

Information About The Church of Christ

Editor's Note: About 19 years ago I was invited to speak to the 8th grade class of 25-30 students, at the St. Joseph Catholic School in Farmington, MO. A Catholic nun was also present. I was asked to give "**Information About The Church of Christ.**" At the end of my comments at least fifteen minutes were devoted to answering questions asked by the students. I was somewhat surprised when they asked such questions as, "Was Peter the first Pope?" I answered their questions to be best of my ability, in accordance with Bible teaching and other facts.

If I were speaking to that class in our day I would qualify some of the broad statements I made, such as, "The churches of Christ do not do. . . ." In our time some of the churches are doing things after the manner of the denominational world, and that is without authority from God's word. It would have been better to have said, "True and faithful churches of Christ do not do. . . ."

The following is almost word for word of the information I set forth to those Catholic 8th graders:

The invitation to speak to you young people on the subject, "The Church of Christ," is deeply appreciated. Let me assure you that I greatly appreciate young people, having had four teenagers of my own.

It must be terribly confusing to young people growing up in the religious confusion of today. Not only are there hundreds of denominations, all claiming to be right, there are also a number of pagan religions active in our country. In view of the current situation it is indeed needful to know much about religion, and especially about the true religion of Jesus Christ. Our religious knowledge concerns our spiritual welfare whereas secular knowledge has to do primarily with things of a temporal and physical nature. Therefore, it is commendable that you are spending this time in the study of religious matters concerning the church of our Lord.

As you know, I'm here to talk about the churches of Christ. By the term "Churches of Christ," I do not mean the "National Council of the Churches of Christ." That religious organization is made up of a number of denominations, and the churches of Christ have no connection with it. Toward the end of the hour we will have about fifteen minutes for questions, and let me encourage you to jot down any questions you may have.

I will be setting forth some basic facts about the church of Christ, and since a number of these things may be new to you, we would be happy for you to visit our worship services in order to see how our worship services are conducted. But for now, let me call attention to some very important areas of religion that have to do with the churches of Christ.

AUTHORITY IN RELIGION IS MOST IMPORTANT

The source of authority determines the make-up of a religion. If the authority is changeable, so will the religion be changeable. But if the authority is unchangeable, so will the church or religion be unchangeable. For example, there are certain laws of our State, based upon the constitution of the

State, which determine how the state is governed. If that state constitution is changed there will also be a change as to how the state is governed. The authority of Christ is unchangeable, as is His religion.

The Bible claims to be, and is, our source of authority in religious matters. How many of you have a Bible of your own? (Surprisingly, many of them said they had a Bible). The apostle Paul declares that, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In other words, God's all-sufficient revelation is spoken to man through the Scriptures. Christ told his apostles that the Spirit of Truth, or the Holy Spirit, would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). "All truth" has been made known through the Scriptures, and true faith comes from the hearing of the Scriptures, according to Paul's statement in Romans 10:17.

The churches of Christ have no man-made creeds, like most religions of today have. The Bible serves as the only rule of faith and practice. If you ask me what I believe about a certain subject, my reply will be: "Whatever the Bible teaches on that subject."

We have no man-made religious government, with some power telling us what to believe and what to do. There are no Cardinals or Archbishops. Rather, there are elders, deacons, preachers and teachers, and members. Our directions come from the Bible, and we have no power to change anything the Bible says, and of course, men should not want to change the message of the Bible. Although there is much of benefit to be learned from the Old Testament, it is the New Testament or covenant which is in force in our time. It is the law by which Christians are governed.

WHEN DID THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BEGIN?

When information about the beginning of the church of Christ is sought, one must go to the Bible for that. Most denominations mark their beginning by some date not more than a few centuries in the past, and many have had their beginning rather recently. But the church of Christ is not a denomination. By following the pattern of the church as set forth in the New Testament we are the same thing that existed in the first century. Therefore, we are neither Protestant nor Catholic, but just Christians, as were those in the first century.

From Matthew 16:18, we learn that Christ said he would build His church. The Old Testament prophets had predicted the coming of Christ's church or kingdom. Beginning with the Book of Acts in the New Testament we read of the church in existence. It is referred to as Christ's church, the church of God, simply the church, or by some other descriptive term.

When the pattern for the church in the New Testament is followed, the same church exists today. From the parable of the sower, in Luke 8, we learn that the seed is the word of God. As an example of what that means, let me illustrate it this way. Suppose a preacher goes into some heathen country where the true church is not known, and preaches the pure gospel. When people hear that gospel, when they believe and obey that teaching, they become Christians. Those Christians make up the church in that place. That church would be the same as we read about in the New Testament, since the same teaching was believed and obeyed.

