

Banner of Truth

April 2002

Church Growth — As God Would Have It

That the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, intended for the church to grow could not be more evident. Adequate God-given plans have been provided through the inspired word to insure that desired growth. Church Growth-As God Would Have It, must be accomplished in accordance with God's plan, not the plans of men. It is urgent that God-fearing brethren look into the problem to see what can be done to help accomplish our Lord's desire.

If great interest and untiring effort are to be maintained in **Church Growth - As God Would Have It**, it is essential that a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of the church be acquired. There is no doubt but that the current lack of church growth can be attributed, at least in some measure, to a lack of understanding of the part the church was intended to play in God's plan of salvation for man. It is evident from God's eternal plan for the church and the price of Christ's blood with which it would be purchased, that the church is of the utmost importance. When the proper growth of it occurs, the desire of the Father and the Son is being accomplished.

That there is a wholesale lack of knowledge of and appreciation for the church is quite obvious. This is so true with the denominational world around us, and is becoming more so with our own brethren as every day passes. The man-made churches, for the most part, even deny outrightly that the church is essential to salvation. Some of our own are falling into the same error, and the emphasis upon our Lord's church is diminished. Who would have thought that such a thing would occur in our time?

Whereas years ago, as I can well remember, a large part of our brethren defended the distinctiveness of Christ's church and were willing to debate the subject. In our time, the denominational people are so overcome with indifference that they seldom care what others teach and practice. Few of them would attempt to uphold in public discussion what they stand for. With our own brethren, there are still those who would stand up and uphold God's word in public discussion, and we thank God for them. But on the other hand, it is a sad day in spiritual Israel in that a growing number of our preaching brethren who are considered to be "somewhat," would not challenge the denominational world because they themselves have such an affinity for the man-made churches.

In present day preaching and writing there is on the part of many, little said about the evil of denominationalism. Not only that, but there are actually efforts being made to justify the man-made religions. In order to do this it is not uncommon for the one true church to be harshly criticized. Those who still stand for the "old paths" of Jeremiah 6:16, as most brethren used to do, can expect criticism.

Those who deny the essentiality of the true church as revealed in the New Testament demonstrate one of two things and/or both. 1) A lack of knowledge as to the nature and purpose of the church as an integral part of God's plan of salvation for man, or 2) a lack of love and appreciation for that for which Christ died the shameful death on the cross of Calvary, when He offered himself as a "once for all" sacrifice. As noted above, some may be affected in both areas. Let us now note:

THE CHURCH IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

Though not mentioned by name, the first allusion to Christ and His church is found in Genesis 3:15, where it is said the "seed of woman" would bruise the head of the seed of the serpent. The fulfillment of this promise was carried out through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and finally Christ (Gal. 3:16; 29). The sacrifice of Christ, His blood, with which He purchased the church (Acts 20:28), made possible the forgiveness of sins of those before Christ as well as those after Him (Heb. 9:15). The forgiveness of sins of those before Christ was contingent upon the coming sacrifice of Christ. We think of this as a promissory forgiveness, about which there could be no uncertainty since it was a fact that Christ would die for the sins of mankind.

God planned the church even before man sinned. An important fact about the church, which is some times overlooked, is set forth in Ephesians 3:9-11. Note carefully what is said.

"And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

How can man in any sense deny that which was in the eternal plan of God? The eternal plan for the church by God and its preeminence in God's revelation should stand as great evidence of its importance and worth. Indeed, the church is essential!

With all the importance attached to Christ and His church relative to God's scheme of redemption for man, surely the church must grow to accomplish its God-given purpose. Note the following:

GOD INTENDED FOR THE CHURCH TO GROW

It would seem reasonable in our way of thinking that since the church was "according to the eternal purpose which he [God] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," the Father and the Son would want the church to grow. But more importantly than our own reasoning, that God intended for the church to grow is very evident from that which is written in God's word. That God intended for the church to grow is seen from the standpoint of: individual, congregational, and universal growth.

Universal Growth. From the very first reference to God's plan of salvation it is universal in nature. "...in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). The Great Commission, to be carried out by the church, is to "every creature" in "all the world" (Mk. 16:15-16). Jesus, by the grace of God, was to "taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever ... have everlasting life" (Jno. 3:16). From the above and other evi-

dence there is no question but that God intended for the church to grow in the universal sense. Otherwise, the church could not accomplish its mission.

Congregational Growth. The accounts of congregations being established in New Testament times are many. The first congregation was established in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. It soon grew to “the number of men were about five thousand” (Acts 4:4). When the Christians were scattered from Jerusalem, “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). That a growing congregation was started is evidenced by the fact that “When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women” (Acts 8:12). As Paul and Timothy “went through the cities” it is said, “And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5).

The Book of Acts records the planting of various congregations and growth was evident in many, even in the face of persecution. The letters of the apostle Paul are designed to encourage growth within congregations. He warned of many things which would hinder growth, and he pointed out many things which would result in individual and congregational growth. On a number of occasions Paul revisited congregations to see how they were doing and to instruct them in ways which would contribute to their spiritual and numerical growth.

Individual Christian Growth. It is only by individual growth that a congregation can grow, since the congregation is made up of individuals. The greater the individual growth and cooperation with others, the greater will be congregational growth.

