions to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). The celebration of Christmas as the birth of Christ is full of such traditions of men. These include the supposed date of Christ’s birth, nativity scenes, the singing of Christmas carols, and the very notion that the church ought to engage in such a celebration when Scripture nowhere even hints at it. But isn’t it okay since it is all done to glorify the Lord? No. Something must first

be according to the revealed will of God before it can be done to his glory (Matt. 7:21-23).

Should We Celebrate Christmas As a National Holiday?

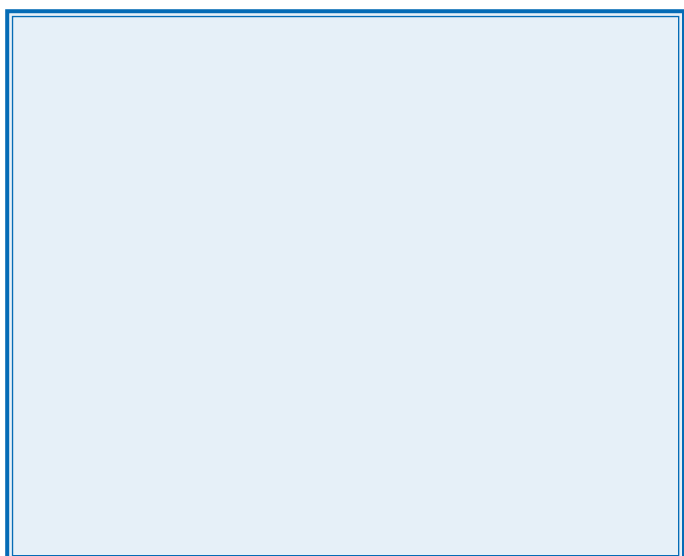
1. Do we have authority to engage in the non-religious traditions surrounding Christmas? While we do not have scriptural authority to engage in the religious traditions surrounding Christmas, there are many non-religious traditions that are approved by God. We have authority to give gifts to one another (Luke 11:13; Acts 20:35; Eph. 4:28). We have authority to take time off work (1 Cor. 9:6). We find general authority in Scripture to spend time with family, eat, and do all of the other non-religious activities that are associated with the Christmas holiday tradition.

2. What if someone cannot celebrate Christmas with a clear conscience? A Christian who has been used to the idea of celebrating Christmas as a religious holy day may not be able to simply celebrate it as a national holiday without attaching such a significance to it. If that is the case, then he should not celebrate it at all, for to do so would be to act against his own conscience (Rom. 14:22-23). However, he must also guard against condemning those who are able to celebrate it non-religiously and in good conscience.

Conclusion

We can be certain that if God intended for the church to celebrate Christ's birth he would have instructed us as to how to do so. While this is understood, we need to be able to distinguish between engaging in erroneous denominational religious practices and sharing a holiday with our families each December. The former is condemned while the latter is approved (2 John 9).

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“Christians” continued from front page

so much the more as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). The Lord wants us to come together frequently. He knows the value of such gatherings, and if we are wise we shall acknowledge the spiritual benefits to be derived from our coming together to do those things which are mutually helpful. To forsake the assembling of ourselves together is to violate God's will.

To Teach and Be Taught

Paul's preaching in the assembly of the church at Troas (Acts 20:7) was not inappropriate. All of us need to grow in knowledge. The teaching efforts of the church should not be limited to the regular meetings; on the other hand, the teaching done in the assemblies is highly important. We should come together with an earnest desire to learn and to draw closer to God. What we are taught must be translated into action and application to be of real benefit.

To Keep Informed About the Lord's Work

When Paul and Barnabas had completed an extended preaching tour, they returned to Antioch of Syria, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God, “And when they had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27).

Frequently, statements are made in the meetings of the church about the work being done at home and abroad. Occasionally, a preacher being supported in another field will come to report on his work. We should be present to know what is taking place and how we might render assistance.

We Need Each Other

God does not expect us to live in isolation. We need the prayers of each other. We need the edification that comes from teaching and warning each other. We are instructed, therefore, to work together and to worship together. We have mutual responsibilities to fulfill. The local church is a team, and each member of that team has a place to fill. It is a sad day when someone decides to “go it alone.” The Lord is our chief source of strength, but we can provide stability, soundness, and steadiness for each other by assembling together for the purposes outlined in the New Testament.

