

BANNER OF TRUTH

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SARDIS, THE “DEAD” CHURCH, A LESSON FOR US

When Christ had John pen the letter to the church at Sardis he set forth some facts which serve as a vivid reminder to every congregation of the Lord’s people today. The Lord’s emphasis is upon their **works**, something which affects every member of God’s family, the church. In order for us to profit most from the Sardis letter let us consider the congregation of which we are members, and the part we play as an individual member, in relation to what Christ said about works. Note the Sardis letter which follows, one of the letters to the seven churches of Asia.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know they works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the thing which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou has received and heard, and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Rev. 3:1-6).

CHRIST KNEW THEIR WORKS. That Christ knew their works is a sobering thought indeed! If He knew their works, as well as that of each of the seven churches of Asia, doesn’t He also know our works? Surely He does. Sardis obviously had a “name,” or reputation that was not according to fact. Many a congregation today may have a reputation as being “alive” when the omniscient Savior, who knows the true condition from within as well as from without, may see it as “dead.” Divine judgment is made not upon the basis of reputation or “as man seeth,” but on the basis of reality.

THERE IS A NEED TO BE WATCHFUL. The idea conveyed by “watchful” is to be wide awake, rather than drowsy or sleepy. Only in this way would there be an awareness of the need to strengthen what little life that remained in the congregation. If this is not done the congregation in its entirety will die. A congregation in its sleepy condition may enjoy what one person described as “peace in the cemetery” if it is not aroused to life. Even some congregations claiming to be “sound” are sound asleep.

Evidence of imminent death for the Sardis church, if action is not taken is seen in the fact that Christ had “not found thy works perfect (fulfilled, ASV) before God.” Their works had not

measured up to the standard our Master demanded. Notwithstanding the fact that there are those who contend that our works are unimportant in gaining and maintaining acceptance with God, the true importance of works is here spelled out. John, the apostle said: “And I saw the dead, small and great stand before God... and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works” (Rev. 20:12). A faith not accompanied by works is dead, so says James (ch. 2).

WE MUST REMEMBER THE THINGS RECEIVED AND HEARD, AND HOLD FAST. God’s word had brought life to those in the Sardis church in the first place and only a life of continued obedience to the gospel could maintain that life. A proper respect for the truth they had initially received would bring genuine repentance with regard to their spiritual lethargy, into which they had allowed themselves to drift. How many congregations today stand in need of repentance due to the same condition? There are a number of warnings sounded out in the New Testament with respect to the danger of departing from the truth. Some have estimated that as many as fifty percent of those who obey the gospel fall by the wayside. For some cause or other there is a failure to remember the truth and hold fast to it. The penalty — the loss of the soul.

CONTINUED SLEEP INVITES DISASTER. To fail to heed the warning to arouse out of their sleep would result in the Lord’s judgment upon them in a time unexpected, that is, as a thief. Once judgment has come upon those in whom the light has gone out of their soul, there is no recourse. It is too late! The riches of His grace have been forfeited forever. How many of our brethren need to heed the solemn warning this very day? The Lord knows, and we can know as individuals if we will but measure ourselves by the divine standard, “the word of his grace.” Several months ago I received a call from a member of the Madison church of Christ, near Nashville. He was deeply concerned about the spiritual condition which had come to be in the congregation. He said, “For years I’ve just been asleep, but I have now waked up.” Think of all those who go to sleep but never wake up this side of the grave and the opportunity to repent.

THE “FAITHFUL FEW” NEED NOT GIVE UP. There were a few individuals in the Sardis church who had not defiled their garments with sin. Though the temptation to succumb to the norm of the majority may have been great they could not afford to do so. Neither can the faithful do so today. The “worthy” shall walk with the king, if they do not give up. Victory is in the overcoming of the foes which beset us along life’s way. The foes may come in the form of spiritual indifference on the part of many; the lure of things of the world; or the teaching of error in its many forms. But foes there will be.

In some cases it may be necessary for the faithful to come out from those who are in error. Paul instructed the Roman brethren to “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). Paul also said, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from ever brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 Thess. 3:6).

We are now seeing a tragic thing happening in a number of congregations, where they have for the most part departed from the faith. Though departing from the faith is a great tragedy, I’m speaking with regard to the faithful few who will not separate themselves from the error which prevails. Some people feel such a loyalty to a certain congregation that they will not leave it, regardless of what happens. In more instances than a few, those who will not leave the error eventually end up accepting it. I’ve thought of this as people on a sinking ship who will not leave it for safety, but go down with it.

To live in such a way that we may receive the promise of Christ, which He expressed this way, “I will not blot out his name out of the book of life,” is the greatest thing for which we have to live. That same Christ which had John to pen the letter to the church at Sardis is living today, and it is by His word that we will be judged. If we do not hear Him we can only blame ourselves as we face the great beyond with eternal regret. Let us, therefore, learn a lesson from the Sardis church and not become a “dead” church. Let us rather be numbered with those who are **OVERCOMERS**.

There are also great lessons to be learned from the other six of the seven churches of Asia. Though much of the book of *Revelation* is difficult to understand, due to the highly figurative language, there is much that can be understood in the seven letters to the seven churches. The great lesson to be learned in the entire book of *Revelation* is that victory is assured to the **overcomer**

- - Walter W. Pigg

“Our Church” And “Your Church”

Some of us can remember when the above expressions were seldom used by members of the church. We were reminded more often, and rightly so, that we should not use such. The reason being that the church belongs to Christ (Matt. 16:18), not to us. In a great many instances the church is referred to as belonging to Christ or God, in the New Testament. The early Christians did not speak of it as belonging to them. It was the blood of Christ which purchased the church (Acts 20:28) and He is to have the preeminence (Col. 1:18).

