



## **Christ And His Church In The 21st Century**

*Has the God-intended-role of Christ and His church in the plan of salvation changed in the 21st Century, or is it still the same as it was in the 1st Century?*

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden there was already in the mind of God a plan for the salvation of sinful man. The first allusion to that plan is in Genesis 3:15, where it is said: "And I will put enmity between the man and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This promise was to be carried out through Abraham and his seed (Gen. 12 & 22). The promise would ultimately be fulfilled in Christ, as made clear by the apostle Paul, when he said, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

Before the coming of Christ and the New Covenant, the sins of people were forgiven on what we might call a promissory basis. That is, actual forgiveness was contingent upon the sacrifice Christ would make when he shed His blood to atone for sins (Heb. 9:15). Since God knew Christ's sacrifice would be made, there was no uncertainty involved. It is worthy to note that the same sacrifice of Christ, wherein He shed His blood for sins past and present, also purchased His church (Acts 20:28).

That the part to be played by Christ and His church in God's plan of salvation was in God's mind from the beginning is made clear by Paul:

*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).*

There is not a shred of evidence that God's "eternal purpose" for Christ and His church would ever change or need to change. This being true, the role of Christ and His church in man's salvation is exactly the same today as it was in the 1st century. It is man, not God, who wants to change things, even to the point of trying to change things which God has permanently fixed.

There is no better example of the above than what has happened to Christ and His church, as they relate to man's salvation. Yet, even in view of the all-sufficiency of God's plan of salvation the question arises:

### **WHY DESIRE TO CHANGE GOD'S PLAN?**

Considering all that is said which shows the essentiality of Christ's church, it is rather ironic that those who make up the Protestant world of religion, for the most part virtually divorce Christ from His church which He died to purchase. It is generally considered to be non-essential to salvation. That salvation is available apart from any church is the position of most denominations. But that Christ's church is of the greatest importance in God's plan of salvation is seen from the following, as well as other proof: 1) The church was in God's "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:10-11). 2) The Old Testament prophets foretold the establishment of the church (Isa. 2:2-3; Dan. 2:44, et al.). 3) Christ said He would build His church (Matt. 16:18), and He purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). 4) Those who obeyed Peter's command through the Holy Spirit to "*Repent and be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...*" (Acts 2:38), were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). 5) Christ is the head of the church: "*and he is the saviour of the body*" (Eph. 5:23). The "body" is the "church" (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). There is only "one body" (Eph. 4:4), and that "body" is Christ's "church."

### **WHY SUPPLANT CHRIST'S CHURCH?**

It is at the hands of men, not God, that the one true church has been supplanted. Hundreds of man-made churches have come on the scene since Christ built His church. These churches have never had nor will they ever have God's approval. Few of these man-made churches even make any claim that they are essential to man's salvation. It is somewhat difficult to even imagine why people who claim to believe in Christ and accept the Bible as God's inspired word would reject the role of Christ's church in God's plan of salvation. But that is the way it is.

That men have built their own churches while rejecting Christ's is evidenced by the common erroneous idea that men have a right to, "Join the church of your choice." The only God-given choice with regard to a church is that of accepting or rejecting the one purchased by the blood of His only begotten Son.

It is indeed true that the churches built by men, which have supplanted Christ's church, are in no sense of the term essential to anyone's salvation. They don't even have a God-given right to exist. It is no less than tragic that multitudes have been led to believe that the one true church is not essential to salvation, since the churches of men aren't.

Not only is the idea that the true church is not essential to salvation found among denominational people, this egregious error is now cropping up among an increasing number of members of the church. There is no better example than the participation in the Billy Graham Crusade in Nashville this past summer by Rubel Shelly and the Woodmont Hills group, along with five or six other congregations. They actually took part and encouraged this work of error. The incidents of fellowshiping denominational churches are growing rapidly. It is happening all across our country.

A case in point of the above right here in our front door (Murray) was the fellowship in the "***Jubilee 2000 Revival!***" at the St. Leo Catholic Church. John Dale and members from the Glendale Road congregation, including elders, participated in this event this past September. A reader of B.O.T. wrote: "I am shocked that a congregation with elders would fellowship with the Roman Catholic Church. Further, I was shocked that fellowship with women denominational 'preachers' has occurred. Certainly some have left the one faith we hold." I can well remember the times right here in our own county when most members of the church would have been

"shocked," but it is sad to say that times have changed, and such error doesn't make as much difference as it used to make.

