

Banner of Truth

"The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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HAS THE LORD'S CHURCH LOST ITS APPEAL? IF SO, WHY?

Fifty years ago Christ's church was the fastest growing religious group in our country. Not only has it lost that distinction in our present time, it is not growing at all today. The number of faithful brethren has decreased. What part do we have to play in the sad picture we see today?

Before commencing a discussion of this topic it is highly needful to reflect on the importance of the Lord's church. The more important a subject is, the greater the need to consider it in the highest degree of seriousness. Due to the gross misunderstanding by so many of the nature and purpose of the church revealed in the New Testament, the profit from our discussion would be limited, without first giving some attention to the church about which we speak. If the church is unimportant, even unnecessary, as so many view it, then it would not be important as to whether or not the church has any appeal to mankind. Thus, we begin by considering:

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH

We can be thankful that God has revealed to us the importance of the church and the part it has to play in His plan of salvation for man. Just a little

serious study would convince many that the church is much more important than they ever realized. For example, how many people realize that the church was in the mind of God from eternity? Yet, this is set forth in very clear and understandable language. We learn this from the inspired apostle Paul, who said of the gospel he preached, "For I neither received it of man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). The gospel came from Christ.

As Paul speaks of the grace given to him to preach the "unsearchable riches of Christ" to the Gentiles, he said: "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" (Eph. 3:10-11). Since the church is evidence of the "manifold wisdom of God," this places it in the highest →

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Continued from Page 1

order of value and importance. This means that even before man sinned, God had the church in His mind. The church which God had in mind was that which is described in the New Testament, and of which the prophets prophesied.

From early on in God's revelation (cf. Gen. 3:16), we see the various activities converging toward "God's eternal purpose," by which His plan of salvation would become a reality as intended. Through the lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Christ would be brought on the scene as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. He would "build" His church, purchasing her with His own blood (Acts 20:28; Matt. 16:18). That purchase price of the blood of Christ would atone for the sins of man both before and after the coming of Christ (Heb. 9:15).

The church is essential to man's salvation as

is seen by the fact that Christ shed His blood to purchase it; and, that He is "the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). That "the body" is the church could not be made clearer. Note what Paul said in Ephesians 1:22-23: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." In view of this, one would be saved, he must be a part of that which Christ saves.

If the body, the church, is that which Christ saves, and Scripture as noted clearly affirms that, then the church becomes all-important to those who would have the salvation which God has made possible. When the church is viewed in its rightful sense, then its appeal becomes something of the greatest importance. Therefore, it is in order that we define:

II. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "APPEAL"?

As to the noun form of *appeal*, Webster says it is "the power or ability to attract or stimulate the mind or emotion."

It is a matter of fact that many institutions lose their appeal, and for many different reasons, which we shall discuss latter as it pertains to the church. Some institutions lose their appeal because of mismanagement, corruption, etc. But, as to the Lord's church, if she is abiding according to the true teaching of God's word, any loss of appeal cannot be the fault of the institution.

We know that the Lord's church has had greater appeal at some times than at others. In the first century, the church had great appeal to some, but not to the majority. Comparatively speaking, the number of people to whom the church has had great appeal is miniscule. Christ tells us that most people are going to be lost; they will enter the broad way of destruction and few will enter the narrow way to life

(Matt. 7:13-14). Paul warns that “some shall depart from the faith”; and that “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine....and they shall turn away their ears from the truth” (I Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). He warned the elders at Ephesus that “after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock [and] of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). This is an echo of the Lord’s warning of “false prophets which come to you in sheep’s clothing...” (Matt. 7:15). John said we must “try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I Jno. 4:1).

No doubt, then, to such people the church would lose its appeal, but it is significant that it would not be due to the change within the church as far as God’s side is concerned. The true church today is what it was in the first century, and will continue to be so regardless of its lack of appeal to increasing multitudes.

In her early days, the church Christ purchased with His blood had her greatest appeal among those who truly loved God and His truth. This is shown by the fact that they opted for Christ and His church, even at the risk of giving their physical lives. Christ said to the church at Smyrna that some of them would be cast “into prison.” But the true value of remaining true to the Lord was expressed by Christ when he said: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). That is, they would face physical death, and should be faithful to the point of giving up their lives. They might have to face becoming martyrs, but it would be worth it to do so. History indicates that many early Christians did give up their lives rather than deny the faith. There is no way to know, but if we were put to that same test today, just how many of us would choose to die

rather than give up the Lord? Perhaps we should be thankful that our faith is not likely to be tried to that degree; but if ever we should be, it would separate the strong in the faith from the weak.

We have seen a great deal of difference with regard to the appeal of the church in our time. Fifty years ago the church was the fastest growing religious body in our country. That is no longer true. In fact, the church is much weaker today than it was then. In fact, given the vast numbers who have departed from the true faith, the church is much weaker than fifty years ago.