Having set forth in this article eight reasons why Christians assemble together, those who profess to be Christians but do not assemble with others of like faith should ask themselves, “What good reasons are there for Christians not assembling together?”

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“Unity” continued from page 2

salem. When some tried to bind the practice of circumcision on the Gentiles, he refused to put up with it for one hour (Gal. 2:1-5). When brethren make their private opinions into divine law, binding what God has not bound, they have departed from the faith and substituted their opinions and judgments for the revealed word of God (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Unfortunately, there are some brethren who have not learned that there is any such category as “indifferent” that exists. Every personal belief that they hold is a matter of “the faith” and everyone who does not believe exactly as they do in reference to these matters has departed from the faith or gone liberal. Such brethren will admit that matters such as circumcision and eating meats are matters of indifference and can understand how these issues had to be handled in the first century. But, when you ask them, “What matters of personal conscience do you hold that might fall into the same category as eating meats and observing days?”, they cannot identify any of their personal convictions as matters of judgment. All of their opinions are matters of the faith, even though they are quite adept at identifying the personal opinions that others hold. A few men have taken the position that nothing they believe falls into the category of things in Romans 14, and in fact Romans 14 has virtually no application in the discussion of modern issues.

We recognize the damage that has been done to the cause of Christ by those who make essential matters into non-essential matters. The church has been damaged by those who want to make instrumental music in worship, the action and purpose of water baptism, the day to partake the Lord’s supper, the role of women in the church, and similar issues matters of indifference and personal judgment. Such teaching leads men into liberalism and ecumenism.

We must also recognize, however, that those who have bound where God did not bind have also torn asunder the body of Christ. There are those who have bound their personal judgments on such matters as the following:

- No-located preacher
- No uninspired literature
- One cup should be used in partaking the fruit of the vine
- No Sunday night communion
- If one partakes of the communion, all must partake of it
- Dividing into Bible classes
- Women teachers in children’s and ladies’ classes
- The head covering

Brethren have divided from each other and been unwilling to call on one another for prayer in such matters as these

because of their determination to make a matter of indifference into a matter of the faith.

To illustrate that these are matters of indifference, I take one example on which most of us would agree—the “no located preacher” example. The Lord commanded preachers to go into the world and preach the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). The Lord ordained that those who preach the gospel have the right to live of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:1-16). The Bible shows examples of men preaching at congregations for varying lengths of time. Paul stayed at Corinth for eighteen months (Acts 18:11) and at Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). Even though there were elders in the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17-32), Paul nevertheless sent Timothy to preach for this congregation (1 Tim. 1:3). Having established the authority for preachers to work with a congregation with or without elders for an indefinite length of time, we ask what command, example, or necessary inference imposes a length of time for which one may do the work of an evangelist in a given locality? That is a matter of human judgment and should never have been elevated to a matter of faith to divide brethren one from another. God did not teach that a preacher is limited in the number of years he may work with a congregation. However, some brethren believe that having a located preacher in a congregation that has elders is sinful. They begin to preach their private opinions, bind them as divine law, and withdraw their fellowship from every preacher and church which disagrees. As a result, the church splinters and divides.

On Divorce and Remarriage

What happened in the past is recurring and is having its divisive effect among brethren, particularly on the issues of divorce and individual collectivities. We acknowledge that the Scriptures reveal a body of doctrine on the subject of divorce. The gospel record contains Jesus’ teaching:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Matt.5:31-32).

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Matt.19:9).

And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (Mark 10:11-12).

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery (Luke 16:18).

These Scriptures emphasize that one man is to be joined to one woman for life. Any person who divorces and marries another is guilty of adultery. The Lord allows one exception to this rule—in the case of fornication. In that case, the innocent party may divorce the guilty party and marry another.