Another indicator of a lessening of respect for the one true church by our own brethren is the discontinuance of the use of the term "Church of Christ" on meeting places and elsewhere. A number of congregations are now calling themselves a "Community Church." This practice is growing in the Memphis area where there are several examples and some other congregations don't seem to oppose the practice. There are other problems with the Community Churches, doctrinally speaking.

In the following discussion we shall note a few current areas within the church and compare them with the church of the 1st century. Differences are becoming much more common, and there seems to be little concern on the part of many members of the church. We begin by considering:

### **GOD-APPROVED WORSHIP**

The worship which God approves is clearly defined in John 4:24: "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*" To worship God "in spirit" is to worship Him from the heart, the inner man. To worship God "in truth" is to engage in the acts of reverence paid to God which are authorized by His word. Those who worship in accordance with our Lord's instruction are those the Father seeks to worship him (John 4:23). Those who try to worship God according to man's way do so in vain (Matt. 15:9).

Just as the denominations have replaced Christ's church with their own churches, some of our own brethren have come up with their own style of worship. New fads are appearing regularly. For example, the "Southern Hills Church" in Tulsa, OK, sent out a letter to the members, announcing changes which would be made in 1993. With regard to music, the letter said: "We also plan to use a variety of musical formats--small groups, solos, congregational singing..." It was also stated that "several of our church leaders and staff members visited Willow Creek Church near Chicago to evaluate their very successful methods of connecting with the culture to evangelize in an urban setting." These are not the only people who have been to Willow Creek to "learn" from this conglomeration of denominational people who practice all sorts of error. This is a modern trend. The above letter emphasized a desire on the part of the leadership to give people what they wanted, including a more active role for women. The very thing which gives rise to the increasing number of denominations is the doing of what people want rather than doing what God has commanded.

The "Southern Hills Church" is not unlike many others. "Praise teams" are the going thing in various places. The same is true with regard to various types of group singing. Another innovation is the use of "drama teams" or groups. There is clearly a trend to engage in that which is entertaining during the time when Christians should be engaged in the worship which God desires and approves. Whereas our first thought in worship should be what pleases God, it is more and more becoming a matter of what pleases men; pleasing God takes second place.

**Preaching.** From the New Testament we learn something of the nature of preaching in the 1st century. To the Ephesian elders Paul could declare that he was "*pure from the blood of all men.*" This was so because he said, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). Paul charged Timothy to, "*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*" (2 Tim. 4:2). There were

false teachers even in the 1st century, and various warnings were given with regard to them. We never find an instance where preachers were urged to compromise.

Present day preaching is often quite different when compared with that of the 1st century. The difference is not with regard to false teachers – we have many of those in our day. A serious difference is that in many cases some of God's counsel may be left off, thereby perverting the gospel. There is now a strong tendency to preach what people want rather than that which they need and that which pleases God. Certain subjects are sort of out of bounds. "Chapter and verse preaching" has gone out of style with a great many, and subjectivism is in. It is not uncommon for outright error to be preached on a variety of subjects, such as: direct operation of the Holy Spirit, God's law on marriage and divorce, fellowship, worship, Christian living, and others.

Outright emotionalism is being used quite extensively in the pulpit, with a serious lack of the plain truth. Good story-telling gains the favor of some, when scripturally-edifying sermons tend to be boring. In this day, when people have little time to be given in serving the Lord, a real favorite in preaching is a 15 - 20 minute sermonette, which goes easy on duties and responsibilities.

How one would justify the widespread non-distinctive preaching which is so common today is simply beyond me. My real fear is that there is little attempt to justify it. There is abundant evidence to uphold this idea. Since God's word has not changed it has to be that men have taken it upon themselves to change the preaching that is now being done. That this change has resulted in evil rather than good could not be more evident.

**Singing.** Whereas "*psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*" were commanded in the 1st century (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), it is now the case that in many instances the singing is obviously designed to "entertain" rather than offer praise to God and edify one another. It is quite obvious that the objective is not that of "*making melody in your hearts to the Lord,*" as people clap, raise and wave their hands as they sway from side to side. The arousing of emotions and pleasing one another by singing songs of entertainment do not constitute to true worship. This is just another example of the great change which is taking place within the church, it is now more than ever a matter of what pleases men.

In Paul's discussion of the one true gospel, which must not be perverted, he makes it clear that his objective is not that of pleasing men (Gal. 1: 6-10). This principle would apply to singing or other acts which are designed to please God. When acts of worship become matters of men-pleasing rather than God-pleasing it is evident that spirituality has become a very superficial matter.