The writer of Hebrews points out the fact that the Hebrew Christians had failed to grow as they should. He said they “ought to be teachers” but they were still in need of being taught “the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb. 5:12-14). A congregation made up of such individuals will not experience growth. Multitudes of individuals today have failed to make progress, just as the Hebrews had. This prevents growth in all three areas: individual, congregational and universal.

When the apostle Peter wrote to the “strangers” he encouraged individual spiritual growth in a powerful way. He said, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (I Pet. 2:2). This is a key to individual growth. The figure Peter is using is that of individuals, adults, having the same desire for spiritual food [sincere milk of the word] that a newborn baby has. We all know that when a child is born, if it is normal or healthy, it wants to do two things: eat and sleep. It seems that too many of us fail to follow that pattern in a most important part. That is, we don’t have the proper desire for “the milk of the word,” but we are ready to sleep and go without the spiritual food. It seems that some of the congregations today which claim to be sound, are “sound asleep.” Too many of us are malnourished spiritually, and it shows.

The church which Christ purchased with His blood was not to be a static institution, but rather a vibrant and growing body. The tremendous responsibility of the church as “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15), taking the gospel to “every creature” in “all nations” (Mk. 16:15-16; Matt. 28:18-20) necessitates growth. And, everyone who considers himself as a faithful member of the body of Christ must demonstrate a vital interest in such growth if he would maintain God’s approval. Just as church growth is necessary, it is also necessary that it be God-approved growth.

TWO AREAS OF IDEAL CHURCH GROWTH

An example of **Ideal Church Growth** is found in connection with the work of Paul and Timothy. Paul came to Debra and Lystra and took Timothy with him. As they went through the cities they delivered the decrees which “were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at

Jerusalem.” The church growth which resulted from their efforts is described this way: “And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. This growth, which we mentioned earlier, was twofold in nature. It involved:

Growth In Quality. The churches were “established in the faith.” The ASV says, “strengthened in the faith.” Let God be thanked that the means for growth in faith have been abundantly provided. The all-sufficient word (2 Tim. 3:16-17) when “heard” (Rom. 10:17), serves as the basis for a growing and mature faith. As the church grows in faith it becomes more aware and concerned with regard to the opportunity and responsibility of propagating “the faith.” It is understandable that Peter would exhort: “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (I Pet. 2:2). If a church fails to grow in **Quality**, the real, true growth which our Lord wants to see does not occur.

Growth In Quantity. The churches “increased in number daily.” We should strive for growth numerically but if that growth is Lord-pleasing it must be the result of and “established faith.” When growth in number occurs as a result of something other than growth in **Quality**, it is not the right kind of growth, and in fact may be a serious problem. When the church is strengthened in faith God will give an increase in numbers (I Cor. 3:6). We see instances where churches become more concerned about numerical growth than growth in **Quality**. The result may be a weakening of the faith due to a neglect of emphasis upon spiritual growth. A fact which we would do well to remember is that growth in faith will produce growth in numbers, but growth in numbers does not translate into growth in faith, or in that essential quality.

A Serious Problem. Within the past couple of decades especially, there has been a growing emphasis upon growth in numbers. Growth in numbers when accompanied by growth in quality is most desirable. But much of what is called growth in our time is in numbers alone. In fact, a congregation may increase in numbers while growing weaker spiritually. This has happened in a great many places. The quest for numbers has never been so great in my time as it is now. The result has been the bringing in of an increasing number of innovations which are without scriptural authorization. The reliance upon growth in numbers by the preaching of the true gospel, without addition or subtraction, is rarely seen nowadays. When numbers are drawn by means other than the proclamation of the gospel and the influence of Godly lives it may be called “growth,” but it is not the growth which God wants.

I don’t profess to know what goes on in the minds of our brethren who want to change God’s ways of doing things. but I can see what goes on with regard to the actions of brethren. It is generally the case that things in the mind are reflected in actions. In the case of church growth, as that subject is viewed today, it appears that some are thinking they can improve upon God’s way of doing things. Do they actually think that God has come up short when He set forth His word, the gospel, as the drawing power? It seems that they must.

Could it be that these innovative brethren feel that God’s word is somehow “dull” and “uninteresting,” or out of date and will not draw people? Do they feel that it must be sort of “spiced up” before people will listen? If this is not the case, how do we account for all the emphasis upon a wide variety of entertainment, which is lacking in the sacred and serious attitude which should characterize true worship? “... in spirit and in truth” is the worship which God desires from His children. There is at least one other possibility, and that is that brethren have veered away from worshipping God “in spirit and in truth,” in order to please themselves rather than God. There is strong evidence that this may indeed be true. Surely, no one believes that God is pleased by the

food, fun, frolic and entertainment which is the fare being offered in a fast growing number of congregations.

There are congregations today, usually the larger ones, which serve as sort of a “catch all” for just about anyone they can take in, regardless of the spiritual status of the individual. If they constitute a number, they are welcome. It is a matter of fact that in various areas the larger congregations, and most especially the more liberal ones, feed off the smaller rural congregations. The growth in numbers that may be proclaimed, is often sort of like what we might call “church checkers.” That is, the people are moved around and the growth in numbers may be primarily at the expense of other congregations.

SOME ESSENTIALS FOR ACCEPTABLE CHURCH GROWTH

There are a great many things which are necessary to accomplish church growth as God would have it. We can only note a few of those things, but others are also important. It is my personal belief that perhaps the greatest hurt today from which the church is suffering, is the lack of acceptable growth.