The church, “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15), appealed to multitudes in its early times. — “they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were addend unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). This resulted from Peter and the other apostles preaching the gospel on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-38). The Lord continued to daily add people who were being saved to the church (Acts 2:47).

Given the inseparability of the church and the truth for which the church is the “pillar and ground,” it may be said that the church appealed to those in Berea who “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

While there are other examples of people to whom the Lord’s church appealed, there are also instances where people were antagonistic toward the church and the truth it is to uphold. Paul speaks of many for whom he wept saying they “are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18). He also speaks of those who perish, “because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10).

Many of the Jews were antagonistic toward Christ and His church. Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, preaching God’s word. Note →

the response of Jews toward the preaching when “almost the whole city” came together to “to hear the word of God.” The Jews were filled with envy when they saw the multitudes, and “spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.” Paul and Barnabas would not be dissuaded from preaching the word. “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:45-46).

Now that we have considered instances in New Testament times when the church appealed to people, and instances when it did not, we turn our attention to our times. We shall consider conditions which prevent the appeal of the church and conditions which encourage the appeal of the true church. We began by considering:

III. THE LOVE OF THE WORLD HINDERS THE APPEAL OF THE CHURCH

World is used in different senses in the New Testament, but it is often used in the sense of that which is opposed to the truth of God; and it is the truth, as we have noted, that makes known to us the church which God planned from eternity. The world is often condemned in Scripture because of its opposition to the truth. There is that classic passage in First John 3:15-17,

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of the Father abideth for ever.

In the New Testament we find many instances where “light” is used to represent truth, and “darkness” to represent sin and the world. Christ sets

forth a powerful truth with regard to this in John 3:18-21,

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hatheth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

This shows so clearly why the true church does not appeal to worldly people. People of the world love darkness and the light which is to be set forth by the church is offensive to them, because light shows these people up for what they really are, as God sees them. Unless they change, this is the way they will appear at the day of judgment.

Worldliness has never been so prevalent in our society, as it is now. There are so many things which encourage it. Every effort is put forth to do away with the influence of God, and those efforts are increasing, encouraging more people to trust in the world and its evil. Worldliness has become so powerful that more of the Lord’s people than we have ever seen are succumbing to its appeal.

Though the “world,” as it is used in the evil sense, includes many things, there is one form of worldliness which has become so powerful that it should be given special attention. That form of worldliness is:

IV. MATERIALISM KILLS THE APPEAL OF THE CHURCH

Back in the 1930s, most people where I lived had very little in the way of material things. We were perhaps as poor as Job’s proverbial “turkey,” though I never understood just how poor that was. We were barefoot in the summer time and wore overalls that had patches on top of patches. ↴

We got one suit of “Sunday, go-to-meeting clothes,” and that included one pair of slippers for Sunday wear. We never owned an automobile, an icebox or refrigerator.

I say all this to make a point. In those hard times, there was not nearly the amount of crime and ungodliness that we see today. People then were less likely to lie, steal, cheat, and depend upon someone else to feed and clothe them. The idea of honest work in order to provide the necessities of life did not cause people to go into shock. This was generally true of even those who professed no religion. The principles of life, as set forth in God’s word, were respected much more than now. I have seen this in India. Most of us cannot imagine just how little most of the people in India have materially. And, even though the people are for the most part members of a pagan religion, their interest in material things was not nearly as great as that of many people in our country today. The influence of the spiritual in the lives of those people was considerable, even though it was pagan.

In stark contrast to the 1930s, for a long time now nearly everyone has more than they have ever had materially speaking. Has the possession of these material things increased the respect for God and spiritual things? Few would be so naïve as to answer in the affirmative. To the contrary, there is abundant reason to believe in the principle that the more one trusts in or values material things, the less interest and respect there will be for spiritual things. This principle is clearly enunciated by the example of the church at Laodicea. Christ knew their works, that they were “neither cold or hot.” Due to this Christ said, “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue [vomit] thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that

thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:15-17).

Their trust in material things, as with many in our time, blinded their need for spiritual things. Their “need of nothing” obviously included the Lord and that which is available only in Him. No doubt, the Lord sees many in our time who are in the same condition as the Laodiceans. Unless they repent, which is seldom the case, they too, will be “spued” [vomited] out of the mouth of the Lord. To such people, the church has lost its appeal, assuming it was ever there. In the case of the Laodiceans the church did have appeal to them at one time. Otherwise, they would not have been the church. This shows what can happen to those within the church, when they put their trust in material things. In many cases people are so engrossed in the pursuit of material things that the church never has an appeal to them. Multitudes of young people are being brought up under the same circumstances.