### **THE WORKS OF THE CHURCH**

From the New Testament we learn that the work of the church in the 1st century was comprised of three things: Evangelism, Edification, and Benevolence. If God had desired that other things be included, wouldn't He have said so? But He didn't.

Again, it is man, not God, that has made the changes. If a survey were to be made of churches in this 21st century, as to the works in which they are involved, there would be several more than the three mentioned above. Why so? is an important question which needs to be answered if there is any desire to please God.

There is strong evidence that the Social Gospel has made serious inroads into the Lord's church. This movement began within denominations in the early part of the 20th century. The evidence of it is now seen within most of the denominations, and sadly, in an increasing number

of congregations of our brethren, and more especially within the larger ones. A great many members of the church may not have even heard of the Social Gospel, and know little about it, but it is influencing the church.

The matter of greatest concern about the Social Gospel is that an unusually strong emphasis is put upon the "here and now," and little emphasis is put upon the "hereafter." The main concern is to provide for the needs and wants of people in this present life. That is so contrary to the message of our Lord which is to "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness..." (Matt. 6:33). This helps to account for the increasing number of multimillion dollar facilities which are being erected by congregations. Generally referred to as "Multi-purpose buildings," or "Family Life Centers," a main part of most of them is a gymnasium. A wide variety of activities usually take place in these facilities, the greater part of which are completely secular in nature. The Family Life Center of the Broadway congregation in Paducah was to afford a place for their "Recreation Ministry." Don't ask where the scriptural authority for providing such by the church is found, unless you don't mind being called "a nitpicker." Such things as this are, however, very important matters to those who are concerned about doing God's will in the area of spiritual things.

If such things as the above were not authorized by God's word in the 1st century (and they weren't), at what point were they authorized? Before the 1950s such things were virtually unheard of except among the denominational people. Since religious authority comes from only two sources – God and man – they had to be authorized by man! God didn't.

One very puny effort is some times put forth in an effort to justify the doing of things which God has not authorized. This involves what is called, "The end justifies the means." That is, if something good is the goal [end] to be accomplished, then there is liberty to use any means which might help accomplish that goal. There is one very serious error in this way of reasoning. That error is that this type of reasoning is not from God, it is from man. If we are to be obedient to the will of God, we must use only those "means" which are approved of God. Paul was accused of saying "*Let us do evil, that good may come*" (Rom. 3:8). But in no way did Paul say or advocate such a thing. It would have been contrary to God's will as it is today.

It might be surprising to some as to the number of our brethren who try to use the above erroneous reasoning to justify unscriptural practices. For example this involves such things as: 1) Bringing people in to feed them [not benevolence] with the hopes that someone might be converted. 2) Providing a place for basket ball or other sports, thinking someone might become interested in the gospel. 3) Providing various forms of entertainment, trusting that some person might become interested in spiritual things. 4) Financial planning. 5) Family planning. 6) Bus trips to amusement parks. 7) Fellowshiping denominations. 8) Fellowshiping false brethren.

It is hard for me to believe that some of those who engage in such things as the above do so because of ignorance of the scriptures. This leaves one other possibility and that is, God's word is simply ignored by those who engage in such. This is even worse than ignorance, it shows high-handed rebellion. The evidence of this is increasing all the time.

If God had intended for His people to use the many innovations which have appeared in the past three or four decades, it is very strange that no allusion to such was made in the New Testament. The work and worship of the church which God approved in the first century is still sufficient today. Anything different is without God's approval, since we have had no additional revelation this side of the first century. If God is pleased, so should we be.



## THE WORK OF EVANGELISM

The primary command of Jesus after his resurrection from the dead was: "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations...*" (Matt. 28:18-20), and "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature...*" (Mk. 16:15-16). Paul said to Timothy: "*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*" (2 Tim. 2:2). When Saul was making havoc of the church in Jerusalem, the record says, "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word*" (Acts 8:4). The book of Acts, a "book of conversions" covers in great detail the missionary work of Paul and others, as the church grew rapidly even in the face of persecution.

There is no doubt but that the first century church was indeed very mission-minded. Reaching out to the lost with the good news of the Gospel was of the highest priority. If this was so then, is there any reason why it should not also be so today?

The facts are that we are woefully negligent in the work of evangelizing. As pointed out earlier, the interest in "the here and now" seems to be overriding the concern for the well-being of people in the hereafter. The number of people involved in foreign mission efforts today is much less than it was forty years ago. The only thing which accounts for this is a lack of priority. Financially, we are now more able to support mission work than ever before. But why are we doing so little, considering our potential?