Denominational people may refer to their churches as belonging to them. Christ did not build them. Therefore, they are not His. But when we use the expressions “our church” and “your church” with reference to the Lord’s church we are classing it with *plants* which the heavenly Father *hath not planted*, and bodies which Christ does not own. We help to remove the distinctiveness of the one true church, and that has become a problem of increasing concern within recent years especially.

It is difficult to teach people that the Lord’s church is not “just another denomination.” And when we use their language we simply make the job more difficult. Why not remember this the next time you talk to denominational people about the Lord’s church? A good way to break the habit of speaking of the Lord’s church as “our church” before denominational people is to never use the expression amongst ourselves. After all, we have no right to use it at all. There is some value in calling Bible things by Bible names.

I’ve had people take issue with me with regard to calling the church “our church,” but no one has ever given me any biblical evidence for so doing. We are now in a time when affinity for the denominational churches is growing among our own brethren. This is a grave reflection with regard to the true church for which Christ died. It is in effect saying that churches built by men are as good as the one Christ built. Some brethren are even getting away from using the sign “Church of Christ” on their meeting places. On my last trip to the Philippines I saw an example of this.

- - Editor

Responding to a Critical Review of a *Banner of Truth* Article

We invite people to respond to the material we carry in *Banner of Truth*. We expect some to disagree with some things which are written, and some do. In some instances the criticism is very severe. There is, however, some things in common with nearly all the criticism received. And that is, there is seldom a case in which the critic cites any passage of scripture which has been violated.

In the August 2001 issue of *Banner of Truth* we carried an article by our brother Michael B. Willey, entitled, **THE DANGER OF CHORUSES**. It was my decision to carry the article. It is my practice to read articles which I decide to use. I don't knowingly use articles by false teachers, or articles which teach error. I used the article by brother Willey because I believe he is a sound and faithful teacher and preacher of the gospel. I did not and do not believe that the article teaches error.

The article was run because I'm convinced there is a great need to consider the use of choruses as is under consideration in brother Willey's article, that is, the use of choruses by congregations at times other than the "corporate worship" period." More and more congregations are using choruses during their worship period. While congregational singing is clearly authorized by Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16-17, I do not know of a passage that authorizes a chorus (choir) during the corporate worship period or outside it.

Under the date of October 17, 2001, I received a letter from brother Ben Vick, whom I've known for many years. He informed me that they were not putting out the August issue of *Banner of Truth* to the congregation because of the article by brother Willey. Ben said he appreciated my stand on many issues, "but you have stepped over the line on this one." He enclosed a copy of his review of brother Willey's article, in his bulletin, *The Informer*.

Ben's harsh criticism of brother Willey has also included me. He has accused me of being "cranky" and an "extremist." Since Ben has included me in his criticism, it is in order that I have something to say in the matter, as well as brother Willey.

Since Ben's bulletin goes out to a number of people, other than those of the Shelbyville Road congregation, it is needful to respond to his critical review of the article under consideration in a public way. The article following this is a response to Ben's critical review by brother Willey. Ben's review calls for a rather lengthy response.

Inasmuch as I'm accused of teaching error with regard to choruses, let me set forth a few things to be considered. As a new Christian I thought nothing about the choruses of our schools being unauthorized. As I grew in the faith I began to think more seriously. Then, several years ago some began to use choruses in their worship services.

Many years ago I come to realize that choruses were often used as entertainment. 1) I have heard people applaud their "performance." 2) They are often advertised as going to "Perform." 3) They seek an audience to hear them. 4) They travel great distances to perform. Ben affirms they entertain.

Here is something I cannot understand. As an example, let us say that "corporate worship" begins at 11 a.m. and ends at 12 noon. If it is wrong for the chorus to perform during that hour, why is it right for the chorus to perform to the same people in the same place at ten minutes after noon? Is there a "worship switch" which can be turned on or off by a flip of the wrist? Some seem to think that way.

Ben says members of the chorus may be worshipping and entertaining at the same time. He sees nothing wrong with this, but he says it is wrong for them to perform during “corporate worship.” I don’t believe true worship is “entertainment,” as that word is most often used. If the chorus is worshipping, as Ben says they may be, then why not use them in the worship period? They could entertain.

It is safe to say that our spiritual activities are to have God’s approval (Col. 3:17). Things are not authorized by what we like or what we have practiced. Neither does the word of an uninspired man authorize an activity. In the case of choruses, that is not the type of singing of spiritual songs that God has commanded. If so, where? - -Editor

A RESPONSE TO A REVIEW

Michael B. Willey

In the August issue of *Banner of Truth*, brother Pigg was kind enough to publish my article, “The Danger of Choruses.” When I write for publication, I expect disagreement from some brethren. Brother Ben Vick aired his disagreement in a review of the article in the October 21, 2001 issue of *The Informer*, which is the bulletin for the Shelbyville Road congregation where brother Vick serves as an elder and preacher. Due to the tenor of the review and the arguments made by brother Vick, a public response is necessary.

At the outset, it must be made perfectly clear that brother Vick does not advocate the use of special music groups during the worship services. He states, “In reference to corporate worship, every argument Willey made, I am in agreement with him.” Brother Vick, however, disagrees with the main thrust of the article; that the hosting of choral performances of spiritual songs by an individual congregation before or after worship is unscriptural. The following is a point-by-point response to brother Vick’s review. For purposes of clarity and for the benefit of those who, like myself, do not receive *The Informer*, quotations from brother Vick’s review will be set forth in boldface type, followed by my response.

But it is running past Jerusalem to say that special singing groups, as a chorus, quartet, trio, or solo [are] unauthorized at any time.