Paul gives man something to think about when he said, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). Many must not stop to think, that the things *which are seen* — houses lands, bank accounts, etc. — will one day be separated from their view. Not any of it can be carried away for future use.

The things *which are not seen* reach well beyond our earthly existence. Christ speaks of that which is not seen as “treasures in heaven,” where nothing can take it away (Matt. 6:20). Another comparison between the seen and unseen is made by Christ when he said, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” →

(Matt. 16:26). It is the “wise man” who hears the “sayings” of Christ and does them, that understands the difference between the seen and unseen. It is the “foolish man” that hears and does not do the things concerning Christ and His church (Matt. 7:24-27).

As we move on to other things which hinder the appeal of Christ’s church, we consider a category of people, who in the thinking of many actually increase the appeal of what they see as the church. We refer to them as:

V. CHURCHES WHICH HINDER THE APPEAL OF THE ONE TRUE CHURCH

As we read about the church in God’s word, we see there is only *one*. Isaiah speaks of “the Lord’s house” in the singular (Isa. 2:2-3). Daniel singularly speaks of “a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44).

More particularly in the New Testament, we find several instances where the church is referred to in the singular, the plural being used to refer to churches of the same kind but located in different places. Christ said, “upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). In Acts 2, we see the church in actual existence. “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (vs. 47). From this point onward, there are many references to the church. Pointing out the great importance, even the necessity of the church, Paul said, “...even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23). “The body” is the same thing as the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18).

When we look at today’s religious picture we see hundreds, even thousands, of churches. Why is this so, when there is only one found in God’s word? That question demands an answer. Since Christ did not build or purchase these churches, they must have come into existence by the will of man. Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders saying,

“...feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). God’s all-sufficient word does not tell us that any other church was purchased by His blood. That means that the thousands of churches which exist today were not blood-bought. Yet, people put their trust in them.

Since millions trust in the churches built by the will of man, they are not likely to see the church Christ built as appealing. This is quite understandable, considering the fact that most have never been taught the truth about the one true church. This does not mean they are to be excused. Man has the responsibility of learning what God’s word teaches, and ignorance is not excused. Since we will be judged by the words of Christ (Jno. 12:48), it behooves us to learn what His word teaches.

Man-made churches offer many things which the true does not offer. The true church is a spiritual institution and its primary work is found in three categories: evangelism, edification and benevolence. In the category of benevolence the church is to help those who are truly in need with material needs. But churches built by the will of man reach out into various areas which are not authorized works of the true church. These things often appeal to people.

In the 1920s a movement, called the “social gospel,” had its beginning. That movement has rapidly grown within the past four or five decades. The main emphasis of this movement is “the here and now,” and not “the hereafter.” This effort to supply the physical wants and desires of people has done great harm by drawing people away from things of a truly spiritual nature. When people become all wrapped up in the “here and now” the “hereafter” is not likely to be of much importance. Christ rebuked some people, when He said, “Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.” He admonished them to “Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but that which endureth unto ∫

everlasting life..." (Jno. 6:26-27).

It is not uncommon today to see these churches of men competing with each other as to which can offer the biggest attractions and entertainments, and the most fun, food and frolic.

Some of these churches are now making mockery of God's word by upholding and practicing of things which are clearly in violation of God clear word. Churches are now even upholding homosexuality, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah.

It was reported recently that Billy Graham had preached in person to some 210 million people. But how many of those did he direct to become Christians, have their sins washed away, and be added to the church which Christ built the same way people did in the early days of the church? As far as I know, not a single one. Now here is my point. Is the true church going to appeal to those who believe such messages as preached by him and many others of like mind,? Why should it, unless the people hear the truth and believe it?

People making a joke of what is supposed to be Christ and His church. The gospel is God's power to salvation (Rom. 1:16). It has the drawing power to make Christians, true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else will do this. But with men, there is hardly any end to what they will do to try to attract people. When people are drawn by something other than the gospel, they are going to be something other than true Christians. But many evidently are not aware, or don't believe that.

In the July BOT, we ran a short article, "Religion as a Joke," in which we cited an article in *The Paducah Sun* (July 13, 2007). It went,

Church Plans Comedy Club Service
Associated Press

MANCHESTER, Conn. — A comedy club is a place to find a few laughs...and God?

So say the leaders of St. Paul's Collegiate Church in Sorrs. Starting in August, the church will hold

Monday night services at The Hartford Funny Bone, a comedy club.

Surely, you say, This takes the cake. No, here comes something which out does that. Again, in *The Paducah Sun* (Aug. 31, 2007) is an article entitled "Horses and the Ministry." A subtitle reads: "Salem family combines riding lessons with 'cowboy church' to spread Word."

No. The article is not talking about converting horses. The article says, "The Rev. Chris Clark, with help from his family, founded the Happy Trails Ministry in 2003. A barn owned by Dr. William Barnes of Burna serves as the ministry's headquarters."