I don't profess have all the answers as to why so little mission work is currently being done when our potential is so great. I do believe, however, that there is strong evidence, in at least three areas, which indicate that the primary reason is that of outright indifference or lack of concern. That Evangelism was of a highest priority within Christ's church in the first century cannot be honestly denied. In view of this, let us reflect upon some evidence pointing to a **lack of concern** now.

**First**, brethren with sufficient interest and willingness to make the sacrifice involved in foreign Evangelism have often found it very difficult to raise financial support. While I didn't have great difficulty in raising support for the few years that I've spent in foreign Evangelism, it has not been uncommon for brethren to spend many, many months and travel tens of thousands of miles in order to find support. In view of the fact that our brethren have the money, and much of the world is wide open for Evangelism, it must be that mission support is hard to come by simply due to a **lack of interest**. Our brethren are now spending more money on things which are not works of the church. This should tell us something relative to interest.

It seems to me that if Evangelism was given the priority that it deserves and that God intended, a great many congregations would be searching for qualified men to send to a mission field. But this is not, to my knowledge, happening very often.

**Second**, there is a slim number of brethren who are willing to leave the "Good 'ole U.S.A." for a number of years in an effort to carry out the Great Commission. A greater number are willing to go to foreign lands for a short time; a couple of weeks or a month. It is, however, a matter of record that not very much is accomplished in such short periods. In fact, in some instances it is debatable as to whether any good is actually done. For example, while working in Ukraine I learned of instances where groups had come for a short time, baptized some people and then left them to fend for themselves. The new converts, without any guidance, turned to the Mormons or some other false religion.

There seems to be an idea among some that we can engage in foreign Evangelism while staying at home. That would be great if it would only work, but admittedly a very limited amount

can be accomplished in this way. I'm not suggesting that no good can be done abroad from home, but it does not contribute much to the stability of a work. From the years I've spent in foreign places I have learned a few things. One is that there are a great many difficulties to overcome in any foreign field, even when the evangelist is there all the time. Another is that people left without spiritual guidance and encouragement are almost sure to stray from the right way and end up in error. Just a visit or two a year does some good, but it is hardly enough to bring babes in Christ to the maturity which is needed.

One thing which has contributed so much to the worldwide spread of Mormonism is that their young people, now including girls, spend a couple of years of their lives to propagate their false religion. Go into just about any foreign country which is open to outsiders and the Mormons will be there! I don't admire the zeal and the devotion of the Mormons, because they are for a cause of error which will cause souls to be lost. But I do wish we, our own brethren, had as much zeal and devotion for God's saving gospel as the Mormons have for error. Again, evidence that we need greater interest.

**Third**, our brotherhood lectures, which are growing more common, generally reflect subjects which are considered to be of considerable interest by those responsible for the lectures. This being so, we may learn something as to the interest in Evangelism by reviewing the subjects in lectureships.

Over five years ago I reviewed the subjects of seven lectureships to be conducted in a particular year (*BOT, July 95*). Out of about 222 lectures and/or classes listed, many timely and needed subjects are discussed. Yet, there was something which stood out with regard to the subject of **Evangelism**. Of the 222 subjects listed, **Only Two** appear to deal specifically with Evangelism. Unless it was overlooked, the **Great Commission** was not mentioned in any of the subjects. If there had been much interest in Evangelism on the part of those elders and preachers (or whoever) who planned the lectureships, one would think its importance would have been emphasized at such an opportune time.

Though I've not mentioned a fourth item as evidence of lack of interest in Evangelism, it is worth considering. That fourth one is the para-church organizations which are under no eldership. They reach out to individuals and congregations for money to do mission work. This removing of Evangelism from the work of the individual congregation tends to lessen the tie between those supplying the funds and the evangelized. The closer the tie between those supporting mission work and those being taught, the greater the interest and more realistic having a part in the Great Commission becomes.

### **CHRIST'S CHURCH AND LEADERSHIP**

It is a well-known fact that **Leadership** determines the success or failure of organizations generally. Not only is this true in secular organizations, it is also true in the most important of all organizations, **Christ's church**. Since this is true, those who are concerned with the well-being of Christ and His church will also be concerned that the leadership within the church be such as would meet God's approval. To be content with leadership which falls short of our Lord's standard, would amount to being satisfied with the failure of the church to accomplish that which it could and should accomplish.