This is but the first example of brother Vick’s alarming habit of misrepresenting the arguments made in the article. The focus of the article was the practice of congregations hosting a choral group that performed either before or after worship services. That is a far cry from stating that “special singing groups” are “unauthorized at any time.” As will be demonstrated later in this response, there are times when “special singing groups” are entirely appropriate.

Willey tells us, “When spiritual songs are sung in a choral performance, the songs are not sung to the Lord as commanded, but to the audience.” Who says they are not sung to the Lord? Willey? Does he know the hearts of those who are singing? they may very well be singing to the Lord as well as to the audience. Does Willey have some kind of instrument that he can judge the inner recesses of the hearts of all who are singing? No, he does not know that they are not directing their songs to the Lord anymore than he knows that during congregational singing all are directing their songs to the Lord. Remember: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye

shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:1-2).

It has been my experience that when brethren, especially liberal brethren, are attempting to defend an activity or practice, they will, when they have no other support from Scripture, whip out Matthew 7:1-2. How very sad it is to see brother Vick follow suit, especially when I have not done the type of judging Jesus condemns in those verses. Jesus makes it clear that we are to “judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24), which is judgment based on God’s word. I did not say that those who perform in choruses are not singing to the Lord. They may very well be, in their own minds, singing to the Lord. I have no doubt that “Contemporary Christian” artists believe they are singing to the Lord when they are performing. But neither they nor the choral performers are singing **as commanded** by God’s word.

Colossians 3:17 tells us, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” So, for everything we do in this life, we must seek the authority of Jesus Christ. We obtain authority from the Word of God in three ways: direct command, approved example or necessary inference. Is there a direct command in the New Testament authorizing choral performances at any time? **No.** Is there an approved example in the New Testament that would authorize such activities? **No.** Can one find a necessary inference in the New Testament that would allow such activities? **No.** Can one find any evidence in the writings of Josephus or of members of the early church that the apostles approved of, or engaged in, such activities? **No.** The choral performance of spiritual songs has no basis in Scripture or in church history. It is a man-made tradition that has its foundations in the denominational error and the efforts of our Christian schools to ape that error. Christians are to abstain from the very appearance of evil (I Thess. 5:22), not attempt to replicate the error of those in the world around us. In his zeal to defend this man-made tradition, brother Vick seemingly ignores those Scriptural principles.

As was clearly pointed out in the article, Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 both require that spiritual songs be sung “to the Lord.” Now, suppose that members of a chorus believe that, when they perform, they are singing to the Lord, that is, that they are worshipping God in song. Our efforts at worship must comport with God’s commands. What authority is there in God’s word for the performance of spiritual songs “to the Lord”? There is **none**, and the performers are engaging in vain worship. Furthermore, the audience has joined in their sin by bidding Godspeed to the activities (2 Jno. 9-11).

Regardless of the performers’ intent, they are taking the name of God in vain just as surely as if they had connected it with a curse word. The word of God is abundantly clear that the **name** of God is to be held in reverence. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Ex. 20:7). One of the definitions of “profane” is “to treat something sacred with abuse, irreverence or contempt; to debase by a wrong, unworthy, or vulgar use.” When spiritual songs, all of which invoke the names of Deity, are sung in a choral performance, the names of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, are debased by a wrong, unauthorized use. The names of Deity are treated irreverently. The names of Deity are taken in vain. There is no other alternative.

The Jews believed the name of God, *YHWH* in Hebrew, to be too sacred to utter. Tradition tells us that once each year the priest stood in the holy of holies and **whispered** God’s sacred name. How I wish my brethren had such respect for the names of Deity!

Let me ask a few questions. If the only time one can sing is when the congregation lifts

[its] voice in song in unison, then what if someone in the assembly is not singing? Does that make the act unscriptural? Suppose someone in the congregation refrains from singing because one cannot sing? Must the one with laryngitis stop his ears so he does not hear the singing while he is merely listening to the singing? During worship services does Willey begin exactly when the song leader begins and end when the song leader ends? Does Willey ever have to stop singing with the congregation in order to clear his throat during a song?

There is an old maxim in the practice of law regarding arguing cases. “If the law is on your side, pound the law. If facts are on your side, pound the facts. If neither is on your side, pound the table.” Neither the law of God nor the facts are on brother Vick’s side, so he pounds the table. These questions are so absurd as to not justify a further response.

One matter must be corrected, however. I never stated in the article that “the only time one can sing is when the congregation lifts [its] voice in song in unison.” This is another example of brother Vick twisting my arguments beyond recognition. There are certainly times when what brother Vick has termed “special singing groups” are entirely appropriate. Let me cite an example. When I am driving alone in my truck, I often sing spiritual songs. Am I a soloist, a “special singing group”? Of course I am. Is such authorized? Absolutely — provided that I am singing to the Lord as required by God’s word, and not just for entertainment. The same holds true regardless of whether I am singing alone in my truck or if I am hosting a group of brethren in my home and we decide to have a singing. Compare this example with the scenario in which a group of people is assembled on a stage putting on a musical performance and the distinction is clear.

Willey seems to think that singing is either worship or entertainment. It is one or the other, but nothing else, according to him. He says: [lengthy quote from article omitted]. One can be edified, yet not be worshipping. When one reads his Bible, he may do so for his own edification, but that does not mean he is worshipping.