Many things are involved in this, but those who are not interested in seeing the church grow have a real problem and constitute a liability rather than an asset. There is something which just about every member of the Lord’s church can do to contribute to the growth of the church. In the following we shall point out some areas in which our brethren need to be involved in a most serious way.

PREACH THE TRUE WORD, THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

Paul declared, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:16-17). The true gospel is the means by which God chose to bring about growth. All false gospels are condemned (Gal. 1:6-9). Many warnings are sounded out to help warn people, lest they become victims of false teaching. Jesus said the “truth” makes men free, and the gospel is composed only of truth.

The time was that a lot of attention was given to warning people against accepting the teaching of the religions round about us, because more or less than the true gospel was taught. Now, God-fearing brethren are having to give considerable time to warning brethren about the dangers of the **Perverted** gospels which are being set forth by those within the church. The warning set forth by Paul to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-31, has taken on new meaning in more recent times, as a growing number of false teachers are leading brethren into a multiplicity of errors.

In recent years we have seen an increase in watered-down preaching, which has virtually nothing to say. The oft taken “positive approach,” leaves out the “meat” which is necessary to bring about growth. The truth which might “prick the heart” is excluded, as people are encouraged to feel good about themselves, though they may be spiritually sick, even near death! Some of the preaching of today is obviously related to “job security.” I can’t imagine the apostle Paul leaving off something that was needed for fear of man in any way. In fact, he makes it clear that he had not “shunned to declare...all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Timothy was commanded to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:3). There is no semblance of a suggestion in God’s word to uphold much of the so-called preaching being done today.

“The sincere milk of the word” (1 Pet. 2:2) will bring about growth, yet many are being denied it. I’ve never seen in the emphasis upon giving people what they want to hear, rather than what God would have them to hear, that I’m now seeing.

In the *Commercial Appeal*, a Memphis newspaper, the June 17, 1967 issue, it was reported that the “Churches of Christ” were the fastest growing religious body in the United States. Though some seeds of error were being planted during that time, it is important to consider the fact that most of the preaching during that time was very different from what most of it is today. Our older brethren, some of whom have passed on, should be given much credit for the type of preaching they did. It had a major part to play in that period of extraordinary growth. Yet, instead of credit, these brethren are often criticized by some of our liberal, stand for nothing, preaching brethren.

A TRUTHFUL, SERIOUS AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

It is an established fact that a congregation will not grow above its leadership. There may be instances where growth occurs above the designated leadership, but in such cases there is some leadership being exercised other than by the designated leaders. Church growth doesn’t occur accidentally. There is a limited sense in which every member of the church should be active in leadership. This can be done by encouraging one another and by setting a proper example. But some in the church have greater opportunities in the area of leadership. A Bible class teacher should be a leader by teaching and example. Deacons should be leaders in the act of serving. The preacher should exercise leadership through teaching and by way of serving and exhortation. The preacher should be an example in practicing what he preaches.

In the area of leadership, God’s order is for elders in each congregation. These leaders have a great and fearsome responsibility, the greatest of all within the congregation. Qualifications for these leaders are set forth in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. As we view these qualifications it is easy to see that those who meet them would constitute a great asset to a congregation, and would be exercising the type of leadership which would assure growth both in quality and quantity.

The importance of the God-ordained function of elders is seen in the words of the Hebrew writer when he said, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). The apostle Peter sets forth the importance of elders when he said, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (I Pet. 5:2-3).

That the church is failing to grow as God would have it can be attributed in great measure to the lack of serious and qualified leadership. There are so many ways in which qualified elders can contribute to the well-being of the flocks over which they are overseers. The elders can protect the flock against false teachers, who as “grievous wolves” arise and speak “perverse things to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29). The qualifications of elders include the ability to do this (Titus 1:9-11). The elders are to “feed” the flock the proper spiritual food. Paul said to the Ephesian elders, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the

Holy Ghost had made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

In view of the responsibility of leadership which the Lord placed upon the eldership the congregation should look to the elders for plans and methods of carrying on the Lord’s work. This does not mean that the abilities and potential of the membership, other than the elders, should not be utilized. Effective leaders will seek the suggestions of the entire congregation and make the best possible use of them in planning the work of the congregation. But it is the responsibility of the God-approved leaders (elders) to make the final decisions.

One of the saddest pictures being seen today within the church is the failure in leadership. In some cases the leadership is completely lacking in ability as leaders. Some times the leadership is not well enough versed in God’s word to **stop the mouths** of the false teachers. We can see why God gave qualifications for elders. When leadership is lacking, the church of our Lord suffers.

A sadder picture still, other than the lack of ability and knowledge as leaders, is the leadership which allows and even helps the wolves to destroy the flock. Some times elders are quiet as a tomb when it comes to confronting error, but more and more we are seeing elders take the front position in leadership in leading their flocks into error. Not only do the elders ignore the spiritual needs of the flock, they do not even consider their own spiritual well-being. Just how can men in the position of leaders knowingly lead a congregation into destruction? I’ve pondered that question, but still cannot find a sufficient answer. There is one thing, however, which seems evident. That is, such leaders must be akin to those whom Paul describes in Philippians 3:18. “(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.”

There are two extremes in the leadership of elders. Some do very little, being merely figure-heads. On the other hand, some seem proud of “power” and violate Peter’s injunction not to be “lords over God’s heritage” (I Pet. 5:3). One of the greatest blessings a congregation may have, is in my estimation, serious, well qualified elders who rule as God intended that elders should. We have a number of preacher training schools. Why not have some elder training schools?