God never intended that there be more than one church. And, Christ prayed that all who believed on him through the words of the apostles would be one, as he and the Father are one (John 17). There are many denominational churches today because men have followed something other than the Bible alone as their guide. If all men would return to the Bible as their only religious authority or guide, and this I teach, New Testament Christianity of the first century would be restored, and we would not see the condition which exists today.

WHAT ARE THE TERMS OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

The various conditions of membership in denominational churches are unlike those found in the New Testament. As we read the New Testament record we learn that when people heard the gospel, believed it and obeyed its commands, they were added to the church by the Lord. This is clearly set forth in Acts, chapter two. Those commands of the gospel to be obeyed include faith (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Acts 17:30), confession of faith (Rom. 10:10), and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27).

Christ tells us in John 3:3-5, that entrance into the kingdom or church involves the new birth. The new birth is to be “born of water and of the Spirit.” One is “born of water” when buried with Christ in baptism and raised to a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). The Spirit is involved in the new birth in that the instructions are given by the Spirit through the word of God.

Whereas men have made their own conditions of entrance into their own churches, the Lord has set forth his own terms of entrance into His church. When men do the bidding of the Lord relative to the terms of entrance, the Lord “adds” to the church those who have done so (Acts 2:47).

ACTS OF WORSHIP ENGAGED IN BY CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Worship is a word which may mean different things to different people. But as the word is used in the New Testament, it has been well defined as, “Acts of reverence paid to God by man.” The Hindus of India may show a great attitude of reverence as they bow before their idols, but their worship is not acceptable because their reverence is not paid to the true God of heaven, and they are not children of God, or Christians.

Jesus says, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Jno. 4:24). Worshipping God “in spirit” involves our attitude, that is, with reverence from the heart. To worship “in truth” limits our acts of worship to those authorized by the New Testament. There are five items of worship set forth in the New Testament, and we shall give some attention to them.

Prayer. This is an act of worship engaged in by the Christians in the early church. It is, therefore, according to truth to worship God through prayer as we have been directed. But there are certain conditions by which prayer must be offered. For example, prayer to God is to be made through Jesus Christ, not to Christ. Paul clearly says, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5). This prohibits praying to various people as mediators, since Christ is our only mediator.

Under the Old Law there were ordinary priest and high priest. Men went before the ordinary priest, the ordinary priest went before the high priest, and the high priest approached God. But under Christianity all Christians are priest (1 Pet. 2:5), and Christ is the High Priest. This allows the Christian

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to pray to God at any time without any mediator other than Christ.

Singing. Singing was another act of worship for New Testament Christians. Paul tells the Ephesians and Colossians to sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We find no record of early Christians using mechanical instruments of music in their worship, and indeed the New Testament does not authorize or command their use. In fact, it was centuries after the church began before mechanical instruments of music were used in worship. This type of music has its place, but that place is not in worship. We do not have the right to determine what we do in worship on the basis of what pleases us. We are only permitted to do that which pleases God.

Giving. When people give of their financial means they are paying reverence to God. In New Testament times people were told to give as God had prospered them (I Cor. 16:1-2). Paul also told the Corinthians, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or

necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). This is the basis upon which Christians are to give of their money. Therefore, we never use other means to make money, such as selling merchandise, running a business, bingo parties and such like. The New Testament doesn’t allow us to engage in such means of raising money.

The Lord’s Supper. Communion is a very solemn act of reverence paid to God by men. We know that Jesus commanded that he be remembered by the observance of this great memorial (Matt. 26; I Cor. 11). The early Christians came together upon the first day of the week, Sunday, to observe the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7). Each individual makes a choice as to whether or not to partake of the Lord’s Supper. It is not a “closed” communion. Those partaking of the supper take the bread as a representation of the body of Christ, and take the cup or fruit of the vine as a representation of the blood of Christ.

Bible Study. The hearing of God’s word is also an act of reverence paid to God by men. Since faith comes from the hearing of God’s word (Rom. 10:17) it is very important that God’s word be heard. Therefore, the hearing of God’s word is encouraged in keeping with New Testament teaching. Paul told Timothy to “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Since it is truth which makes men free (Jno. 8:32), it is important to hear that truth.

WHAT OF THE PRACTICE OF BAPTISM?