Brother Vick seems to think that if one is not in a worship service, one is under no requirement to conform his behavior to the word of God. The word of God is sufficiently clear that singing of spiritual songs is reserved for the worship of God. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart **to the Lord**” (Eph. 5:19). “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts **to the Lord**” (Col. 3:16). We teach, admonish and edify one another when we sing, but that in no way changes the fact that spiritual songs are to be directed **to the Lord**. Brother Vick seems to be implying that one can participate in a choral performance of spiritual songs, either as a performer or a member of the audience, for his or her own edification. Can one attend a Billy Graham Crusade and be Biblically edified, “built up in the most holy faith”? Of course not. Likewise, can one participate in an unscriptural choral performance of spiritual songs and be Biblically edified? I think the answer is abundantly clear.

But consider the word “entertainment.” Notice two definitions: “(1) to keep, hold or maintain in the mind with favor; to keep in the mind; to harbor; cherish; as to entertain charitable sentiments, hopes or favors; (2) To engage the attention of agreeably; to amuse with that which makes time pass pleasantly.” These definitions sometimes describe my feelings after a wonderful period of worship. That does not mean that the

worship was not directed to God. Some brethren seem to be so crankified that they think worship is not to be enjoyed. Have your ever heard a preacher say, in effect, “If a person does not enjoy worshipping the Lord here on earth, he certainly would not enjoy heaven”? Based on the above definitions one may worship God acceptably yet, in some instances, still be entertained.

Nowhere in the article is it ever stated or implied that worship is not to be a pleasant, enjoyable experience. ‘I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord’ (Ps. 122:1). Certainly, while worshipping, I entertain thoughts of God and my attention is engaged agreeably as I focus on spiritual matters. Worship is an altogether joyous experience, but it is not “entertainment” as that word is generally defined. Note the following definition of “entertainment” from *The American Heritage College Dictionary*: “Something that amuses, pleases, or diverts, esp. a performance or show.” Throughout the brotherhood, congregations are departing from the Old Paths and are replacing God-centered worship with man-centered entertainment. Efforts by faithful brethren to oppose such activities are undermined when a Gospel preacher engages in semantic exercises in a attempt to defend his favorite form of unscriptural entertainment.

While on the subject of definitions, the word “crankified” does not appear in my dictionary. I did, however, find the word “crank” (definition as it relates to a person: a. a grouchy person. b. an eccentric person, esp. one who is unduly zealous). “A good name is rather to be chosen that great riches” (Prov. 22:1). Yet brother Vick apparently thinks so little of the good names and reputations of his brethren that he does not hesitate to imply that brother Pigg and I, along with, I suppose, all the many brethren who are in agreement with my article, are cranks. It is saddening to think that a Gospel preacher seems unable to engage in an honest disagreement with brethren without making a personal attack. I believe repentance and an apology is required.

“Worship” is an act of devotion to God. Please observe that in order for something to be worship, it has to be directed to God (John 4:24).

Certainly, worship cannot be accidental, but the Bible is clear that spiritual songs must be directed “to the Lord” to be acceptable. As stated earlier, when spiritual songs are sung in a choral performance; in an atmosphere of frivolity and entertainment; with an audience demonstrating its approval of the performance through applause, the name of God is profaned.

I do not hesitate to quote N. B. Hardeman’s thoughts along this line:

“Well, is every time a man sings an act of worship? ‘Why,’ some one says, ‘It just depends on what he sings.’ Well, friends, I think that is true; but the singing of the best song on earth is not always worship. That is a fine old song written by Charles Wesley: ‘Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly.’ Suppose I were to sing that song tonight, would that be an act of worship? Well it just depends on the circumstances. Why, I have sung that song and kindred ones many a time when it was not worship. I have sung it out in the country when passing the graveyard at night. It wasn’t worship. Just to be plain about it, it is none of your business why I was singing it. But I was singing a spiritual song. Why, I have heard, ladies and gentlemen, in our smaller towns, even on Sunday morning, little negro boys with the bootblack outfits strapped across their shoulders, going up and down the street singing the very same song that the brethren sang after I got to the place of worship. Now, were they worshipping God? If

so, they didn't go to do it; it was purely accidental.

“So it is not the mere saying of the words. It is not the mere carrying of the tune that makes the worship, but the other requirements as well.”

- Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons, Vol. II, p. 226

It is significant that, according to the word count feature on my computer, brother Vick quotes 238 words from brother Hardeman in support of his defense of choral performances of spiritual songs, but none from the word of God. Brother Hardeman may have been the “prince of preachers,” but he was just a human being, every bit as fallible as me or anyone else. This sermon quoted by brother Vick is entitled “The Church – Its Worship” and does not address special music groups. If, however, brother Hardeman was taking the position that, outside the worship service, a Christian can sing spiritual songs with the same attitude that one would employ in singing a secular song, then he is as wrong as brother Vick is in the matter under consideration. We need to seek authority for all that we do from the word of God (Co. 3:17), not from man.

Does one use God's name in vain when he uses it at any time other than worship? Be careful, now, how you answer this question. Think about it. Jesus, in teaching his disciples how to pray in the model prayer, used the Father's name. It was not worship. It was not Jesus' prayer, because he said, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Jesus had no sin; so, he was not praying this; but he was teaching. Not all teaching is worship. Paul used God's and Christ's name many times in his epistles. Was he worshipping, or was it entertainment? When the readers received his epistles and read them (Col. 4:16), were they worshipping when they were being read? Would it have been wrong for them to have enjoyed hearing the Scriptures read?

Yet again, brother Vick is twisting the arguments made in the article. Never once did I state or even imply that a person may not use God's name at any time other than worship or that one is worshipping as one teaches. The absurdity of brother Vick's statement is so apparent that no other response is necessary.