Here are some judgment matters that are being equated with divine revelation among us. Some are teaching that the innocent party in a divorce for fornication does not have the right of remarriage unless:

- He has “for fornication” on his legal papers
- He initiates the civil proceedings for the divorce
- He counter sues the guilty person in the event that the guilty party files civil divorce papers first
- He obtains the civil judgment (in the event that the judge awards the judgment to the guilty party, the innocent has no right to remarry)
- He makes a public statement to the church that he is putting away the guilty party for fornication (think about the situation this creates for the person who is not a Christian at the time the divorce occurs)
- He makes a statement to the church that he is putting away his mate for fornication before the judge issues his civil ruling
- He must know about the fornication and put away his wife for fornication before the civil papers are processed; should he learn about the fornication after the civil papers have been processed, he has no right of remarriage (for example, a person may suspect that an affair is going on but have no positive evidence until after the divorce papers have been processed)

This list can be extended quite a bit to accommodate the personal judgments that various ones among us have. What command, example, or necessary inference teaches me, for example, that a person loses his right to remarriage unless he initiates a counter suit against his guilty mate in the event that the fornicating mate starts a divorce proceeding against the innocent mate? What command, example, or necessary inference teaches me that, unless the innocent party makes some public statement to the elders before the judge’s gavel declares them divorced, the innocent party has no right of remarriage? One cannot read the New Testament passages on divorce and find an answer to these questions. Any answer one comes up with will be his human judgment drawn from those Scriptures, not the Scriptures themselves. However, some brother with a personal judgment about what he decides to label as “mental divorce” begins preaching his opinion, equating his opinion with divine law, and identifying as apostate every brother and church which disagrees with him. Meetings are canceled, churches are divided, and alienation separates those who are equally committed to teaching what Matthew 19:9 says—that one woman is joined to one man for life; that there

is but one cause for divorce that allows the innocent party to remarry; that the only person with the right to marriage is someone who has never before married, someone whose mate has passed away, and someone who has put away his guilty mate for fornication.

On Collectivities

The discussion of what individuals may do together in spiritual matters outside the local church recurred from time to time through the years. Daniel Sommer engaged in several debates in which he argued that the only collectivity which could teach God’s word is the local church. In the *Humble-Garrett Debate* (1954) and the two *Wallace-Ketcherside* debates (1952, 1953), these brethren condemned all schools operated by brethren as unscriptural collectivities for teaching God’s word. Despite their asserting in debate that schools had no right to exist because the only collectivity which could teach the Bible is the local church, both of these brethren published papers in which various writers pooled their resources to teach the gospel. Personal opinions were elevated to the level of divine law by those brethren who drew lines of fellowship over their opinions about collectivities.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a similar discussion occurred in which Florida College was the focal point. In 1974 Cecil Willis and Jesse Jenkins engaged in a public debate over this issue. Brother Willis affirmed and brother Jenkins denied, “It is scriptural for individual Christians to organize, operate, financially support by contributions, and utilize liberal arts educational enterprises, in which the Bible is taught as a regular part of the curriculum (as is practiced by Florida College).” Fortunately, neither brother pressed to draw lines of fellowship, though some brethren suffered the pains of friction and alienation over this matter. (This debate was transcribed and is still in print.)

In 1975 Marshall Patton affirmed and Darwin Chandler denied in a written debate, “The scriptures teach that Christians may collectively teach God’s word through service organizations, such as Florida College” (*Searching the Scriptures* xvi, 8-10 [Aug.-Oct. 1975]). When brother Chandler reprinted the debate as a special edition of his bulletin, he commented, “I know of no one who believes as I do on this issue who believes that there ought to be severance of fellowship over it. As this is not a problem that affects local churches—yet—it should not be made a matter of church ‘fellowship.’ Nor should it alienate brethren on a strictly personal level. Brethren ought to be grown up enough by now to be able to disagree without being disagreeable” (*Sound Doctrine*, special issue dec. 1975, House St. Church of Christ, Alvin, TX, 36).