Of the several conversions recorded in the Book of Acts, the act of baptism was a part of everyone. This was in keeping with the Great Commission given by Christ in Mark 16:15-16. Jesus told the apostles to, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” We note that Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized.” Only people who were old enough to “believe” were baptized in New Testament times, and we do not baptize those under that age today. It was many years after the beginning of the church before infant baptism was practiced.

Bible baptism was immersion or a “burial” in water. It was centuries before people started “sprinkling” people for baptism. It would be wrong for us to practice this today; the Bible doesn’t authorize it.

A FEW OTHER THINGS IN CONCLUSION

Our time is almost gone but there are a few other things which characterize churches of Christ today, when the truth of God is respected and obeyed. You may find some of these of interest since some religions of today differ greatly on these points.

The New Testament Christian doesn’t use alcoholic beverages. This is because drunkenness is a “work of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21) and those doing such things cannot go to heaven. Gambling, which often accompanies drunkenness, is avoided because of the evil fruit which it bears, though the act of gambling is not specifically mentioned in the Bible.

Christ is respected as the head of the body, the church (Eph. 5:23). He is the savior of the church. No earthly head of the church is accepted. Christ is to have the preeminence (Co. 1:18) and no man is to be exalted to that position.

Preachers of the churches of Christ do not use titles such as: “Reverend,” “Father,” “Cardinal,” “Archbishop,” etc. In New Testament times the term “preacher” or “evangelist” was used with reference to those who used their time in preaching the gospel. There is no clergy-laity distinction among Christians. Preachers do not wear any special type of clothing to distinguish them from other Christian men. Women have no authority to preach.

There are no special days or seasons observed by churches of Christ. The first day of the week is when the Lord’s Supper is observed, when people give of their money, and engage in other

activities of the assembly. In this sense the first day of the week might be called special, but there is a first day in every week and all are to be observed.

Your kind attention during my remarks has been greatly appreciated. We are going to devote the remainder of the hour to questions you may have, but before we begin the questions I would like for each of you to have one of these brochures containing some facts about the churches of Christ.

Editor's Note: As indicated in my note in the beginning of the above discussion, some churches of Christ are now doing things that were virtually unheard of when I obeyed the Gospel almost 50 years ago. For example, the University congregation here in Murray had a Christmas program this past December, and then an Easter program earlier this year. Some churches are now using instrumental music. It is no longer a "no, no," for women to have leadership roles in some places. Some now use unscriptural means to raise money, other than the first day of the week contribution. In some quarters, the church is no longer being presented as that "one distinctive, blood-bought body of Christ." A growing number of congregations are now using choirs in their worship periods. There are other changes.

A primary reason for running the above article was that it might be helpful to some of our own brethren. There is now such a pressing need for the emphasizing of the basic and fundamental things which used to be accepted by most members of the Lord's church. It used to be that one of our greatest appeals to the non-Christian was that we based our beliefs and practices on God's word and that alone. It is no longer that way. Appeals to a "thus saith the Lord" are no longer ringing out as they once did!

What we are seeing today, as tragic as it is, should come as no surprise to us. The New Testament amply warns of such times. Cf. Mt. 7:15; Acts 20:29-30; Phil. 3:18; I Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; I Jno. 4:1; Jude, and others. —Walter Pigg

Division Cannot Always Be Avoided

Marvin L. Weir

Much is said, and rightly so, about unity in the body of Christ. Unity was on the mind of the Master shortly before His death. Christ prayed, "*Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even 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 didst send me*" (Jno. 17:20-21). The apostle Paul strikes a death blow to unscriptural division in saying, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (I Cor. 1:10). How can one read and believe these Scriptures and then advocate that even though people disagree on doctrinal matters all will be saved?

Biblical unity is not determined by man but by the Holy Spirit. The Ephesian brethren were obligated to "*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:3). The Holy Spirit reveals the truth that there is but "*one body...one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God...*" (Eph. 4:4-6). Thus, unity in diversity is **not** a Scriptural solution to doctrinal error.

The Lord's people must divide from time to time but such division cannot be attributed to God. To the brethren at Ephesus Paul said, "*I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse*

things to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). To divide and refuse to follow those who reject God's Word is not sinful!

The words of John are as applicable today as they were when he said, "*Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his* (Page 6)

evil works" (2 Jno. 9-11). To go beyond and not abide in the teaching of Christ is always sinful. Those who insist upon going beyond the teaching of Christ must be marked (Rom. 16:17), and not fellowshiped (Eph. 5:11). When such is done then division will occur. But whose fault is it when those who no longer wish to follow Christ go out or are put out from among us? (cf. I Jno. 2:19). It is the fault of those who have chosen to no longer abide by a "thus saith the Lord."