Willey tells us, “Allowing choral performances before or after worship services desensitizes brethren to sin.” I do not want to cause anyone to sin, but this is a charge that is unfounded. If it could be proved that having a chorus sing after worship services would lead to a chorus' being used in the worship service, I would oppose having a chorus to sing in this building any time. We would prefer proof rather than just Willey's word.

Has brother Vick been hiding his head in the sand all these years? How much proof does he need? So many congregations, not satisfied with a “Thus saith the Lord,” are ignoring God's commands on singing. In Nashville, the Madison congregation suffered a very public split over the use of special music groups. Do I have empirical evidence that choral performances contributed to this problem? No, but common sense, an awareness of current events in the brotherhood and the history of past digressions lead to that conclusion. I have lived long enough to know that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. When a congregation begins hosting such unscriptural entertainment, it is a step in the **wrong direction**.

Given that brother Vick supports choral performances after worship services, consistency requires that he would not object to a “Contemporary Christian” band performing in concert at

the Shelbyville Road meeting house — after worship service, or course. While I do not know this for a fact, I suspect that brother Vick **would** object to having a band perform at the Shelbyville Road meeting house. And that is the fundamental problem with brother Vick's position: it is rife with hypocrisy.

First, there is the hypocrisy of stating, in effect, "Our congregation doesn't use a choir in the worship service, but we sure do five minutes after the service is ended!" "Choir" and "chorus" are synonyms; they have the same meaning. Perhaps the use of the word "chorus" assuages brethren's consciences and helps them to feel that they are not really sinning by participating in these performances. Nonetheless, a performance of spiritual songs by a chorus is nothing more than a performance of spiritual songs by a **choir**. Brethren may have blinded themselves to the hypocrisy inherent in such performances, but that does not make them any less hypocritical.

Second, there is the hypocrisy of allowing choirs but not mechanical instruments of music. Why? Other than the use of instruments, there is no material distinction between the two types performances. In each case, the performance would take place either prior to or immediately after a worship service and would involve the singing of spiritual songs in an unscriptural manner. One is no less sinful than the other, but perhaps elderships take solace in the belief that it is not really a choir, it's a chorus and, to them, that makes all the difference in the world.

I went to Georgia Christian School where we had chapel every day in the school auditorium. A piano was there, and each afternoon we had chorus practice in the auditorium.

At long last, we see the real reason for brother Vick's objections to the article. It has been my experience that many of those who defend these unscriptural performances do so because they themselves participated in these activities in the past, as is the case with brother Vick, or would have had children or grandchildren who have participated. Rather than contemplate for a second the possibility that their cherished memories are based on an unscriptural activity, they close their eyes, cover their ears and oppose those who present the truth of the matter. They would rather be right in their own eyes than be right with God.

Given the extreme view these brethren teach on this matter, opening and closing a radio program with spiritual songs would be sinful. They could not have a singing group at a funeral. If they did, they would need to speak out against it. They cannot listen to gospel singing on tapes, radio, etc. If they hear someone begin to sing a spiritual song, they must immediately join in and condemn all that do not sing. Such is crakiness gone to seed!

Throughout his review, brother Vick has twisted my arguments and implied arguments that I, in fact, did not make. Now, brother Vick takes his twisted arguments to their logical (?) conclusion, but it is a conclusion that I did not reach, nor is it a conclusion that can be reached from an unbiased, straightforward reading of the article. Rather than justify his assertions with a reply, I will simply note that, again, brother Vick is "pounding the table." Finally, in yet another unwarranted personal attack, brother Vick labels brother Pigg, me and others who agree with the article as extreme and again implies that all who do not hold his view are cranks.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Solomon said, “much study is a weariness of the flesh” (Eccl. 12:12). So is much writing I might add, especially the writing of this response. While I believe that this public response was necessary, I am saddened by the necessity of writing it. I have done my best to ensure that I did not take brother Vick’s arguments out of context and that my response was based in love for my brethren and for the word of God. I feel that I have been fair to brother Vick, even providing him a courtesy copy of this response prior to publication.

It must be pointed out that, due to brother Vick’s disagreement with my article, the August issue of *Banner of Truth* was not distributed to the brethren at Shelbyville Road. This was the prerogative of the eldership at Shelbyville Road and I do not question it. I do, however, question brother Vick’s decision to review the article in *The Informer*. Regardless of how far and wide it may be circulated, the main audience for a church bulletin is the home congregation. The Shelbyville Road congregation was deprived of the opportunity to read my article but **was** given a highly critical review of my article that twisted the arguments made in it. How does brother Vick’s action comport with any standard of fairness and brotherly love?

Furthermore, despite the fact that my address was listed at the end of the article, brother Vick did not contact me regarding his objections either before or after he published his review. It appears to me that, since brother Vick believes I am in error on this subject, love for the Truth, concern for my soul and common courtesy would have prompted him to contact me and expound unto me the way of God more perfectly. Instead, he chose to lash out at me in a public forum.

This is certainly not the way that brethren should treat each other, and I reiterate that brother Vick needs to repent. “Let all things be done with charity” (I Cor. 16:14).

- - 586 Cottonwood Dr., Gallatin, TN 37066

Editor’s Note: We ran the above article by brother Willey, because we think there is a great danger posed by choruses. Congregation after congregation is turning from the way of Truth. The unauthorized use of choruses is just one of a number of things which serve as evidence of departure from the faith. Just days ago I received from brother Mark McWhorter a short note which is a good example of a bad use of a chorus. The following is an excerpt from *El Expositor Espiritual*, p. 9, August 2001, by Lionel Cortez.