It is evident that our Lord made provisions for the kind of leadership which would assure success in His body, the church. It should be noted that the leadership within the church, as set forth in the New Testament, is derived from Christ himself. Jesus said, "*All power* [authority,

ASV] *is given unto me in heaven and in earth*" (Matt. 28:18). This rules out leadership which does not have Christ's authority behind it.

The New Testament sets forth an element of leadership which has God's approval. That leadership is referred to as "elders," and a number of other descriptive terms. The elders, as leaders, are to lead only in accordance with God's word. They have no power to make laws or to bind or loose that which God has not bound or loosed. That the leadership which is to be exercised through the elders is not a matter to be taken lightly, is seen through the fact that a number of very important things are spelled out in relation to qualifications and duties.

The qualifications of elders are set forth in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. A review of those qualifications will show how they relate to leadership. Note just a few of those qualifications: 1) Apt to teach. 2) Rules well his own house. 3) Not a novice. 4) A good report of those without. 5). Blameless. 6) Not self-willed. 7) Not soon angry. 8) Hospitable. 9) Holding fast the word, et al.

The duties of elders are significant, as they relate to leadership: 1) Take heed unto themselves and the flock as overseers (Acts 20:28). 2) Able by sound doctrine to withstand gainsayers (Tit. 1:9). 3) Take oversight of the flock willingly, not for money (1 Pet. 5:2). 4) Not to be lords over the flock but examples (I Pet. 5:3). 5) Watch for souls as they that must give account (Heb. 13:17).

Authorized leadership is not a one-sided matter relative to responsibility. Those over whom the elders serve as leaders have a responsibility to submit to that leadership: 1) To know them which are over them in the Lord, and admonish them (I Thess. 5:12). 2) Esteem them highly in love for their work's sake (I Thess. 5:13). 3) Count the elders worthy of double honor... (I Tim. 5:17). 4) Obey and submit to those who rule over them (Heb. 13:17). 5) Receive not an accusation against an elder, but before two or three witnesses (I Tim. 5:19).

When leadership as described above is exercised by elders and submitted to by the congregation, good will be the result. When such is not done the congregation will suffer. At the same time it should be kept in mind that elders are not vested with authority to change or nullify the law of Christ, or in any way make laws of their own.

When the leadership in our present day is reviewed, it must be reviewed on the basis of its compliance with that which is revealed in the New Testament, which has been discussed briefly. Otherwise, any review would be worthless.

We have no intention of reviewing present-day leadership in great detail, but we shall point out a few important areas wherein the Lord's church is hurting greatly. Let it be noted that we are not saying that no leadership today meets God's approval. Elders who are doing their God-given work are to be highly commended. They're a great asset!

In the following we shall consider a few areas wherein some aspect of the leadership of elders, as exercised in many congregations, falls far short of conforming to the pattern as outlined in the New Testament. A great many problems now seen within the church can be attributed in large measure to the failure of elders to measure up to God's standard. It is my sincere conviction that elders, more than any other group within the church, have the greatest potential of all to guide Christ's church in the way it should go. Quite a number of congregations do not have elders, but there is some sort of leadership, and it should be guided by God's word. We begin by considering a very important act:

**The Selecting of Elders.** It was God's intention that **elders** serve as overseers and leaders of the church. Though no specifics are given as to how the selection is to be carried out, the qualifications, however, are often given little attention when selections are made. For



example, selections are often made on one or more of the following basis: 1) Being a successful business man. 2) Kin folks or family ties. 3) A desire for power to be over others. 4) Material wealth. 5) Church politics. 6) Influence in the community, et al. Needless to say that this is not in harmony with God's way of selecting elders.

**Qualifications of Elders.** When a decision is made to select elders one of the first things to be considered is God's **qualifications**. From just a brief glance at the qualifications it should be apparent that God had a reason for giving them. Those meeting those qualifications would be the kind of men who would be capable of successful leadership. Anyone who has been acquainted with very many elders will recognize the important fact that qualifications are often lacking. This will generally be reflected within the congregations they oversee. When qualifications are lacking, things which can be hurtful to the church can be expected. With regard to qualifications, some brethren actually have a philosophy which is expressed in the following way: "Select the best you have and make them elders."

**Duties of Elders.** Being an elder involves much more than someone just pointing out an individual and saying, "You're it!" Being an elder in the true sense involves doing something, fulfilling duties. We pointed out earlier that the duties of elders involve some important functions in the area of leadership. When these duties are not carried out, leadership suffers and so does the congregation.