Sometime later in the late 1970s and early 1980s, brother Gene Frost wrote a series of articles on collectivities in which he argued that “privately supported missionary

societies” are sinful because the only collectivity which can make arrangements for men to teach God’s word, sing, and pray is the local church. Just as brethren Garrett and Ketcherside had edited papers, brother Frost published *Gospel Anchor* via Gospel Anchor Publishing Company, Inc. (Articles of Incorporation). In short, he was a member of a board which published a paper and, as editor, oversaw the publication of a religious magazine to which brethren contributed articles for publication (a collective arrangement). Nevertheless, brother Frost never drew lines of fellowship about his personal convictions, so far as I know. Though he and I disagreed in print about this issue, neither of us has ever withdrawn fellowship from the other.

In 2004, *Truth Magazine* announced and conducted its first lectureship (available in book form). We invited a respected brother who objected to state his view, which we gladly published without suggesting that he and other good brethren who share his views are unworthy of fellowship. The same issue of *Truth Magazine* carried an article setting forth the affirmative case from Scripture. (For the two viewpoints, see Donald Townsley, “Why I Opposed the Guardian of Truth Lectureship,” and Ron Halbrook, “Let the Church be the Church,” *Truth Magazine*, XLVIII, 18 [Sept. 16, 2004]). A few brethren suggested before the lectureship that those who do not participate would be stigmatized as occurred during the institutional division. As it turned out, we are the ones being stigmatized as unsound and liberal minded by some who object. Since that time, several men have suddenly developed convictions about unscriptural collectivities making arrangements for men to teach God’s word, sing, and prayer. I say that they “suddenly” developed convictions because some of those who have been so vociferous about “unscriptural collectivities” making arrangements for men to teach God’s word, sing, and pray have attended the Florida College lectures for years, spoken on the lectureship, sang at the top of their voices, and led prayer at the lecture program. Not one word has been written or spoken by these men about Florida College being an “unscriptural collectivity” competing with the church.

Other collectivities which teach the Bible and offer worship are ignored. Here is a partial list of other collectivities supported and operated by individuals which teach the Bible and/or offer worship:

- R.J. Stevens’ singing school
- Florida College chapel
- Florida College camps operated all over the U.S.
- Athens Bible School
- Teenage get-togethers operated by brethren all over America
- *Think* magazine which is supported by individual contributions and distributed free

- A summer meeting conducted by brethren at Burkesville, Kentucky
- A radio program in eastern Kentucky supported by several brethren pooling their resources

I have no objection to any of these individual collectivities having prayer, singing, and preaching, publishing and giving away their paper without cost, or conducting lectureships, chapel talks, and regularly scheduled Bible classes. But, would someone please give me the book, chapter, and verse that makes these things scriptural and the Truth Magazine Lectureship unscriptural? However, suddenly some brother suddenly develops a conscience about this issue, begins preaching his opinions, divides churches, and castigates faithful brethren as liberal, solely because they will not agree with his opinions about individual working together in various business arrangements.

Preaching Opinions Is Sinful and Divisive

Some brethren have not learned that the ditch is just as deep on the right side of revealed truth as it is on the left. We have agreed that liberalism is a threat to the church, but we seem to have forgotten that factionalism is just as significant a danger to the local church. Within a few miles of where I live, three churches have divided over factionalism in the last ten years. One has gone from 180 to 90 in attendance; another has gone from 225 to 150. Many of us have emphasized 2 John 9-11, perhaps some of us have neglected 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Paul wrote about factional brethren in the church at Corinth who created their own party—“I am of Paul,” “I am of Apollos,” “I am of Cephas,” and “I am of Christ.” He charged that their factionalism was evidence of their carnality. He wrote,

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? (1 Cor. 3:1-4).

He then warned those who divided the body of Christ in this factional way saying,

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

Let those words sink in! Paul is addressing those in Corinth who defiled the local church by their carnal divisions—“I am of Paul,” “I am of Apollos,” and “I am of Cephas.”

God will destroy those who defile the temple of God (the church) by their carnal divisions!