But horses do have something to do with "the ministry." Clark says, "I'll take my guitar and play 15 minutes, mostly country gospel, and then have 15 minutes of preaching." The article says, "Clark sometimes preaches atop a horse."

Can any serious minded person picture the apostle Paul or any of the apostles preaching at "a comedy club," or "atop a horse," or at "cowboy church," or any other such tomfoolery? Or, what of any of the apostles using a guitar or any other mechanical musical instrument to get people to listen?

God has a plan that will convert people if they are convertible at all. That plan is the Gospel. Paul says it is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). It is so very evident that many people don't believe the Gospel will do what God intended for it to do. Therefore, they come up with all sorts of far-out things to help God out, they erroneously think.

If God's plan for the salvation of man, as revealed in His word, will not accomplish its intended purpose, who is man to think that he can come up with something better or something that will work? When God's plan is considered, more and more of what we see today is nothing more than a joke. But such will keep some from →

finding the true church, and becoming a part of that which Christ will save (Eph. 5:23). There is nothing more serious than God and His plan, which was in His mind even from eternity (Eph. 3:10-11).

VI. THINGS WITHIN THE CHURCH WHICH AFFECT ITS APPEAL

It is evident that the greatest danger facing the church today is from within, not from without. The time was that there was considerable conflict between the Lord's church and the man-made churches. That conflict has ceased to a great degree. But the danger which the church faces from within is growing rapidly leaving behind people who are without the conviction which characterized most in past times.

Paul exhorts the elders at Ephesus to "feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The great importance of this is emphasized by the words of Paul: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall mean arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

Within the past few decades, we have seen these departures fulfilled as never before. There are so many false doctrines being taught now that one can often find one that suits whatever situation is at hand. People who are truly interested in the whole truth and nothing but the truth, are often turned away when such inconsistencies are evident. Such lessens the appeal of the church.

We shall set forth a few things which are more common within the church now than they were forty or fifty years ago. People who have seen the changes of the past several decades are more greatly impressed by them than younger people who have never seen them. When we see things happen, they tend to become more real than when we have only heard about them.

The Distinctiveness of the church. There is

nothing more evident than the fact the church is distinctive. There is no other like it. But we are not hearing this highly important fact emphasized like it once was, and should be today. If the true church is not distinctive, then why would it appeal? If it is only one of many, a view that more of our brethren are adopting, then why choose it over the hundreds of others, which in many instances require virtually nothing in the way of a certain standard by which we must live to have God's approval?

Elders Not Feeding and Protecting the Flock. Without the proper spiritual food, members of the church grow up as weaklings. Not only are the elders often not feeding the proper food, they may actually feed that which is contaminated. With regard to protecting the flock, on some occasions the flocks are turned over to the wolves to do as they please; and they please to devour the sheep.

Entertainment Crowds out True Worship. True worship is designed to be pleasing to God, and that which pleases God should please man as well. But that is not the way it is in so many instances today. The worship of today, if it can truly be called worship in many instances, is often designed to please man rather than God. This has characterized much of the religions around us, and too many of us are following suit. Some of the preaching heard today seems to be designed to please man rather than God.

IN CONCLUSION

Brethren, we have an important part to play in helping the true church to have the appeal it once had during some of our lives, and in the first century. This part is played by the lives we live as servants of God. If we live in harmony with God's will, we will help the true church to have the appeal that God intended. If we fail in this, we may bring about unconcern on the part of others, and also pay with the loss of our souls, due to unfaithfulness. May the Lord help us to let our lights shine.

—Editor

Fifteen Tracts Lead People to Be Lost

While waiting for my wife in an optometrist's office I picked up fifteen religious tracts, from a display, "Published by the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite." All the tracts have different titles, and are in a variety of colors.

Among the tracts a number of Biblical subjects were discussed: "Teach Us to Pray," "Are You Forgiven?," "Peace of Mind in a Troubled World," "Eternity," "Repentance," and "A Lost Soul on Judgment Morning." One would think that in such a list of subjects some important things would be taught; and, in this case truth is taught about many things. At the same time, though, some important and necessary truth was not taught. This is a reminder that much truth can be taught, and yet be nullified by that which is not taught.

The tracts had many scriptural references dealing with such important subjects as repentance, confession of sins, man's accountability, salvation, prayer, the Holy Spirit and others. Also contained in the tracts were a number of personal stories or experiences. These were worthless as far as teaching God's truth is concerned, and may go contrary to God's work by encouraging people to rely on subjectivism rather than objective truth.