**Leadership and Respect for Authority.** A man who does not meet the qualifications as an elder and does not his duty as the same, has demonstrated a disrespect for divine authority by assuming a position to which he is not entitled. This disrespect for authority is being demonstrated at an increasing rate as some elders actually take the lead in leading people into error. In some cases they remain silent as error is allowed to creep in.

Some elders who show disrespect for divine authority by assuming authority the Lord has never given them. This is what is meant by Peter when he said, "*Neither as being lords over God's heritage*" (I Pet. 5:3). In principle this would relate to Diotrephes, who "*loveth to have preeminence among them...*" (3 John 9-10). Unfortunately, there are some like Diotrephes within the church today.

In the past year I've heard from more than one of my sisters in Christ who were treated with disrespect by elders when they expressed their concern about practices of error within the congregation. Our brethren, men and women, are to be commended when they stand up for the faith. When this is done, criticism may be expected. But if the cause of Christ is not worth standing up for, nothing is.

### **LEADERSHIP OTHER THAN ELDERS**

Members of a congregation, other than elders, often exercise some leadership, and rightly so. Yet, all this must be within the bounds of our Lord's authority. Preachers and teachers are in a position to exercise some leadership through their teaching and influence. This is where the elders have a very serious responsibility to see that the preachers and teachers stay within the bounds of what is authorized in God's word. A failure to do so invites evil influence to find a lodging place.

The above is an area where false teaching occurs. Error often invades a congregation by way of a preacher. It has been observed that a preacher who is very congenial and outgoing can set forth doctrinal error and a great many people will accept it just on that basis. This very thing

is evidenced in cults, where people blindly accept their leader's teaching and influence. This seems to me to qualify as one of Satan's "devices" (2 Cor. 2:11).

When elders should put a quick stop to false teaching and preaching, it is often the case that they do nothing, when a public position against error should be taken. In too many instances they are even swayed by the teachers of error and end up supporting the error. Many examples of this can be found. It is sad indeed when preachers and teachers, who are ordained of God as a means of edification and propagation of the faith, serve as means by which the devil is tearing down the Lord's work in this 21st century. In many of the largest congregations in our brotherhood, the elders, preachers and teachers are in the lead in the promotion of error.

Individuals exercise some leadership as they influence other members of the church. When this influence is contrary to God's will, it is the duty of elders as overseers of the flock to put a stop to such. It is sad when such is not done, as is often the case.

Yes, elders could do more to stop the flood of error which is now sweeping the church, than any other group within the church. If only they would fulfill their God-given role as shown in the New Testament, what a great blessing that would be.

### **LOVE IN CHRIST'S CHURCH – AS SEEN THEN AND AS SEEN NOW**

By THEN we mean the first century. By NOW we mean the 21st century. It is from the New Testament that we get a true picture of the important part which love played in the Lord's church in the first century and the part it should play now. The love which is now under consideration is that higher form of love, translated from the Greek word *agape*. This love is that which has at heart the well-being of others, whereas love from the Greek *phileo* has to do with "tender affection" as often seen between close friends and loved ones.

Of the motivating factors which characterize both God and man, none is greater than that of love in its true and most important sense. Though there are some things about love which may be difficult to understand, one aspect of it is so very clearly evident, and that is — **love is evidenced by action**. Another faculty of man, that of memory, is unseen and difficult to understand, but it is a very powerful force. Love is not actually seen but actions motivated by it are indeed most visible.

The greatest act motivated by God's love was "*that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). Paul said, "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8). The full extent of God's love for man is reflected in His scheme of redemption, or plan of salvation. This cannot be separated from Christ's church.

**Love** is one of the most abused and misused words in the New Testament. Yet, that should not be since the meaning of love (*agape*) is very clearly revealed. We shall give a few examples of actions which are motivated by love. John says, "*For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments...*" (I John 5:3). Our Savior said, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). In verse 23 He said, "*If a man love me, he will keep my words.*" Christ said further, "*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love*" (John 15:9). In verse 12 He said, "*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*" In the great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "*But I say unto you, Love your enemies...*" (Matt. 5:44). In the "love chapter," I Cor. 13, the essentiality of love is made clear. There Paul points out that love "*Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth*" (v. 6).

In view of the above and other New Testament passages, we know that love is demonstrated in keeping God's will. Keeping God's will involves the whole Christian life. Inasmuch as God's will includes all of us, and our relationship with one another, we are all duty bound to act in accordance with love as our Lord intended. Before considering some examples where love should prevail, we want to point out some misconceptions of love.