Some people advocate unity at any price to spare a congregation from division. The Bible, however, does **not** teach that false teaching and error are to be tolerated within the body of Christ for the sake of unity. Thus, even though division is sinful for those who cause it by error, it some times cannot be avoided. Neither is it right to accuse faithful brethren of **causing** the division by standing forthrightly for the truth!

In the 1800s the instrument was introduced into the churches of Christ. Faithful brethren opposed the instrument being introduced, and division occurred in congregation after congregation throughout the land. Were loyal followers of Christ responsible for the division **caused** by advocates of the instrument? Absolutely not! Singing in worship is authorized by the Lord (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), but the instrument does not have divine approval.

Why is it also more often than not that those who are unwilling to compromise on Scriptural matters are the ones who walk out and leave the church building to those who no longer respect the Word of God? Perhaps some have such an aversion to division that they convince themselves that they must leave quietly and without any trouble. Does it glorify God for faithful soldiers of the cross to lie down and let the enemies of the cross run over them?

No quarter should be willingly given to those who seek to pervert the gospel and restructure the Lord's church. The liberals should meet nothing but resistance on every hand from those who truly love the Lord. The Savior does not expect His followers to win popularity contests, but He does expect those who love Him to stand firm for His cause. The line between righteousness and unrighteousness is **not** a thin, gray, nebulous line. Those who are committed to what is godly and right must simply determine to stand firm on sacred matters. To claim fellowship with God while refusing to abide by His will is hypocrisy. To fail to stand up and fight for the cause of Christ is to act cowardly. To hand over church assets to traitors of the kingdom to avoid trouble and division is despicable.

May those who love the Lord take the "*Sword of the Spirit*" (Eph. 6:17) and not give one inch to those who would subvert the faith. Division cannot always be avoided!

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ET Phone Home (V)

Alan Adams, Assistant Editor

The scriptural pattern for unity is set forth in I Corinthians 1:10, "...brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...ye all speak the same thing,...that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." This noble ideal for brethren can only be attained if we all set our minds to "walk by the same rule [and] mind the same thing" (Phil. 3:16). When the principle of unity is ignored it causes tremendous alienation among brethren. You can

be made to feel like “ET” longing to be with his own kind again. One departure from the “pattern” is in the area of The Assembly. From this point let us consider this beautiful aspect of Christianity: All Christians of a local congregation assembled together in one place for the purpose of worship.

A careful examination of First Corinthians 11:17 through 16:9 shows those brethren assembling together in a particular place at a particular time on “the first day of every week” (16:2; RSV). Because this section of Scripture deals at length with “spiritual gifts,” many students miss the teaching about the Worship Assembly.

You see, during the early church, “spiritual gifts” were an inseparable part of worship and the Worship Assembly. Try to put yourself in the First Century Corinthian context. You’ve been raised up and have lived in an environment where ever sort of idol is worshipped, where every sort of sexual sin and perversion is a common thing. Through the preaching of Paul (later Apollos), you and others have obeyed the Gospel. Come Sunday, who’s going to lead the singing? Out of what book? Who will preach? Who will lead the prayers? Where will you buy your New Testaments? “Spiritual gifts,” were needed in order to allow certain brethren to lead the assembly in acts of worship.. This is why Paul said, “...when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (I Cor. 14:26). These “gifts” long ago “fail[ed]...cease[d]...and vanish[ed] away,” because they only enabled those early brethren to “know in part” (13:8-9). Now, we have the “perfect [complete, AA]” New Testament and are able to “know” fully what we are to say and do in our worship service to God (Cf. I Cor 13:12). Absent the “spiritual gifts,” what we have left in these passages is the Worship Assembly.

Worship, generally speaking, is not limited to the “first day of the week,” but there can be no doubt that early Christians particularly “came together” on that day (Cf. Ac. 20:7). An exact translation of the Greek text in I Cor. 16:2, *kata mian sabbatou*, shows that those brethren, as also “all the churches of Galatia” (1), assembled together on “the first day of **every** week.” Among the other items of worship listed in chapters 11-14, they also “la[id] by...in store” on that day.