As I read the fifteen tracts, my attention was drawn to what was not mentioned, as well as what was outright contrary to God's will. In the latter category was the emphasis upon the Holy Spirit and His direct influence upon those who are not even Christians, those who are not even "in Christ." An example of something contrary to God's will is the following concerning the Holy Spirit: "As we seek freedom from fear and place our confidence in God, His Spirit will speak to us in a still small voice." This idea is from man, not God. Those who wait to hear a "still small voice" will be terribly disappointed. Any "still small voice" they hear will not be from God. But it could be from one's imagination apart from the truth.

What struck me as much as the outright error in this were the things not mentioned in the tracts. It is possible that I overlooked a word here and there, but it would have been few indeed. A most important thing

to not mention was the way to have forgiveness of sins as set forth in God's word. Just think how important this is. Yet, one tract says, "We must find God's forgiveness if we want to be saved from the consequences of sin." But why are readers not told how to obtain that forgiveness according to God's word? Instead they are told, "Your genuine repentance, as you invite Jesus into your heart, instantly brings you eternal salvation.... You can do this in a quiet private moment wherever you are. Don't put it off. Trust Jesus today. Then let your Bible-believing church know that you have been saved."

Readers of the tracts are not told what God's word teaches about getting into Christ, where salvation is found (2 Tim. 3:15). That people get "into Christ" by baptism couldn't be made any clearer. Paul says, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). To the Galatians Paul said, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). I did not see "baptism" mentioned in any of the fifteen tracts. With regard to forgiveness of sins, as noted, I did not see what people were told to do in Acts 2:38. That is, when the people asked what they should do, they were told to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...." If baptism, a command of God, can be omitted, as the Mennonites have done, why can't repentance be omitted?

Not only are the tracts a waste of time, paper and ink, but lost souls are given a false hope by trusting in that which is not true. What could be a greater crime in God's sight than that of leading people to believe they are saved when they are still lost, because they have not obeyed Christ, the author of eternal salvation? (Heb. 5:9). To die out of Christ is to be lost, and those who follow the teaching of the tracts will do just that, die out of Christ. The fact that the tracts do not teach people how to be saved, as God's word makes plain, amounts to teaching people to be lost. Only the truth will save (Jno. 8:32), but when part of the truth is left out, it is not the whole truth and it loses its saving power.

—Editor

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 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 the church by 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 divisions 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. Brethren at Ephesus 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 [and] one God” (Eph. 4:4-6). Thus, unity in diversity is not a Scriptural solution to doctrinal matters.

The Lord’s people must divide from time to time but such cannot be attributed to God’s fault. 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 says, “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 is partaker in his evil works” (2 Jno.9-11).

To go beyond and not abide in the teaching of Christ is always sinful. Those who insist on going beyond the teachings of Christ must be marked (Rom. 16:17) and not fellowshiped (Eph. 5:11). Division will surely occur when such is done. But whose fault is it when those who no longer wish to follow Christ go out and 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 can be sinful, sometimes division 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 churches of Christ. Faithful brethren opposed use of the instrument in the church, 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 as 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 aversion to division that they convince themselves that they must always 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 faithful followers to win popularity contests, but He does expect those who love Him to stand firm for His cause. The 1

line between righteousness and unrighteousness is not a thin, gray, nebulous line. Those who are committed to what is godly and right simply must determine to stand firm for 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. —1272 Bonham St., Paris, TX 75460

“God Will Take Care of It at the Judgment”

How often have you heard someone make the above statement with regard to some sinful thing that someone has done, and nothing is done about it? Or, it may have been something like, “He’s getting away with it now, but some day he will have to pay.”

It is indeed true that sinful things not made right here on earth, will be taken into account on the Day of Judgment. Christ says those on His left hand will go away into everlasting punishment, but those on His right hand will go into life eternal (Matt. 25:46). All who are in the grave, He says, will one day come forth; “they that have done good unto resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto a resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29). Paul points out that all will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and answer for their deeds, good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). The writer of Hebrews says it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment (Heb. 9:27). The fact of the judgment is well established, and so is the fact that people will answer for their deeds, both good and bad.

But the fact that people sometimes do evil and are not called into account here is not all that is involved. For sure, we know they will pay at the judgment, but more is involved than that. For example, consider the following: Suppose someone bears false witness against another; think about the influence and impact that may bring to bear. A false accusation can cause one’s influence to be adversely affected. People may think he is an evil per-

son, and the good that he has done and could ye do may be hindered, because people believe him to be guilty of evil on the basis of false charges.

Consider another example, which is somewhat different. Suppose someone is teaching false doctrine, and is not confronted as God’s word teaches he should be. No, that person will not get away with it, because there is a Day of Judgment. But what about the damage he may have done by his false teaching. Some could lose their souls because of it.