“Some weeks ago three elders with their wives, Marta, my wife, and I went to New York. Sunday morning we looked for the closest congregation. We went to the Manhattan Church of Christ. All of a sudden a chorus appears singing in front of the congregation, and although some sang along with them, not all of us did. Then, the time came to partake of the Lord’s supper and three men and two women go to the front to serve. At that point, all eight of us got up and left the auditorium; at the door, there was a Latin brother who told us in English, ‘Don’t slam the door.’ How rude! It seems likely they are used to people leaving their services. Behind us other visitors from Texas also left.”

Where choruses are used in the worship, there are likely other things which are not authorized. The use of choruses apart from the corporate worship is one step nearer to their use in worship. It would be hard to convince the denominational people that the congregation which uses choruses apart from the worship hour does not believe in choirs.

Brother Ben Vick has told me that if I will keep my view, which he calls “cranky,” to myself that he will have no problem fellowshiping me. It is good to be able to be in fellowship with brethren, but if that fellowship is contingent upon me keeping quite on something that is a

matter of truth, and failing to respond to unjust criticism which is not based upon New Testament teaching, then that fellowship will just have to cease. My objective in life is to maintain fellowship with my Lord, even if it means that I can't maintain fellowship with some of my brethren. If brother Ben can't fellowship me, so be it. That is his problem, not mine. If I'm in error I trust that those who love me as Christians should love one another, will show me my error, on the basis of what God's word teaches, not just a pronouncement.

Using the Word “Spiritual”

Alan Adams, Assistant Editor

What's that old NRA slogan: Guns don't kill people, people kill people. Allow me to borrow this idea: Words don't confuse people, people confuse people. Sometimes this confusion is intentional, politicians do it all the time. Yet, sometimes, this confusion is because people do not take care to learn and think about how they are using words to convey their points or ideas.

In his book, *The Art of Making Sense*, Lionel Ruby, in chapter two, entitled: “Words, Words, Words,” has the following:

‘What do you read, my Lord?’ Polonius asks, and Hamlet answers: ‘Words, words, words.’ Unfortunately, there are times when that is all our reading and conversation give us: just words. [That's about all that a whole lot of our preaching amounts to]. Words are of little importance on their own account, or for their own sake. Their importance derives from what they stand for: their meanings. the function of words is to act as signs or symbols of something outside themselves. Words may be likened to checks drawn on a bank, worth nothing as paper, but valuable insofar as they represent cash in the bank. Words are ‘cashed’ when we are directed to the things and event they stand for. Thus the admonition of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: ‘Let us think things, not words’ (p. 26).

WORDS: THE VEHICLE OF CHRISTIANITY

We (preachers in particular) need to work on verbal precision. Preaching is all about communication. Communication can scarcely take place without “words” being involved; but, we simply must be sure that the “things we think” are accurately transported to the minds of our hearers by way of the words we use. More particularly, is this true when it come to the matter of transporting “the deep things of God” (I Cor. 2:10) into the minds of people we seek to teach or influence. It cannot be overemphasized that Christianity exists and thrives, or consequently suffers and wanes, in the world today as a result of how we use words to convey its (Christianity's) ideas and concepts. This is a particularly nettlesome thought to people, and not a few brethren, who want religion to be all about “feeling.”

“SPIRIT”: AN OFTEN PUT UPON WORD

The word, “spiritual,” is certainly at the very heart of Christianity, yet, ironically, seldom used according to its biblical meaning. It is good for us to analyze and use precisely this wonderful and powerful word and the idea it is intended to convey. In fact, I think it fair to say that it is often used, at best, ambiguously, and, at worst, incorrectly.

We should note that “spirit” is a noun, and as such, it identifies some particular things or concept. “Spiritual” is an adjective which derives from the noun “spirit.” At the outset, it should be clear that “spiritual” must describe something (a quality, an attribute, a person) that is connected to, or pertains to the basic idea of “spirit.”

VARIOUS CONNOTATIONS AND USAGE’S OF “SPIRITUAL”

It is very helpful and easy to use tools like *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* in order to study Bible words as they are used within various contexts. The following listing generally, relies on the information set forth in this reference book. Some of the points made, however, will be my own. The Greek word for “spirit” is *pneuma*, and the word for “spiritual” is *pneumatikos*. I will use italics within the verses cited to emphasize the comparison between the English translation and the Greek word and definition —

- Pertaining to the invisible, non-physical, part of man (soul or spirit), as distinguished from what concerns the body. “Gentiles have been made partakers of their *spiritual* things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things” (I Cor. 9:11).

- Pertaining to the nature or essence of spirits, non-physical entities or beings: “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a *spiritual* body. There is a natural body, and there is a *spiritual* body. (I Cor. 15:44).

Note also Eph. 6:12. “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in *high places*.” Here reference is made to two realms of existence: the place of “flesh and blood,” and “high places.”

It’s interesting to note that five times in Ephesians, Paul uses the Greek word *epouraniois*. Four times it is translated “heavenly places [literally, the heavenlies]” (1:3, 30; 2:6; 3:10), and one time, “high places” (6:10). In each case, it refers to that region or realm occupied by “spirit” beings.

- Pertaining to things of the Holy Spirit: “I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some *spiritual* gift, to the end ye may be established” (Rom. 1:11). Acts 8:17-19 explains how Paul would have “imparted” to them “some spiritual gift.” I Cor. 12:1-11 and 14:1 identify these “spiritual gifts” as the ability to perform supernatural, miraculous acts. It is inaccurate and foolish to refer to anyone today as having “spiritual gifts.” Where is the apostle who would have “imparted” to them such a “gift”? Yet, there are more and more preaches among us who freely speak of our “spiritual gifts.”