One of the most often erroneous concepts of love is that it overlooks wrongdoing. Some believe that if we love someone, we will never say anything that would hurt that one's feelings, even though the individual is wrong and should be, according to God's word, corrected. Some contend that love would rule out negative teaching and preaching, even though the whole truth contains many negatives as well as positives. In the writings of some I've seen the idea advanced that love is to be the motivating factor in serving our Lord, even to the point that His objective truth becomes relatively unimportant. This is a case where subjectivism rules rather than God's word. Back in the 1960s some were touting the idea that we should "Serve the man and not the plan." On the basis of misunderstood love, many have simply engaged in the compromise of the truth of God.

With the truth in mind that love (*agape*) is concerned with the well-being of others, let us look at a few areas with the question in mind, "Is love being demonstrated in these areas?"

With individuals in mind, should we commend and encourage one another when we do that which is pleasing in God's sight? What about when we are in error? Should we be corrected, or allowed to continue in error? What will real love do? Will love lead us to teach someone that which is not according to "the doctrine of Christ"? Will love lead us to cease fellowship with those who are in error and cannot be brought to repentance? Will love lead any of us to do that which is a violation of God's will?

What about Bible class teachers? Teachers are in a very responsible position. They may lead and influence their students only in that which is according to truth, or they could lead them astray. If the teacher loves his students, which course will be taken? Could it be truthfully said of any teacher who knowingly teaches error that that teacher loves those being taught?

What about preachers? Normally, the preacher has a greater potential of teaching error than any other individual. He has the hearing of the entire congregation and generally teaches some classes. He usually sets forth ideas through the printed page. There is also the engaging in social activities with members of the congregation. We know the preacher is duty-bound to preach "the word," the truth, as revealed in God's word (2 Tim. 4:2). But it is a matter of fact that much of the error within the church today was propagated by preachers. Now, a question. If the preacher loves those whom he teaches, will he teach them anything which he knows to be error? Of course not. Furthermore, if the preacher loves those whom he teaches or influences, will he encourage them to hear anyone he knows to be a false teacher? Will he bid God speed to any preacher or other individual who teaches error, if he loves that person?

What about elders? We know they are responsible for watching for the souls of the flock for which they are to give account (Heb. 13:17). If they love those of the flock will they expose them to the teaching of a false teacher? Will they allow the preacher to teach error, or encourage the members to listen to a teacher of error if they love him? Will the elders be in the forefront, along with their preacher and members in fellowshipping the Catholic Church in a "revival," or any other denomination, if they love those they are leading? How in the world can elders, if they love the souls of men, encourage members of the church to engage in anything which is known to be wrong? How can elders lead members to believe that it is with scriptural authority that

entertainment, food, fun and frolic are provided by the church? How can elders allow in worship that which is not in accord with John 4:24, that worship must be "*in spirit and in truth*," if they love the members? Most of the questions we have posed must be answered in the negative if God's word is respected, but some would answer them in the affirmative, or affirm them by their actions.

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

We should thank God that we have His word by which we can serve Him acceptably. His word is all-sufficient and unchangeable. It serves as the same infallible guide in the 21st century as it did in the first century. It is man, not God, that has changed. As we review the conditions in the church today, a great many changes which have not one whit of Bible authority are clearly evident! May we vow and determine to stand by God's precious word, regardless of how many others choose to do otherwise.

- - *Walter W. Pigg*

## **The Parable Of The Wheat And The Tares** ***Counterfeit Wheat, Counterfeit Christians***

Matthew 13:24-33; 37-43

*Alan Adams, Assistant Editor*

We have before had a series of articles based on this marvelous "Kingdom Parable." In those studies of this parable we pressed the point that there is but one "seed" which can produce a Christian. The Word of God (Lk. 8:11). However, this great parable speaks of yet "another" seed which produces, not a Christian, but rather a "counterfeit," something, that at first glance might look like a Christian, but upon further examination it is not.

### MAINTAINING CLEAR DISTINCTIONS

In a former article which dealt with the flap between the so called Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Mormon Church, we tried to inject some objectivity into the discussion by noting the fact that the Bible places all accountable people into one of two categories: Saved or Not Saved; Christian or not Christian. We showed that the mere fact that someone "calls" himself a Christian does not make it necessarily so (Cf. Rev. 2:2, 20). It is so ironic that people generally talk of "becoming" a Christian, yet when it gets down to the brass tacks of identifying the *point* at which that occurred, the talk then turns fuzzy and subjective. I know clearly at what *point* I ceased being single and "became" married. I also know at what *point* I ceased being lost and became saved. The Gospel was preached, I put my trust in God and His plan by which He sent the Christ into the world to die for my sins and to be raised that I might have life (Rom. 4:23-25). Because I trusted God, I obeyed (2 Thess. 1:8) the commands to repent of my past (Ac. 2:38; Rom. 6:2), confess Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9-10), and finally, be baptized into Christ at which point I was "raised to walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). It is really not a difficult matter to identify at precisely what *point* a person becomes a Christian, and is "called" such by God (Acts 11:26).