In such a case as the above, the teacher of false doctrine is not the only one guilty before God. Why so? In cases where there are elders, they are guilty of sin if they do not confront the false teaching. Preachers who will not speak out against wrongdoing are guilty of failure to declare the whole counsel of God. What about members of the church who are afraid to speak out against error, or are not willing to confront a friend or relative? Are they without guilt? Does not Paul teach that the “spiritual” are to restore one who is overtaken in a fault, or error?

If not made right here on earth, the evildoer will indeed give an account at the Judgment. But those who fail to do their duty in confronting and opposing evil will also have something to account for at that Day. —Editor

Some of My Sayings

The person who does not believe in Hell is in for a hot surprise.

The man who is sold on himself, depreciates the value of others.

He that says it is wrong to judge is doing that which he says is wrong.

The fellow who knows everything usually “knows” some things which are not true.

He who plans to obey the gospel down the road, may never get that far.

Those who attend services only one hour each *week* are usually *weak*.

Those who do not care about the *hereafter* are often *here after* all the world’s goods they can get.

**Please remeber those changes of address.
We will thank you for doing so!**

Do We Appreciate Authors from Whom We Read?

When we speak of authors, we do not have in mind those authors whose writings are found in the Bible. Any person who truly believes in God and has respect for Him will appreciate and respect the authors whose writings are contained in the Bible, because their authority is from God.

The authors of whom I speak are those within the church. They write about spiritual things in particular. There are many of these authors. Some write a great deal, while others write little. As to the value of these writings, there is great variation. Some writings are of great value. They are like great treasures in that they do much good. On the other hand, some writings are worse than nothing, in that they mislead people with error teaching that which is not in harmony with God's word.

There are several categories of writers who should not write. They are: 1) Those who do not know how to say what they mean; 2) those who do not mean what they say; and 3) those who write that which is right, but do not uphold and practice what they write.

One group of authors is used quite often, especially in church bulletins and periodicals. These authors have rather common names. Let us consider some examples: 1. There is brother "Copied." His writings are seen quite regularly. 2. Another author whose writings are seen often is brother "Selected." 3. Then there is brother "Unknown" whose pieces we see now and then. 4) We do not want to overlook brother "Adapted," who writes once in a while. In addition to these brethren, some times we see things which evidently have no author, since there is no name attached to them.

The upside of these writings. As to this list of writers, there is both an upside and a downside to their writings. Let us consider the upside first, that being there are many good things which are written and which benefit many brethren. Had it not been for these authors, they would not have benefited. Another benefit of these writings is that the authors are some times more knowledgeable about the subject about which they write. Some authors are more capable than the average in getting their points across. Were it not for these authors, just think of how many good writings would never be seen. When it comes to writers who are

able to say what they mean and uphold the truth without any compromise or apology, there cannot be too many good writers. Were it not for these authors, many church bulletins and other papers would have blank pages.

Good writings are a valuable tool of teaching and edification. The written word is still one of the most effective ways of communication. Writings can be stored easily and be reread or studied whenever there is a need.

The downside of these authors and their writings. Just as writings can be used in a profitable way, they can also be used in a harmful way. Although we are discussing a special group of authors, the things which apply to them generally apply to other writings. For example, if the Jehovah's Witnesses ceased their writings they would soon disappear, which of course would be a blessing.

The writings of the authors under consideration are some times the sources of false doctrines, and should never be used anywhere. Those who use the writings of these authors sometimes fail to closely examine what is being taught.

A serious downside to these writings is that it keeps brethren from using their own ability to write. It is much easier, takes much less effort, to pick up something from brother "Copied," or brother "Selected." In such cases, some original article that could have been written never will be written. This amounts to a serious loss.

Does it not make the work of a preacher more effective to engage in writing as a teaching tool, as well as by lessons orally delivered? Some preachers hardly ever write things which require much effort in study and research. This represents a lost opportunity. There is no question about it, we are living in times when every tool to teach, edify and encourage should be put to use.

It seems to me that if we never try to write worthwhile things, we will learn to do so. A preacher once said to me that brethren would not read anything but short articles. I am sure that sometimes with some that is true, but not all. In fact, some brethren apparently almost never read anything, either short or long. Our writing should be for the benefit of those who do read and profit by it.

—Editor

A Page of Miscellanea

Lord's Supper Trays Needed. In some congregations in Africa there is a need for trays, since they have no trays. Sometimes congregations have old trays that are no longer being used. If brethren have unused trays, contact: Bob Austin, 5667 State Rt. 121 N, Murray, KY 42071. Phone (270) 489-2040. Bob knows the place in Africa where the trays are especially needed.

An Unnamed Critic. It is strange that people will be critical of things and at the same time not have the courage to let their names be known. We try to respond to critics who let themselves be known. We invite our readers to respond to the material we carry. We give our name and ask critics to do the same.