Superior to the natural, physical course of things: “[they] did all eat the same *spiritual* meat, And did all drink the same *spiritual* drink: for they drank of that *spiritual* Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (I Cor. 10:3-4). The Israelites failed to look beyond the mere meat, water, and the rock, to the God who gave these things to them. They failed to see the deeper meaning of which these physical things were symbols or types. Note what Jehovah said to the murmuring Israelites while they were encamped at Rephidim:

And Jehovah said unto Moses, Pass on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel, and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thy hand and go. Behold, *I will stand before thee there upon the rock* [emphasis] in Horeb, and thou shalt smite the rock and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink (Ex. 17:5-6).

- Pertaining to persons who were, by the Holy spired; to be distinguished from a person

utilizing natural skills or knowledge: “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually* [adverb] discerned. But he that is *spiritual* judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:14-16). Note: This passage can be confusing as to who the “spiritual” person is, particularly, given what is said in the next chapter. I believe the “spiritual” man here refers to an inspired man such as the Apostle Paul and the “natural” man refers to one who is uninspired, one who uses only his natural, human endowments.

In this connection, note also I Cor. 14:37, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or *spiritual*, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

•Finally: Pertaining to people who think and live according to a standard that is different from that of the world. It is a life ruled by principles and actions defined by the Holy Spirit, in the Bible, rather than the carnal passions and pleasures of human beings. “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 are ye now 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” (I Cor. 3:1-4).

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are *spiritual*, restore such an one in the *spirit* of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

“...they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be *spiritually* [adverb] minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:5-6).

It is hoped that this information will enable us to understand what the Bible means when it speaks of “spirit” and “spiritual.” Why not compare this data to our use of these words and make corrections if necessary. Knowing what we mean by the things we say can be a most refreshing experience. Confusing “spirituality” with *feeling* giddy, or “spiritual” growth with an increase in our capacity to become emotional, is not only wrong, but it is also dangerous.

- - 1653 Pine Ln. Dr., Cantonment, FL 32533

Learning Valuable Lessons From One Who Lost His Soul

Marvin L. Weir

The story is found in Luke 16:19-31. The “rich man” had to wake up in eternity before his eyes were opened to God’s truth. He has now suddenly become an expert on living a wasted life and realizes that “*no man can serve two masters*” (Mt. 6:24). The love of riches, the cares of this world, and the pleasures of sin will choke one’s soul to death. If the love of God does not master

us the love of the world will.

The ungodly always seek to **justify** themselves in the sight of men. They should remember that God knows their hearts and that those things exalted among men are “*an abomination in the sight of God*” (Lk. 16:14-15). The inspired words recorded about “*a certain rich man*” and “*a certain beggar named Lazarus*” (vss. 19-20) contain valuable lessons for those who will hear.

One may impress men and live like a king in the sight of men, and yet be utterly corrupt in the sight of God! The “*purple and fine linen*” (v. 19) that make up man’s righteousness and turns heads in this world was of no comfort to the rich man in eternity. Multitudes who selfishly live only for themselves and think that they have need of nothing are in reality “*the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked*” (Rev. 3:17). We need to learn that men may be impressed with many things that do not impress God.

One may be poor and loathsome in the eyes of his neighbor, and yet be rich and beautiful in the sight of God. Lazarus was placed at the rich man’s “*gate, full of sores,*” and desired only “*to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table*” (vss. 20-21). There is no doubt but that the beggar was a disgusting sight to many as the dogs “*came and licked his sores*” (v. 21). God, however, has always been impressed with one’s heart and not his outward appearance (I Sam. 16:7). Even though Lazarus was considered to be worthless in the sight of men, he was a precious jewel in the sight of God.

A man may have a pompous funeral and be a miserable soul. It is a common thing for men to eulogize the *past* of the departed rich and famous, but what about their *present*? Yes, the rich man died and in all probability was given a magnificent funeral, but “*in hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments*” (v. 23). It is surely the case that not many mourned the death of Lazarus, yet “*he was carried away by the angels into Abraham’s bosom*” (v. 22).

One may have an abundance of this world’s goods but in the world to come be utterly destitute. Most people measure success by what they accomplish in this life. The problem is that God does not use the same measuring stick that man uses. One may be a tremendous success according the world’s standard but only a miserable failure in the sight of God. Having no needs or cares in this life is no evidence that one’s soul is right with God. The everlasting thirst for only a drop of water will be a terrible torment for one who never knew what it was like to be thirsty (v. 24).

If one neglects his opportunities in this life, he will have eternity to remember his folly. One’s memory will be the greatest of tormentors in eternity. A person who has lived his life only for the gratification of his own selfish desires will have eternity to reflect on his mistake. In Hades the rich man begged for mercy, but such request something that the rich man would play over again and again in his mind. Abraham said, “*Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things: but now here he is comforted, and thou art in anguish*” (v. 25).

The righteous and unrighteous live together in this world, but a day is coming when they will be eternally separated. People grow quite fond of earthly relationships that they enjoy in this world. Earthly relationships will mean nothing, however, when the great gulf is fixed (v. 26). The only thing that will then matter is our relationship with God and Christ.

In this world people can choose to do as they please. It is necessary for the righteous and the unrighteous to cross paths as they travel through this life. There, is however, a day coming when the words of the Savior will be vividly recalled. Christ warned, “*Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares,*

and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matt. 13:30).

The prayers and wishes of the lost will avail nothing for themselves or others. Those who do not value prayer in this life will find that prayer has no value for them in the life to come. All will have a change of heart or mind in the Day of Judgment – but alas, it will be too late (vss. 24, 27-28).

The lessons are yours to learn while it is today.

- - 5810 Liberty Grove Rd., Rowlett, TX 75030

How May We Attain To The Unity For Which The Lord Prayed, And How May We Maintain It?