This Assembly was/is so important to the life and work of Christians that the Holy Spirit strictly forbids “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25). Of course, this would forbid forsaking any church assembly as well as the one on the “first day of every week.” Not only do we worship God in this assembly (I Cor. 14:25), but this is also where we...”consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24). Forsaking the assembly is a flagrant sin against God, the brethren and oneself. Rather than willfully “missing church,” we ought to be “exhorting one another and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (v. 25). Here, “the day,” is likely a reference to the impending judgment on Jerusalem which came in A.D. 70, but *that* “day” serves as a *type* of the ultimate “day of judgment” which is coming upon all men. Only a very foolish person will cover his eyes and refuse to “see the day approaching.” Brethren, who do not desire to “go to church” every time the door is open need to be adding those Christian Graces to their lives (2 Pet. 1:5-8), because it is certain that “[they] lack...these things [and are] blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that [they were] purged from [their] old sins” (v. 9).

Another unique aspect of this assembly is the *who*; that is, who or what people are to be present in The Assembly. It ought to be evident, on the surface, that every Christian is to be in The Assembly. The definition of “assembly...assemble together...come together” bears this out. Paul speaks of the “whole church...come together in one place” (I Cor. 14:23). To be sure, the *Ox In The Pit* (Lk. 14:5) principle should be considered when discussing the subject of attendance; nevertheless, in general, every member: man, woman, and child should be there. A common practice of many churches today is that of Children’s Worship, Children’s Bible Hour, or the Divided Assembly. This practice got started during the heyday of using busses to bring children from the community. I know, because I used to participate in such a program myself. With a massive influx of children, many who have never been taught about quietness and decorum, they became a distraction in The Assembly. Thus, Children’s

Bible Hour: There the youngsters can be separated from The Assembly and “lighter” activities can be used to keep their attention.

I know that brethren who do this have good intentions; but, from what I’ve read, so did the brethren in Kentucky, many years ago, who first brought in musical instruments. They said their singing was lousy! Good intentions or not, you are taking several Christians out of The Assembly: some of them, young people who have obeyed the Gospel, and some adult Christians who are in charge of the Children’s Bible Hour. When you do this, it can no longer be said that you have the “whole church come together in one place.” When every one of those Corinthian (Christian) Moms, Dads, and others did what the Holy Spirit told them to do on the Lord’s Day, “come together in one place,” where do you suppose the children were? Right there alongside their folks or whoever brought them.

Besides, you are robbing children of a valuable lesson: The importance of manners, decorum and propriety. I think it is great to bring in as many children as possible, but it doesn’t help to start giving them the wrong example right off the bat! Instead of sending them out of The Assembly, get some of the brethren to “adopt” a child or two and be their guardians and models so that they can learn about the dignity and reverence we are to have when we are “all...present before God” (Ac. 10:33). The time for “lighter” activities and appropriately-gear teaching is in our Bible classes. The Worship Assembly and our Bible classes (Sunday school) are not the same thing.

The “whole church” is to “come together” on the “first day of every week.” In that assembly, we “eat the Lord’s supper” (Cf. I Cor. 11:20). We also sing, pray, hear the Word, and give. Today, we usually take a five or six hour break and continue The Assembly in the evening in order that brethren who were not present earlier might “come together” later. Because it is a continuation of The Assembly, they may take the Lord’s Supper; and the Lord’s Supper may *only* be taken in The Assembly. There is no authority for taking anyone out of The Assembly; in fact, this is a clear deviation from the “pattern” (and yes, Rubel Shelly notwithstanding, we do have a “pattern” (Heb. 8:5).

Editor’s Note: When people go into a back room and take the emblems of the Lord’s Supper, after the assembly has been dismissed, they are not taking it “in the assembly.” I think we are some times too concerned with saving a few minutes of time. A few years ago I spoke to a congregation in the Philippines, and they proceeded to sing a song while passing the collection plate. If the objective was to save a little time, no more than three or four minutes would have been saved, since the congregation was not very large in number.

On The Lord’s Day

During the next few minutes,
If I can possibly concentrate;
Things concerning our religious actions,
I will endeavor to relate.

With thoughts on work, play, houses, lands
And a whole raft of other things,
The following may happen next Sunday
When we are supposed to be worshipping:

When Lord's Day breaks,
And even if the weather is fair,
Several who call themselves Christians
Will not even bother to be there.

At 10:00 A.M. Bible classes meet.
If you want learn, make it a date.
But some show their interest to be weak,
Because they often wander in late!

If interest in study was very high
This would not happen, I assert.
Because, how many of these same people
Turn up late for their work?

About 10:40 the Bible classes are o'er and
Conversations begin which I cannot quote;
While some of the grown men
Stand our front of the house and smoke.

When the ten minutes are over,
And it's now time for the worship hour,
A few late comers may struggle in
Under very, very little power.