What Is A Nitpicker? A "nit" is the small egg of a louse. I have seen mothers in India going through the hair of their children looking for nits. That was in the real sense a "nit picker," but that term is sometimes used in a figurative way. It is defined by *Webster* "1. to be critical of inconsequential details; niggle. 2. to criticize by focusing on minute details."

I have been called a "nitpicker," when I was indeed picking something much larger. A person who made no bones about being liberal once accused me of being a nitpicker. It stemmed from an invitation to the congregation to come to his house for a barbecue supper. At the supper was the host's son together with his cooler of beer. Well, the next time the congregation was invited to his house, my wife and I did not go. We were criticized for not going; I, in particular, being called a nitpicker. Call me a nitpicker if you wish, but the nit I was picking was much larger than the egg of a louse. In fact, it was more like a goose egg. Such nits should be "picked."

Get a Bundle of Banner of Truth. We can mail a bundle of 15 copies for \$2.02. Sometimes we have someone in a congregation who will see that the copies are passed out. We also appreciate it when readers who find *Banner of Truth* worthwhile send us names of other they know who would like to receive the paper. The paper is made possible by individuals and

congregations who supply the necessary financial support, but we don't potential readers to feel that they must pay any price to receive BOT. Many on our mailing list of more than 3500 are those whose names have been sent in by a friend.

Banner of Truth Lectures for 2008. The date for the lectures in 2008 is June 23-26. The lectures present a great opportunity for those who enjoy feasting on spiritual things. One can hear 28 sermons in four days, delivered by about 20 speakers. This is as many, if not more, sermons than most people hear in a who quarter at their home congregation.

The Political Outlook is not Bright. Never have we heard so much about politics so early before the national elections. Never has there been, in my time, a greater cause for concern. The world is becoming more worldly and more people love to have it so. Some of the front runners for the presidency are making a major part of their appeal the support of homosexuality, abortion, feeding and caring for those who will not work because they are too lazy. In other words, they are supporting socialism

In the political picture, the efforts to completely do away with God and His influence are increasing mightily. We think things are bad now, and they are morally speaking, but things will worsen to the same degree that God is removed from us.

My Health Report. As many of you know, I have had some serious respiratory problems with the past couple of years. I went to Vanderbilt and had a checkup a few weeks ago and was very thankful to get an encouraging report. I was told that my problem had hardly advanced within two years and that this indicates it might not.

Our Thanks to Those Who Make BOT Possible. First, we thank those who support it financially. But there is much physical work involved. Bob and Susana Austin and Joey and Glenda Lawson are full-time workers in getting each issue out. Others, too, help when they can. My wife and I could not do it alone. —Editor

Searching for Beautiful ‘Soles’

Aaron M.M. Purvis

[NOTE: *Concerned, if not frustrated, brethren decry the present “famine...of hearing the words of the Lord” (Am. 8:11). This famine, however, is not because God will not talk to us; He has spoken, and thus speaks through His word. This famine, rather, is due generally to the fact that people less and less want to hear, and more particularly because we have fewer and fewer men who will “preach the word.” Capable and zealous evangelists are a virtual endangered species.*

How much better than complaining is doing something about it. Banner of Truth readers could hardly miss the passion with which the editor, Walter Pigg, Jr., approaches the subject and concern of preaching. Brother Pigg has long been a friend and supporter of good preachers in general, and good preacher training in particular. He encourages and supports the work of the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies, which is dedicated to filling the void created by unskilled and apathetic preachers.

“Searching for Beautiful ‘Soles,” comes from a recent NWFSBS graduate, Aaron Purvis. Aaron came to us as a graduate of Berklee College of Music in Boston. He faced his studies with discipline and vigor and showed himself a decent young man. We miss him, but are glad that he is in South San Francisco working with the church there.

People often ask, How can we help? Find, encourage, support and send men like this one to the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies.

—Alan Adams, Dean of Students.]

Every generation of Christians must ask, “What about the next generation?” (cf. Ps 78.4; 48.13). If we have any sense of practicality and plain commonsense, we will be compelled to wonder whether the next generation of Christians will have enough faithful preachers who have what it takes to stand in the gaps and defend the bride of Christ in her hour of doctrinal persecution. Unfortunately, many of our generation (Generation “X”) have not been raised to appreciate the import of that great clarion call to revert to true Christianity that was so ably and boldly disseminated in days gone by. However, if the church is going to remain faithful through the next century, the gospel simply must be committed “to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2). Indeed, the salvation of humankind depends largely upon the “beautiful...feet of them that preach the gospel of peace” (Rom. 10:15). We are, then, ever *searching* for such men who are willing to serve in this capacity, especially in a day in which fewer and fewer men are willing so

to do. And if the need for young preachers is great, the need for training them is even greater. We thus want to encourage all Christian men to consider attending preacher training school to be better equipped to serve as evangelists in the Lord’s church. I am fully persuaded that the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies has so much to offer in fulfilling this great need.