Brethren arrogantly think themselves as “super spiritual” because of their private opinions; they separate themselves from other brethren for whom Christ died who do not agree with their personal opinions and consider them as “less spiritual.” The truth is that these brethren are factional for creating divisions within God’s church! They depart from the faith when they preach their opinions and judgments as divine law, just as certainly as did the Pharisees who made their “oral law” equal with the Law of Moses. Paul addresses this issue in 1 Timothy 4. He writes,

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

There is nothing sinful about marriage or eating meats. Making a law that marrying and eating meats are sinful is, according to Paul, a mark of having departed from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Those who elevate their opinions to divine law make the same mistake as did those in 1 Timothy 4:1-3. Some examples of this are: the one-cup brethren, the no-located preacher brethren, the no-uninspired literature brethren, and others. Like the enemies in 1 Timothy, such men have departed from preaching the gospel to preaching their opinions. Paul wrote,

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do (1 Tim. 1:3-4).

But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7).

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called (1 Tim. 6:20).

Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers (2 Tim. 2:14).

But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness (2 Tim. 2:16).

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes (2 Tim. 2:23).

Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth (Tit. 1:14).

But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain (Tit. 3:9).

To the degree that one preaches his opinions as divine law and makes them a condition of salvation and fellowship with his brethren, he has departed from the faith and ceased preaching the gospel.

Thomas and Alexander Campbell addressed this issue directly in *The Declaration and Address* when they wrote,

Thus have we briefly endeavored to shew our brethren, what evidently appears to us to be the heinous nature and dreadful consequences of that truly latitudinarian principle and practice, which is the bitter root of all of our divisions, namely, the imposing of our private opinions upon each other, as articles of faith or duty; introducing them into the public profession and practice of the church, and acting upon them, as if they were the express law of Christ, by judging and rejecting our brethren that differ with us in those things; or, at least, by *so* retaining them in our public profession and practice, that our brethren cannot join with us, or we with them, without becoming actually partakers of those things, which they, or we, cannot, in conscience approve; and which the word of God no where expressly enjoins upon us (35).

When Campbell addressed those “inferences” (this must be distinguished from “necessary inferences” to understand what Campbell wrote) which brethren deduce from Scripture, he said that “no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the church’s confession.” Brethren who have been studying the gospel for years suddenly find some “truth” that no one else has heard before, which they then proceed to bind on everyone else. Such brethren considered themselves faithful to the Lord all those years before they discovered this new “truth,” yet now adamantly proclaim that any brother who believes what they believed before they discovered this “truth” is unfaithful and unworthy of fellowship. Campbell commented on the nature of the church having within its fellowship both mature and immature and the tendency to bind one’s opinions on others saying,

... yet as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion: unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment; or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal informa-

tion; whereas the church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers (17).

Unfortunately, Campbell's warning needs re-emphasizing among us. Some brethren are preaching their judgments, conclusions, and inferences (not necessary inferences), making them equal with divine revelation and dividing churches which do not accept their conclusions. Those brethren who had patience with them for the 30-40 years it took them to reach their new-found conclusion are now castigated as liberal because they will not line up with their pet issues. God-fearing brethren who have spent a life time preaching the gospel and leading many sinners to become children of God are castigated and treated as apostates because they will not agree to preach the opinions which have been elevated to divine law status. Like the Pharisees of old who made their "oral law" equal with divine revelation, these brethren elevate their personal judgments to equal status with God's word.

Conclusion

In order to keep the unity of the faith, brethren must recognize that preaching their opinions is destructive, divisive, and sinful. Those matters that belong in Romans 14 should not be matters for "doubtful disputations" (Rom. 14:1), but matters in which we respect the conscience of our brethren while we continue working together. In all things indifferent or non-essential, we must practice "liberty."

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Quips & Quotes

Poll: 64% of Americans Want Both Creationism, Evolution Taught

"The New York Times: Nearly two-thirds of Americans say creationism should be taught alongside evolution in public schools, a poll released Tuesday has found.

"It also found 42 percent of respondents hold strict creationist views, agreeing that 'living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time.'

"In contrast, 48 percent said they believe humans have evolved over time; but of those, 18 percent said evolution was 'guided by a supreme being,' and 26 percent said evolution occurred through natural selection. In all, 64 percent said they were in favor of teaching creationism and evolution, while 38 percent favored replacing evolution with creationism.

"The poll was conducted July 7-17 by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. The questions about evolution were asked of 2,000 people, and the margin of error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points" (*The Indianapolis Star* [August 31, 2005], A4).



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