A MILITANT AND AGGRESSIVE SPIRIT

The Christian is described as a “soldier” of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3). In Ephesians 6:10-17, Paul goes to some length in describing the soldiers of Christ. Paul said, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life...” (I Tim. 6:12). The exhortation to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3) carries the idea of fighting for the faith.

In New Testament times brethren were generally unafraid to preach the word with great conviction. In the face of physical persecution they refused to lay down the sword of God’s word. The saving gospel was proclaimed without fear or favor of man. The militant spirit display was convincing to many who heard the word. The serious minded are often influence by that same spirit today. When Peter and the other apostles were commanded “not to teach” in the name of Christ, their response was: “...We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

The apostles were unafraid to teach with conviction the basic and fundamental aspects of the gospel. Christ as the only Savior (Acts 4:12), the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:8-9), was set forth. The church which Christ said he would build, was purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28), and He is the head and Savior of it (Eph. 5:23). The distinctiveness of the one true church was emphasized (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4). To have the approval of the Father and the Son, abiding in the doctrine of Christ was necessary (2 Jno. 9). The

day of Judgment was set forth as a day of final separation of the saved and the lost, based on the words of Christ (Jno. 5:28-29; 12:48; Matt. 25:46). Brethren were willing to risk their lives in living for Christ.

That same militant spirit which existed in the first century is not seen very often now. If it were, the church would take on a different meaning with many. Just as the apostle Paul began to preach the faith which he once destroyed (Acts 9:20-21), more and more brethren are conversely destroying the faith they once preached. There is no better example of that than Rubel Shelly but he is not alone in this turning away from the truth which makes men free.

The faith is being destroyed in the minds of many in that preaching brethren will not declare the gospel in its entirety. This is true for various reasons, one of which is to keep their job. A man who will do that is not going to be an instrument to bring about the church growth which God desires. It is more common now for preachers to serve as entertainers, speaking those things which people love to hear, going slow on the responsibilities we have as Christians. There is not a great demand for preachers of the "old style," even though they may have a greater knowledge of God's word and a greater love for it. Some congregations want a preacher to pamper and play with the young folks. That the young folks are built up in the faith is not currently a high priority. Many had rather be entertained than take seriously God's rules for living. When a watered-down gospel becomes more palatable than truth, there's a problem!

The preaching in the first century was characterized by strong conviction. In the face of threatenings Peter and John said, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). The church prayed, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that they with all boldness they may speak thy word" (Ac. 4:29). Barnabas took Paul to the apostles and declared unto them how Paul had "preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus" (Ac. 4:27). It is said of deacons that if they have used the office well, they "purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 3:13). Paul asked the Ephesian brethren to pray for him that "I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:20). There are many references to boldness in proclaiming the gospel in the first century. To this can be attributed in large part the fact that they were said to "turn the world upside down" (Ac. 17:6).

Needless to say, it is so obvious, that so much of the preaching being done today is of the lackluster type, where convictions are only half heartedly set forth. And, the convictions are so shallow. When, and what a great blessing it would be, if brethren begin to declare the true gospel of Christ with the same conviction of those early brethren, great changes will be seen within the Lord's church. It will grow, in spite of the evil in the world. We should pray that that day may soon come.

PROPER RESPECT FOR GOD'S LAW ON FELLOWSHIP

How is it that we can claim to believe God's word and say virtually nothing about God's Law On Fellowship? This seems to be the case brotherhood-wide. The distinctiveness of the Lord's church is being compromised as more and more brethren go hand in hand with and have an affinity for the man-made churches. Within the church some brethren are in fellowship with those who are enemies of the truth, and the gospel of Christ (Phil. 3:18).

The following scenario [Actually it is real] is an example of how God's law is being ignored. The Catholic Church plans the "*Jubilee 2000 Revival!*"

The elders of a large congregation lead their flock to participate in the Catholic “Revival,” along with their preacher as one of the speakers in the revival. It could have been that the preacher led the elders and the congregation to support the Catholic Revival. Either way, how could this have been more presumptuous with respect to God’s law on fellowship? But to make a bad matter even worse, there was little outrage shown by brethren here in the Bible Belt. There are those who would claim to believe the Truth who continue in fellowship with the congregation under consideration. It is not unusual nowadays for preachers to proclaim that certain people are guilty of error, and then go right ahead and fellowship them as if nothing is amiss. This hurts the growth of the church, because it is evidence of a compromising spirit, a lack of conviction.

The New Testament teaches that we are to “...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). We are not to bid “God speed” to those who “abide not in the doctrine of Christ,” nor are we to “receive him” in our house [fellowship] (2 John 9-11).

EXERCISE CHURCH DISCIPLINE, TO THE POINT OF WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP

Church discipline has to do with fellowship in some instances. While Church Discipline involves teaching, correction, persuasion, it does reach the point of withdrawing of fellowship with offenders who will not repent. Discipline to the point of withdrawal of fellowship is almost a forgotten command. How tragic to pick and choose God’s commands we will respect and turn a deaf ear to others! Do we expect the church to grow under such circumstances? Let’s note a few things which God’s word says about Church Discipline, as it pertains to fellowship with violators of God’s law.