The announcer stands to get some attention.
Still a whimper here and a scuffle there,
But, Oh! It's still quite now when compared
With the typical noise of a county fair.

The announcements are made and
It's time for the singing to begin.
But just look at the sour faces
Which will not even chime in.

When the songs are over and
The Lord's Supper we prepare to take;
We'll have to admit that at this time
Most all the people are still awake.

The emblems are passed and
Many are in deep meditation,
But from the whisperings and commotions,
Some must not have any dedication.

It's time to give as we've prospered,
To contribute of our means.
And some give liberally of their goods,
But some are paupers, it seems.

Another song and then time for preaching.
But to some preaching must be a bore,
Or, why would they at different times
Arise and march out the door?

This has happened at other places
But as far as I know, seldom of course.
But now it my estimation it seems,
We are acting decidedly worse.

Now the songs are finished,
As also the prayer has been.
Why not relax and listen seriously?
It's time for the preaching to begin.

Some give the most splendid attention,
For in the lesson they are very engrossed.
But several of the congregation I see,
Whose attention I've already lost.

There are those who are talking or playing,
And on and on we could go.
But would you believe it could happen here?
There are four asleep on one row!

Now I can't help but have the feeling
That they are wanting me to stop,
The way they twist their heads to the right,
Just to look at the wall clock.

At last! The sermon is now over,
And those sound sleepers can awake.
Just a few minutes from an eating place
A very sumptuous meal to take.

Now a song of invitation, with books
Dropping in the racks everywhere.
Just waiting for the releasing signal,
The a-men of the very last prayer.

With some worship time is all over,
At least for another whole week.
But if every little thing is convenient,
Next week they will likely repeat.

But thanks be to our God and His Son
For the most treasured "faithful few."
If it were not for their true love for God,
Then just what would we do?
- - *Walter W. Pigg*

Editor's Note:

The above was written more than 30 years ago. It was not intended then, nor is it now, to detract in any way from those who try to serve the Lord faithfully from week to week. But it was intended to draw attention to some of the weaknesses which were evident in the congregation where I preached. I would think that others have seen similar conditions to those described above, which were real and not imagined.

Moving ? ? ? Would you do us and yourself a favor by sending us your change of address. It will be appreciated! - *Editor*

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The above may be ordered from: James E. Green, 27 Spring Meade Blvd., Columbia, TN 38401. Phone: (931) 486-1364. His e-mail: jamesegreen@charter.net

The tapes contain 28 lessons by 20 speakers, relating to the theme of the lectures: **Back to The Old Paths - The Good Way**. Video set is \$35.00. Audio is \$30.00

We greatly appreciate our brother, Jim Green, making these tapes available. By this means the great informative and edifying lessons delivered by the speakers can be passed on to others who love the truth of God and strive to do His will. - - *Editor*

Foolishness of Preaching

Alton W. Fonville

God in his wisdom, chose to save mankind through the preaching of his word, which is his power to save. Although man is a free moral being, and will give account unto God one day for things he has herd, he still has those choices to make. At no time in history has mankind been "forced" to accept the teachings of God. Even the Son of God, while He was on earth did not "force" his will upon

people. He let them make their decisions to accept or reject him. Those who rejected him finally put him to death trying to silence his word, but, that did not work either. God's word will not be silenced, or return unto him void, but will accomplish its purpose.

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Cor. 12:21-25). “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).

In showing how some accept the preaching and others reject it, our Lord said, as he gave his disciples the limited commission, “And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He concluded his thoughts by saying that if they would not hear you “shake of the dust of your feet...” It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city” (Matt. 10:5-15). And he also pronounced a “woe” to the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, saying, “if the mighty works which had been done in them had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matt. 11:21-22). It takes little study to see the utter destruction which Sodom and Gomorrah experienced. Likewise, the destruction of Tyre and its king was graphically illustrated by the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 28. In his wisdom, the king's heart was lifted up in pride. He boasted that he was a God and sat in the seat of God. His boasting only caused the God of heaven to tell him the kind of death he would die, and it happened exactly that way, “for I have spoken it, sayeth the Lord” (Eze. 28:1-10).

In our time, it is common to hear people boldly claim that they “love the Lord” and keep his word. They boast about their study habits in the Bible, yet, they continue in the divisions which are brought about by man-made doctrines. They continue to partake with the enemy of God in denominational practices which make people “feel good.” Jesus said it so plain, how can we misunderstand it? “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8-9).