James E. Farley

That which may truly be called “The Lord’s Prayer,” is found in John 17. In this beautiful prayer, our Lord prayed for Himself and His apostles. He then prayed for all who would believe on Him through the words of the apostles:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou has sent me” (Jno. 17:20-21).

He prayed for you and me. Specifically, He prayed that all who believe in Him would be “*one in us*,” that is, ONE as Christians. The reason for this oneness is that the world may believe that Jesus is who He says He is. Therefore, we can know that denominationalism and its divisions contribute to infidelity and atheism. These people are certainly not “*one in us*,” they are not even true Christians.

How is this unity in Christ to be had? Can we all understand the Bible alike? The fact is, if we understand the Bible at all, we understand it alike. The fact that some do not understand it “alike” is only proof that some misunderstand it. Paul said:

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (I Cor. 1:10-13).

The church at Corinth was a divided church. This is contrary to the Lord’s prayer, of course. Some had a sectarian spirit, wanting to follow after men rather than the Lord. Paul’s inspired, rhetorical questions make strong arguments against such an attitude. Christ is not divided, so why are you dividing? Paul was not crucified for you, so why are you following Paul? You were not baptized in Paul’s name, or by his authority, so stop following Paul. Of course, the apostle later does admonish these same Corinthians to follow him, but ONLY as he followed Christ. (I Cor. 11:1). He did not want them to be “Paulites” or “Paulinians.” He wanted them to be Christians.

The apostle is very strong in his language to this divided and drifting church. He said

they should all the speak the same thing, have the same mind and judgment, and the end result would be “*no divisions among you.*”

Simple, isn't it? All that we have to do to attain to and maintain the unity that Christ prayed for is to think and speak “*the same thing.*” Can we do this? Well, heaven says we can, so if a man comes along and says we cannot do this, HE'S WRONG! God says we can and must “*Speak the same thing.*”

Well, what is it that we are to speak the same in order to attain and maintain the unity for which Christ prayed? Peter wrote, “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*” (I Pet. 4:11).

Now it becomes clearer, doesn't it? That which we are to speak the same is “*the oracles of God,*” the Holy Bible. You see, if you speak like the Bible teaches and I speak like the Bible teaches we will be speaking the same thing, and according to Paul we will be ONE; there will be “*no divisions among you [us].*” How many divisions constitute “*no divisions*”? But if you continue to speak as the oracles of God., and I begin to speak from a man-made creed, manual, catechism, book of discipline, confession of faith, etc., or just my “think so,” I will be the one causing the division, for I will have departed from the faith. If I do this, I'm no longer abiding “*in the doctrine of Christ*” (2 Jno. 9-11), but I am abiding in some man's writings or doctrine. Peter says that if we “*speak as the oracles of God*” (I Pet. 4:11), it is God who gets the glory. What if we speak as the oracles of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or Spurgeon? Who gets the glory?

This principle is stated clearly in I John 1:5-2:6. The “*light*” is the way of God. This way is indeed a lighted way, for it is by the word of God that we are directed to it, and onto it. The Psalmist wrote, “*Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” (Ps. 119:104-105).

To “*walk in the light as He is in the light*” simply means that we are to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jno. 9-11). It means we are to walk in Truth; to walk after His commandments. In fact, the only way we can know that we know Him is to keep His commandments (I Jno. 2:3-5; Heb. 5:8-9).

If we “*walk in the light*” we will have fellowship one with another. That is, we will have fellowship with God and Jesus, and with all who have fellowship with God and Jesus. But what if you continue walking in the light (according to God's word) and I stop walking after His commandments? If I stop walking in the light, my fellowship with God is severed, I no longer have “*both the Father and the Son*” (2 Jno. 9). Since my fellowship with God is severed, my fellowship with all who are in fellowship with God is severed as well. There can be no unity where there is no agreement in Truth.

- - 759 Ratliff Creek Rd., Pikeville, KY 41501

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READERS' RESPONSE

“Thanks so very much for mailing me a copy of **Banner of Truth** each month. I truly appreciate your love for and stand for the truth. I have just read the May, 2001 issue (as you can see I’m somewhat behind in my reading) dealing mostly with *indifference* and/or *apathy*. I totally agree that this evil spirit is having a field day within the Lord’s church today. I see it here in our area (Northwest Alabama) and everywhere I go for meetings and/or other speaking engagements. So I just wanted you to know that you are right on target with your excellent article, *The Evil Spirit Of Indifference*. Thanks again for the publication and please keep sending it - **Edward White.**” - **AL.** (*Your word and that of others all across our country is evidence enough that the indifference which has swept over the Lord’s church is nation-wide, and that means the same spirit can be seen even in other countries. May the Lord help the faithful as they try to awaken the indifferent to reality, and a return to the Truth - Editor*).

“I’m enclosing a small amount to help with the cost of publishing **Banner of Truth**. I appreciate not only your stand for Truth, but the articles to keep the brotherhood informed of dangers facing the church. I’m also for calling names of false teachers when it has been proven they have taught error. I was at Freed-Hardeman when bro. Dixon was president. Also my husband was there from 1962 - 1965. I just can’t understand why John Dale was appointed to the Board or why Kilpatrick would have been chosen as commencement speaker....Why do Christians still support the school? Why do they continue to send their young people there? Who is responsible for selecting commencement speakers and Board members? Why would other

Board members continue to serve on the Board with one who has erred from Truth?...Just keep printing the paper. I'm sure it will help many - **Dorothy H. Strattis.**" - **TN.** (*Sis. Strattis you surely ask some important questions. The answer to most is, in my, opinion, a matter of indifference toward Truty - Editor*)

Readers' Response continued next issue of BOT. -Ed..

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