Paul couldn’t have been clearer than what he was in Romans 16:17-18:

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly: and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

The above passage, if taken to heart, would do so much to bring about growth in our Lord’s church. Paul’s words are not hard to understand. To “mark” someone is to call attention to that one. When a person is aiding error in a public way, we have no alternative, if we would please God, but to name that person that others might be warned. Those who object to “calling names,” usually only object to calling the names of false teachers to point out their errors. They are for “calling names” of false teachers in a positive way.

I Corinthians, chapter five, goes into detail with reference to the fellowship of those in error. Paul gets specific when he says: “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one not to eat” (v. 11). When such inspired instructions are set aside, the Lord’s church suffers. It is suffering now.

To the Thessalonians Paul wrote: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 Thess: 3:6). When we willfully chose to do that which God has not authorized or not do that which He has authorized, are we not placing our own will above His? This may account for so much of what has been brought into the church in recent years. Some must think their plan is better than God’s plan!

When we fellowship those in error, in opposition to what God's word teaches, we are not showing "love," as some would have us believe, but to the contrary. John said, "For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments..." (I Jno. 5:3). Under the guise of "love" brethren are hurting the body of Christ. There is hardly a greater need today than the demonstration of the higher form of love [agape] with reference to serving our Lord.

If we quit fellowshiping, upholding and encouraging those in error, the church would take on more meaning. Its appeal to those who are dead serious in serving the Lord would be much greater, and growth would occur. There are still out there those who sincerely want to do God's will. The image they see in the religious world is not very convincing, and it could be more convincing with us.

A PROPER EXAMPLE IN THE LIVES OF MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

The advice given to Timothy by Paul has a great lesson for us today, whether we be "youth" or older. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers [Christians], in word, in conversation [manner of life], in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Tim. 4:12). Not only are the lives we live seen by the Lord, but by people of the world and fellow servants of the Lord. When members of the church show a lack of concern for spiritual things, and exhibit a spirit of hypocrisy, the hurt upon other members may be great, and those of the world may be turned off by such examples.

Christ says we are to be, "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14). When we fail to so be, we are guilty of hindering the growth of the church for which Christ died. Godly living is not something which is getting enough attention in our day of "do as you please."

THE PROPER SPIRITUAL FOOD

The Proper Spiritual Food is available for all those who desire it. God's inspired word completely furnishes (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Peter says that "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue," have been given unto us (2 Pet. 1:3). Of the proper Spiritual Food, Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Pet. 2:2). The proper food is available, will we consume it?

Conclusion: We all have a responsibility to uphold and live by God's instructions. We have it in our power, with the Lord's help, to contribute to the growth of the Lord's church in accordance with the way God would have it to grow. For this opportunity and responsibility we will one day give account (John 12:48). May the Lord help us to realize this, and avail ourselves of the great opportunity before us to uphold Truth and oppose error.

- - - *Walter W. Pigg*

2nd Annual Banner of Truth Lectures

Murray, Kentucky — June 24-27, 2002

Theme: Church Growth – As God Would Have It

Sponsored by: Dexter and Hickory Grove Churches of Christ

***Location: Curris Center, Murray State University, Chestnut St.
Auditorium, Third Floor***

Monday, June 24th

10:00 a.m. God Would Have His Church to Grow

Gilbert Gough

11:00 a.m. Church Growth Requires Leadership

Lindon Ferguson

Break for Lunch

1:30 p.m. Church Growth Through “Progressive
Worship” — ***Freddie Clayton***

2:30 p.m. Church Growth Through Scriptural
Fellowship — ***Ken Burlison***

3:30 p.m. Church Growth Through Gospel

Meetings — ***Dean Buchanan***

Evening Meal Break

7:00 p.m. Preaching the Whole Counsel of God

Virgil Hale

8:00 p.m. Growth Through Foreign Mission Work

Roger Campbell

Tuesday, June 25th

10:00 a.m. Growth Through Personal Work

Roger Campbell

11:00 a.m. Church Growth Through the Sincere
Milk of the Word — ***Gilbert Gough***

Break for Lunch

1:30 p.m. Church Growth Through Writing

Alan Adams

2:30 p.m. Church Growth Through Entertainment

Freddie Clayton

3:30 p.m. The Lord’s Distinctive Church — Not
A Denomination — ***David Lemmons***

Evening Meal Break

7:00 p.m. Church Growth Seminars

Dean Buchanan

8:00 p.m. Church Growth Through Special

Singing Groups — ***Richard Guill***

Wednesday, June 26th

10:00 a.m. Church Growth Through Evangelism

David Lemmons

11:00 a.m. Church Growth and the Plague of
Indifference — ***Walter W. Pigg***

Break for Lunch

1:30 p.m. Church Growth and “Lads to Leaders”

Virgil Hale

2:30 p.m. Our Schools and Church Growth

Richard Guill

3:30 p.m. Truth Presented in Love

Jimmy Bates

Evening Meal Break

7:00 p.m. Church Growth and Islam

Don Waggoner

8:00 p.m. Youth and Potential Church Growth

Alan Adams

Thursday, June 27th

10:00 a.m. Church Growth Through Scriptural

Worship — *Tim Hester*

11:00 a.m. The Home and Church Growth

Lenard Hogan

Break for Lunch

1:30 p.m. Prayer and Church Growth

Don Greene

2:30 p.m. Church Growth by “Contending for The Faith” — *Don Waggoner*

3:30 p.m. Understanding God’s Word and

Church Growth — *Jimmy Bates*

Evening Meal Break

7:00 p.m. Training Men to Preach and Church

Growth — *Ken Burlison*

8:00 p.m. The Heavenly Reward, A Reason for

Church Growth — *Lenard Hogan*

Power to Unite or Divide

Ron Wilson

Differences among human beings are astounding. Children raised in the same house with practically the same influences are impressively different in adulthood. Remember Jacob and Esau? Differences between male and female are abundant. Not only are differences outwardly apparent, but inwardly as well. We are different. Each person is different from every other person. The same environment from which comes a caring mother might also provide a cold self-indulgent madman.