He was quoting from David and Isaiah, but, listen to the way Ezekiel put it: “And they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they **show much love**, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (Eze. 33:31). But, we keep trying to teach God's truth, doing his will.

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2). “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:2-3).

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Editor's Note: Whereas in Paul's day the world, with respect to salvation, considered the preaching of God's word **Foolishness**, we now have a situation where some evidently believe people can be saved by **Preaching Foolishness**. For example, aren't men preaching foolishness when they preach the doctrines of men, that for which they have no authority from God? When they preach to please men rather than God? God's word has much to say about **fools** and **foolishness**. Is it not a **foolish** thing to preach that one can find salvation in a religion which was not made possible by the cross of Christ? I think so!

Who Is “The Pusher” In Your Family?

Roger Campbell

We sometimes associate the word “pusher” with one who illegally sells drugs. We also use the word “pushy” to describe a person who, in an unwanted way, forceful way, tries to influence or push us to do something. “The Pusher” to whom we refer in the title of this article is neither a drug pusher nor a pushy person. What we are wondering is, in your family who is the one who “pushes” to keep everybody going and doing what needs to be done in the spiritual realm?

If you are married and your spouse is not a Christian, then we already know who “the pusher” has to be: it’s you. We admire so much our brothers and sisters who faithfully follow the Christ, though their husband or wife does not. You are special. Don’t ever give up.

Then, there are those teenagers of young adult saints who still live at home, and whose parents are not members of the church. We know that you are “the pusher.” Don’t give up in well doing (Gal. 6:9). Keep disciplining yourself to be the best you can be.

If it is the case that you are married to a Christian, is it you or your spouse who pushes to get everybody ready and to services on time? Is it you or your spouse who pushes to even come to Bible class? If you are married and when your spouse is around, your whole family comes to services every time the doors are open, but when your spouse is out-of-town or for some other reason is unable to attend services, do you and the kids just skip services altogether? If so, what does that say about your commitment? Or, when your spouse cannot attend do you sleep in through Bible class on Sunday morning and come only for worship? If so, does it not sound like your spouse must be “the pusher” in your family?

If you have children, is it you or your spouse who sees to it that the kid’s Bible lessons are prepared, their verses memorized, and that they bring their Bibles with them to services? The Bible teaches that fathers are obligated to bring up their children in the Lord’s nurture and admonition (Eph. 6:4). Shouldn’t moms be counted on as a helping force in this effort rather than the ones on whom dad just totally “dumps off” the whole responsibility?

Is it you or your spouse who pushes to come back on Sunday night and Wednesday night? If it were left up to you, just how many services would you and your family attend? Blessed is the family who never, ever discusses the question: “Well, are we gonna go to services at _____ (time), or not?” And just why do they never discuss this question? Because every family member knows that if it is a service of the church, they are going to be there if it is physically possible! Does that describe your family? If so, how blessed you are! Is it not the case that in Christ both husband and wife are to be “fervent in spirit” in the Lord’s affairs (Rom. 12:11)? Should not the Christian husband and the Christian wife be “co-pushers” in the family, that is, should they not both be equally committed to the Lord’s cause? How wonderful it is when Christian spouses exhort one another unto love and good works (Heb. 10:24).

Every Christian needs to be a “self-starter;” every one that is mature enough to make the decision to follow Jesus ought to be able to get himself going and doing what needs to be done in the spiritual realm. The reality is, though, in some cases it seems like it takes someone else to do some pushing. Did not Jesus call on each of us to take up our own cross (Lk. 9:23)? Let’s not wait or depend on some other family member’s leading or pushing us to read our Bibles on a regular basis, to attend the services of the church, or to do whatever else we ought to be doing in our service to Christ. Let each of us take it upon himself or herself to make a commitment to our Lord: “I’m going to do what I need to do, and nobody has to beg, push, or bribe me into doing it. It’s my cross, it’s my obligation, and with my Lord’s help I am going to do the Master’s will.”

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Via The Coldwater Courier

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A REVIEW OF THE BANNER OF TRUTH LECTURES

We have just concluded the Third Annual Banner of Truth Lectures. What a great spiritual feast this was. The theme was “Back To The Old Paths — The Good Way.” Each speaker sought to call for us to get back to the “Old Paths” of righteousness, which are revealed for us in the Scriptures. It is evident that many today are not content to walk in those old paths, and the church is suffering from the effects.

The lectureship was a success because the truth was preached in love and many were edified by it. Many others perhaps will yet be through the audio and video tapes which will circulate far and wide for people to listen to these lessons.