It was, indeed, my good fortune and privilege to be a student at NWFSBS from August of 2005 to June of 2007. It is my deep conviction that no portion of my time was better spent than the time I spent in connection with the school. I believe there are many blessings and benefits to be found in studying at this sound establishment. For instance, at NWFSBS you will find...

1. Faithful Teachers and Leaders – The school is overseen by the elders of the church of Christ at Milestone in Cantonment, FL. Ken Bureson is the director of the school and Alan Adams currently serves as Dean of Students. In addition to these two men, there are three other men who

work with the school as instructors, including Tom Snyder, Jared Knoll, and, as of this year, Joel Wheeler. These are men of integrity and faith. Their characters are worthy of emulation and their knowledge of the Bible is equally superb.

2. Strong Bible Emphasis – Certainly, a strong emphasis on adhering to the great Book of books can never be rightly regarded as unhealthy. So many of “our schools” have failed in this regard. NWFSBS seeks to rivet in the minds of their students the fact that the Bible is our sole standard of authority in matters of religion. Hence, throughout their tenure at the school, students will be taught every book of the Bible in great detail.

3. Additional Bible-Related Subjects – In addition to deep training in the Scriptures, students are also instructed in Bible geography, homiletics (preparing and delivering sermons), debate, denominational doctrine, church history, Greek, apologetics, philosophy, logic etc., all of which are necessary for them to be effective evangelists.

4. A Character-Building Environment – If there was anything we realized more while at school, it is that character is vital to being a successful gospel preacher. Faithfulness and sanctity in the life of the preacher is indeed a prerequisite to sound gospel preaching. Consequently, not only are we educated as to the mechanics of preaching from the pulpit and in classes, but we are also trained to be better Christians. The instructors are devoted to helping students become well-rounded individuals in every aspect of their lives.

5. Opportunities to Preach – Many congregations in the area are willing to offer students the opportunity to preach while in school. The practical experience we receive through the duration of our training will greatly prepare us to be better servants in the kingdom of God. Although preaching for a congregation while in school is not mandatory, it nevertheless is highly encouraged, for this kind of experience is invaluable when training to be a preacher.

6. An Encouraging, Helpful, and Faithful Congregation at Milestone – The brethren at Milestone are truly interested in preserving the restoration plea. They love all souls, the truth, and the church for which Jesus shed His priceless blood. Preacher training students are welcomed with open arms and encouraged to grow in their faith and respective abilities.

In addition to the aforementioned, if you are considering spending two years in deep Biblical training, whether you wish to preach for a living or not, there are some things you simply must know concerning the school and preaching in general.

The school is not interested in producing ear-ticklers, frothy raconteurs, or men who are unwilling to work. Too many congregations have already “hired vain and light fellows” (cf. Judg. 9:4) who ultimately will only lead them down the path of perdition. And while we are encouraged to sharpen the swords of grammar and rhetoric, in the final analysis, if the Bible has not been preached, the preacher has not done his job.

Furthermore, the instructors at the school encourage students to have “a mind to work” (Neh. 4:6). Despite popular opinion, preaching is neither an effortless nor a painless occupation. It involves much time and toil throughout the week. While at NWFSBS, students will pick up study habits and a work ethic they should never abandon. Yet, in spite of the laborious nature of the work, students and faculty alike come to realize that preaching is also wonderfully rewarding. We are convinced that there truly is no greater work in life with which a man could involve himself than preaching the “glad tidings of good things.”

All of these benefits make Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies truly unique in the realm of preacher training. The school’s future is bright and promising. If more young men would receive the type of training offered at NWFSBS, the future of the church would indeed be equally auspicious.

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Thinking God's Thoughts after Him

For all of human folly through the centuries, representatives of humanity have left us instances of insight as seen in “the words of the wise and their dark sayings” (Pro. 1:7). From Confucius to my grandfather, many of God’s “offspring” (cf. Acts 17:28, 29), have accurately and honestly observed, perceived and testified to reality, to truth. A Greek poet acknowledged that we “are the offspring of God,” and so others have likewise articulated obvious truths. We have noted examples of this in the past, consider yet another—

“Writers of every age have endeavored to show that pleasure is in us, and not in the objects offered for our amusement. If the soul be happily disposed, everything becomes capable of affording entertainment, and distress will almost want a name. Every occurrence passes in review, like the figures of a procession; some may be awkward, others ill-dressed, but none but a fool is on that account enraged with the master of ceremonies.” — **Oliver Goldsmith**, 1728-1774.

“But godliness with contentment is great gain: for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content” (I Tim 6.6-7). “Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold trials; knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing” (James 1.2-3) — **The Holy Spirit** through Paul the apostle, and James the half-brother of Christ, First Century A.D.

—AA

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