Human beings are so complex in their differences that it should come as no surprise that we have difficulty in getting along with each other. Though there are great differences, the God who made us is aware of those differences, and has designed a system whereby each human can find a common denominator, upon which people can be in agreement, and have a common association.

The apostle Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). The gospel has the God-given power to unite mankind. There is nothing else in the uni-

verse that duplicates this power. A basis of its amazing consolidating power is in the fact that the gospel is that which unites man to God. Primary obedience to the gospel, though baptism, puts one into God's family (Gal. 3:27), and thus establishes fellowship with God. Consider the following example.

If Fred is in fellowship with God and Sam is in fellowship with God, then Fred and Sam are in fellowship with one another (I Jno. 1:1-3). Since Fred and Sam are in fellowship with one another, by being in fellowship with God, then they ought to be able to get along with each other. After all, since God can get along with Fred, then Sam ought to be able to get along with Fred.

Since Fred's fellowship with Sam is conditioned upon common fellowship with God, then Sam's fellowship with Fred depends upon common fellowship with God (I Jno. 4:21). Due to the complexity of differences, brethren may have differences which temporarily separate them. Even the apostle Paul and his loyal companion, Barnabas, separated in a dispute concerning John Mark (Acts 15:37-40). Brethren may have differences of opinion that temporally separate them, but because of a common fellowship with God they should be able to reconcile their differences (cf. I Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10). At times two otherwise outstanding, faithful and sound brethren, for undetectable reason act as if they simply cannot stand each other. Some times two otherwise faithful brethren, although not publicly espousing their differences, will refuse association and communication with each other, or at least it is so cold that it might as well be nonexistent

Have some of us forgotten the age-old urgent plea of Abram? "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren" (Gen. 13:8). The gospel is the great uniting force for mankind. The gospel can eliminate strife between "herdmen" and brethren.

From a different perspective the gospel is also a great divider. A man can straddle a barbed-wire fence or seem to take both sides of a political issue, but he cannot be on the side of God and on the side of Satan (Matt. 12:30). We need to consider matters from God's perspective (Cf. I Sam. 16:7; 2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17), in order to see the lines drawn by the gospel. (I Jno. 4:1). God teaches us through His marvelous word that there is a gospel line of fellowship between the world and the church; it is drawn at the waters of baptism (Ga. 3:26-29). If by rejection of Baptism Fred is not in fellowship with God, then Sam, who is in fellowship with God through obedience in baptism, cannot have fellowship with Fred (Rom. 6:3-4; 2 Cor. 6:17-18).

The gospel has tremendous power; it is the power of God. By following the guidelines of the gospel Fred and Sam, through baptism, establish fellowship with God and with one another. However when those who have been scripturally baptized and placed in fellowship with God adopt a position contrary to the uniting gospel, then they become separated from God (Is. 59:2; Gal. 1:6-9). If Fred, in fellowship with God, embraces false doctrine, then he loses that fellowship with God (I Jno. 1:3). If Sam takes it upon himself to fellowship Fred, who has lost fellowship with God, then Sam loses that fellowship with God (2 Jno. 9-11). Since God does not fellowship erring Fred, how can Sam claim to be greater than God and seek to fellowship that which God does not fellowship?

Fellowship is sharing, participation in, and support of something/someone. If Fred is an erring brother and thus does not share an inheritance with God, does not participate in the spiritual blessings of God, and certainly is not in support of God by an erroneous position, how can he be in fellowship with God? The answer? He does not have fellowship with God! It is rank hypocrisy and usurpation of authority to fellowship that which God does not. Jesus says, "He that is not

with me is against me...” (Matt. 12:30). Can Sam be with Fred, who is not with God, and yet be with God? How can three walk together except they be in agreement?

Adultery is sin. Can Sam fellowship God and Fred if Fred is an adulterer? Certainly not! (I Cor. 5:11-13). To maintain fellowship with an adulterer is sin. If Fred is not an adulterer, yet fellowships and adulterer, then Fred is in sin. Can Sam fellowship Fred who fellowships adulterers? Certainly not! (Eph. 5:11). Must the sin be adultery? Is not the same principle applicable regardless of the of the sin? God does not fellowship sin: adultery, false doctrine, or whatever. To say one has fellowship with God and yet have fellowship with those who are in sin is to assert that God fellowships sin. Since false doctrine is sin (Gal. 1:6-9), and sin separates from God (Isa. 59:2), then those who espouse false doctrine are in sin and thus separated from God, which negates fellowship with God. Faithful children of God cannot fellowship that which God does not fellowship (2 Jno. 9-11).