Although the attendance was up slightly for some sessions over the previous years, it was still not anywhere near what it ought to be. I fail to understand fully why brethren who want to be considered “faithful” and who live in the area where it is only a few minutes drive to attend, don’t show up. With the exception of the Dexter and Hickory Grove congregations, which cooperate in sponsoring this event, the number of brethren from the near surrounding area (and that includes Coldwater) who attended were pitifully few, and many of them were preachers!

Could it be that there are some who don’t have as much interest in spiritual things as they profess? I see a lot of this displayed in the lack of attendance at area gospel meetings which they also fail to attend. It may be that some have the mistaken idea of what the lectures are all about. Some may think that these are designed as sessions where we “bash the liberals.” While it may occasionally be necessary to expose what the liberals are doing as they depart from the “old paths,” these lessons were generally of a more positive note as they reminded us that God’s way is the “good way” and the only way in which we must walk if we hope to get to heaven (John 14:6).

Some simply do not like brother Walter Pigg and the publication “Banner of Truth.” They don’t care for the exposure of liberalism and sin in brethren. Yet the Bible says that it is to be done (Rom. 16:17-18). Brother Pigg loves the Lord and the church and the truth, and it bothers him deeply that multitudes of brethren are turning away from those “old paths” which lead to heaven, and are going to be lost if they follow that course. How can anyone who calls himself a Christian sit silently by and not plead for their return, and warn brethren of the eternal danger of following that course? I, for one, am pleased to be associated with him in the work of trying to warn brethren and call them back to the “old paths” of faithfulness, because I, too, love their souls and want them to be saved.

- - - Richard Guill via the Coldwater Courier

Editor’s Note: We thank brother Guill for his help with the Banner of Truth Lectures. He has assisted in a number of ways.

I was greatly encouraged by the interest shown in the lectures by those in attendance. We had a number of people for the first time, and some from a considerable distance. Many favorable comments were heard.

To me, the lack of better attendance at the lectures, is a reflection of the decreasing interest in spiritual things. This is happening not only here but all across our country. Every lesson delivered upheld God’s truth. My overall assessment is that brethren in general no longer have a love for the

truth as they once did. If my concern is unfounded, why has no one so informed me? We will not relent in our efforts.

The BOT Lectures are scheduled for June 14 – 17, 2004. We ask for the support of our brethren in this effort. Thanks to God for His truth!

Entertainment Versus Preaching The Gospel

Brock Hartwigsen

Our culture's addiction to entertainment is a major problem facing the church today. Many members of the church complain that our worship services and Bible classes are boring. They want to update our worship and teaching styles so that it is more exciting, more **Entertaining**.

Michael Crichton, in his book, *Timeline*, wrote an excellent piece on this topic. He was not addressing the problem of entertainment in the church, but in our modern-day society. Yet, I'm sure you will see it also applies to the struggle we are having in the church with this addiction.

Today, everybody expects to be entertained, and they expect to be entertained all the time. Business meetings must be snappy, with bullet lists and animated graphics, so executives aren't bored. Malls and stores must be engaging, so they amuse as well as sell. Politicians must have pleasing video personalities and tell us only what we want to hear. Schools must be careful not to bore young minds that expect the speed and complexity of television. Students must be amused – everybody must be amused, or they will switch: switch brands, switch channels, switch parties, switch loyalties. This is the intellectual reality of Western society.

Contrary to what people want today, the purpose of the church is to proclaim the Truth, feed, edify and educate. Either the church transforms and becomes conformed to what the world wants – an entertainer, or the church transforms people into what God wants – obedient believers. The church does not proclaim the truth, feed, edify and educate by entertaining, but rather by the renewing of minds, proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:2).

If we transform the church, we will lose. The church can't even begin to compete with Hollywood and television, when it comes to entertainment. If we transform the church, we will be turning our back on God and when we do that, we will lose.

While we might be losing the battle today with the entertainment industry, we will ultimately win the war against Satan, if we only remain true to God and His will. So let's not **entertain**, let's proclaim the truth, feed, edify and educate by preaching the Gospel.

Our brethren who have been caught up in the modern entertainment-driven culture might consider the preaching of the gospel as boring and foolish, but they aren't the first to view the preaching of the gospel this way and probably won't be the last. The apostle Paul addresses this subject when he said:

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (I Cor. 1:20-25).

Instead of the church conforming to today's modern entertainment-driven culture, the church needs to transform the minds of the people by proclaiming the truth. Again, Paul says, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Entertainment can never accomplish the God-given purpose of the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16).

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