Fellowship is established by the gospel and fellowship is maintained by the gospel. Only the gospel has this power. The gospel has the power to unite every obedient soul on this planet. But the gospel also has the power to divide. If Sam has not obeyed the gospel in baptism, then Fred who has obeyed the gospel in baptism, cannot have fellowship with Sam. If both have obeyed the gospel in baptism and yet cannot get along, it is because one has not continued in obedience to the gospel. If they are brethren in the gospel and are not getting along with each other, then each one needs to “examine himself” to see if he is error (Matt. 7:1-5; 2 Cor. 13:5). If the two are not getting along due to doctrinal error, the guilty party must either repent or remain out of fellowship with God and His faithful children. If they are not getting along due to matters of opinion, then examination is still necessary to determine who is at fault.

If one party is pressing a matter of opinion as a matter of doctrine, and refuses to fellowship the other party who disagrees, then the first party is in error and has broken fellowship with God. He is attempting to legislate where God has not. If either party thinks the other is in error because of an opinion, but it is not pressed to a matter of fellowship, then they should tolerate one another for the sake of their own well-being and of the gospel.

One of the greatest statements about the first members of the church was that “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship...” and “all that believed were together, and had all things in common...” (Acts 2:42, 44). The basis of fellowship was continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, the gospel they preached. That is the same basis for fellowship and being together today. The gospel has the power to unite God’s people. Those who claim to be God’s people ought to be united. If they are not united, someone or ones are not following the gospel.

–232 Chestnut Lane, Nesmith, SC 29580

Editor’s Note:

In the almost fifty years that I have been a member of the Lord’s church, there has never been so much division within the church as there is now. In a nutshell, I believe it can be attributed to a wholesale lack of respect for God’s word, and a desire on the part of many to please self rather than God.

Promoting Homosexuality Among Foster Children

The following article, received from Mark McWhorter, should serve as an eyeopener that there are powerful forces in our country which have as their objective, the making of our country into another **Sodom and Gomorrah**. The article says:

...A bill designed to indoctrinate foster children and parents into homosexuality has passed the California State Assembly. The bill would promote trans-sexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality throughout California's foster care system. Randy Thomasson of Campaign for California Families says the bill would require foster parents to encourage children to accept the homosexual life style and even encourage them to experiment with it. Parents who object could face charges, simply for expressing a religious objection to teaching children homosexuality is "normal." Thomasson says foster children are going to suffer if this bill becomes law because Christian foster parents will not go along with it. They would rather resign from the foster care system. He says the net result is there will be less foster homes for children to go to and the foster-care system will indoctrinate the children to become homosexual activists. Thomasson says that is really sad because most foster kids have already been sexually abused. He says Democratic lawmakers are pushing a dangerous lifestyle that is medically proven to be more dangerous than smoking, yet anyone who objects is labeled "intolerant" or a "bigot" (Agape Press, 5/24/02).

The Direction of Our Schools

A few years back I did a series of articles on Our Schools. The direction most of our schools are taking was pointed out by valid evidence. Since those articles, things have gotten even worse. There continues to be a flow of information which shows that the purpose of the schools, as set forth by their founders, has been completely cast aside. Schools which at one time were an asset to the cause of Christ have now in most instances become a great detriment. This would not have happened without the consent of the directors of these schools, and the financial support of those schools by brethren.

I'm simply amazed at the number of brethren to whom our schools have become a **Sacred Cow**. Time and time again, some brethren demonstrate that their loyalty to their school is even stronger than their loyalty to the Lord and His will.

The following, "From a mailer I received this past week for Uplift--" is from Mark McWhorter. It serves as a case in point, with reference to the school's continuing direction. Note words below:

"Acapella is a model of excellence in music and ministry. In their 20-year history, this humble foursome has performed more than 2000 concerts in the United and the rest of the world. Their most recent album is Hymns for All the Ages."

"Brian Staron is a nationally known comedian, magician, and Christian speaker. His shows are filled with fun and embarrassing moments for audience members. He has per-

formed at Harding numerous times, always drawing a large crowd.”

Listed among the activities: 7 pm on Thursday night Fourth of July Celebration in Bensen Auditorium featuring Acappella and Jimmy Allen. - - - *Editor*

Response To Ben Vick ?

Some have asked if I would respond to brother Ben Vick’s last article, in his bulletin, wherein he is still trying to justify the use of choruses, choirs, and special group singers. As stated in the March BOT, until Ben comes up with something to prove his position, I will not devote more space to the discussion. At this point, as far as I know, Ben has engaged in an effort of futility in his effort to justify his position. If he had Scriptural proof for his position, he surely would have produced it by now, but he hasn’t, though he has devoted a great deal of time to his efforts. We’ve asked Ben to consider the subject seriously, and pray that he will. - - *Editor*

FREE TRACT

NON DENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANITY

Brother Clarence Hall, 2107 Cedardale Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70808, has a supply of tracts of the above title, which he is offering **FREE** to those will make use of them. Contact him by mail or by phone at: (225) 344-6519. These tracts are worthwhile for members of the church as well as non members.

READERS’ RESPONSE

“I sure enjoy your B.O.T. I hope you and your wife continue to have good health and you are able to continue to ‘tell it like it is.’ It is one of the best publications I subscribe to . I’m sending an article that appeared in our *Daily Messenger* last week. I hope you will reply in the future - **Name withheld.**” *(The article referred to is entitled “Prayers offered in UC,” and is By Donna Ryder, Messenger Associate Editor. I will quote a few things from the article. The quotes will be in standard print.*

“Members of Exchange Street Church of Christ will be putting their money where their mouth is during the month of March. Starting Sunday, 116 members of the church will begin praying for families in Union City. Each family will receive a post card the week before they will be prayed for. On the card they will learn members of Exchange will be praying for their physical, emotional and spiritual well being.””We were trying to find something to help the community in light of 9-11,” church elder Bill Gillett said. “This is an appropriate way to reach out spiritually and physically.””Outreach leader Larry Carter said he will also encourage members to drive by homes and park in neighborhoods.” ‘I plan to have as many as possible to walk in that neighborhood as well,’ he said.” ‘We will pray for everyone in a positive way to where good things will happen for them in their spiritual and physical lives.’ . . .’I’m not sure we are doing something new, but I’ve not run into anyone doing this particular thing.’ ‘It’s going to work,’ he said.”

(This is a new thing to me. There is much teaching in the New Testament with reference to

evangelism, but I don't know of an effort such as the one under consideration, in the New Testament. I do know that to convert people it is necessary for them to hear God's word in order to have faith (Rom. 10:17). It is not unusual nowadays for people to come up with something "new" rather than relying upon the proven methods of converting people as seen in God's word - Editor).

"Still enjoy the BANNER OF TRUTH. Keep up the good work. Please add the following persons to your mailing list - **Waymon Swain.**" - **LA.** *(Thanks for sending the names, to help our list to grow - Editor).*

"In searching the 'Seek The Old Paths' website, it stated that I could receive the 'Banner of Truth' newsletter free just by asking to be put on the mailing list. Please add me to the mailing list if this is true; if not, please advise me how to go about receiving it if it is still in publication. In being a member of the Forrest Park Church of Christ in Forest Park, Georgia, I am always eager to learn more and do my best to stay alert in being certain to keep things as the Lord would have them to be in my life. I feel that this newsletter could also be beneficial in my on personal Bible studies. thank you for the opportunity to receive the newsletter. I look forward to hearing from you soon. May God bless you and keep you always - **Kimberely Mauldin.**" - **GA.** *(Kimberly, you are to be commended for having such an interest in knowing and doing the Lord's will. How great it would be if multitudes had the same interest. We trust that BOT will be helpful to you. If so, tell others about it - Editor).*

"I truly appreciate receiving *Banner of Truth* very much and am very pleased to observe the publication's firm stand on the issues facing the church today. It is very informative, as well as beneficial to my studies - **Cade K. Somers.**" - **FL.** *(Thanks for sending your change of address. This helps us, and you don't miss an issue - Ed.)*

"We receive 'Banner of Truth' and enjoy it very much. Especially enjoyed the articles on Islam and to learn the truth about it. We have a son in Cookeville, Tenn. who is a preacher .in Gainesboro, TN. He would like to receive Banner of Truth. ..Enclosed is a check to help with postage. thanking you and may God bless you to keep up the good work - **Jeannette Pinkston.**" *(We trust your son will find BOT worthwhile. Thank you much for the check to help with our expenses - Editor)..*

"I would really like to receive you publication each month. I just finished presenting a lesson on church government and your lesson God's Plan for Elders in the church was very helpful. Thank you - **Mimmy D. Bailey.**" - **TN.** *(We're happy to send BOT. We appreciate our readers who benefit by the paper - Ed. (Next page).*

"I received a BOT (Second hand), Vol. 10, Nov. 2001, No. 11. Front page article, (False Religion of Islam No. 2). I would like to have Vol. 1 of the same subject if available and not too much trouble. Also please put me on the mailing list. I find the articles interesting - **Alvie Byars.**" - **TN.** *(If I didn't send the No. 1, let me know. I plan to do an update on The False Religion of Islam. We should be deeply concerned about this religion, and are already being affected by it in many ways - Editor).*

"We appreciate and thankful so much the periodical BANNER of TRUTH you publish for the brotherhood in Christ. Since it is very informative and biblical we are interest to read for our encouragement and increasing of our knowledge and upholding God's truth. I preach here in Imphal where our information is only periodicals published by brotherhood. The liberal movement is around us. We are doing what we can to keep it out. For more information about the truth we are in need of good and biblical periodical for our study and reading which can help us in fighting lib-

eralism that advance among the churches of Christ. Your periodical does a fine job in refuting this movement and the same time the truth is being taught in love. Brother, we are not in a position to pay the subscription, however if you can send of free for the church copy we shall be very thankful. It is therefore, we humbly request you and put me in your regular mailing. I hope it will be a great help and blessing to the upholding of the kingdom of heaven. May our God who is the God truth bless you richly - **I. Ngulkhopao**>“ - **Manipur, India.** *(We are sending you many back issues and trust these will be helpful to you. We will plan to send additional copies in the future. The enemies of truth are found everywhere the Truth goes. The devil is very much alive, and leading many people astray - Editor).*

“Please send the BOT no more. Thanks - **Alvaton Church of Christ.**” - **KY.** *(Thank you for letting us know that you don't want BOT - Editor).*

“We really enjoy the good lessons in Banner of Truth. Would you please add these names to your mailing list - **Robert Cunningham.**” - **TN.**

We say “thanks” to the many readers who commend Banner of Truth by way of phone, and word of mouth. This is a great encouragement to us. - Editor

Editor's e-mail: < wpiggbot@apex.net >

Visit BOT on David Lemmons' web at
<http://www.hcis.net/users/dlemmons/BOTlist.htm>

Readers may get on David's LemmonsAid e-mail:

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