### FURTHER SUBDIVISION

Narrowing our focus to the category of the *Not Saved Not Christian*, it is helpful to further subdivide. The Bible speaks of profligate, reprobate, immoral people; who refuse to "retain the knowledge of God" (Rom. 1:28). There are people who have little or no interest in religion of any kind. There are idol worshippers (Rom. 1:23-25), nature worshippers, ancestor worshippers, etc. Clearly, there are non-Christian, or unsaved people who can be spotted ten miles away in a hurricane.

However, within this larger *Not Saved Not Christian* category is a class of people who are not what they first appear to be. They "call" themselves Christians, and in many respects, particularly as concerns the way they live, they may at first sight appear to be so. Here we must take care. The eyes may not be giving us the whole picture.

Paul speaks of "*false apostles...fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light. It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works*" (2 Cor. 11:13-15). There are also counterfeit "brethren" (Gal. 2:4), "teachers" and "prophets" (2 Pet. 2:1), and "Christs" (Mk. 13:22). Paul even speaks of a counterfeit "gospel," when he says that some had accepted "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-7), of which he is quick to point out that there actually "is not another," rather some people "would pervert the gospel of Christ."

Let's continue to connect this to one of the main points in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Continue to bear in mind that in this parable there are **two** seeds which produce **two** different kinds of plants. The one, "the good seed," produces "*children of the kingdom*" (Matt. 13:38). The other, "the tares," produced "*children of the wicked one.*" Many think of the "tares" as lukewarm, or even rebellious Christians. It is true that Christians can digress and become all these things, yet they are still Christians. However, these "tares" were **never** "children of the kingdom" to begin with. They were produced by *another* seed, not "the word of God" (Lk. 8:11).

Listen to Robert Schuler; Jerry Falwell; Jimmy Swaggart; Billy Graham; Oral Roberts; et al. If we could ask each of these men, Are you a Christian? their reply would immediately be, Yes. Even to listen to them; much of what they say certainly *sounds* Christian. Yet, continued observation will show that they do not believe nor teach what the Bible says about *how* a person becomes a Christian. Consequently, neither they, nor those who accept their doctrines can be what the Bible "calls" a Christian. Can it be that they fall into the category of "tares"?

### COEXISTENCE, NOT ACCEPTANCE

Upon their discovery of the "tares" the householders' servants came and said, "*Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn*" (Matt. 13:27-30).

The reaction of the servants here is similar to that of Peter who pulled out his sword to destroy the enemies of the Lord (Matt. 26:51-52). Are we to *violently* attack and destroy these counterfeits? The Lord says, "No." We are to *coexist* (not "fellowship with") for a while. The

"field" is the "world," and the Lord's servants contemplated pulling these counterfeits up and getting rid of them forever.

Does this mean that we are to ignore the "tares," that we accept, or even tolerate them? No! We recognize them as "tares," we point them out as "tares," as counterfeits. We show to all the clear difference between "wheat" and "tares." As we deal with these "tares," we are patient and prudent in our actions, lest we also cause the "wheat" to be uprooted along with the "tares." There are, for example, "newborn" Christians, weak Christians, who do not yet clearly understand the difference between the *true* and the *counterfeit*. Many of these think of denominational people as "Christians," as brethren. We must patiently educate our brethren to see the difference, but without arrogance, belligerence or violence lest we cause their faith to be destroyed in the process. Though we point out and distinguish (and yes, we are to **judge** in this sense!), yet the final punishment (another aspect of the word *judge*) is to be left up to the "*righteous judge*" who will judge all men (2 Tim. 4:8).

There can be no doubt as to the fate of those who become and remain "tares": they "*are gathered and burned in the fire*" (Matt. 13:40). It always amazes me to hear some brethren, even preachers, postulating the possibility that maybe, after all, who knows, could be, perhaps God might just open those gates a little wider and allow people into Heaven of whom He has clearly said in the Bible will be "cast into a furnace of fire."

### THE "TARES" AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

An additional point should be made here. Some brethren have interpreted the Lord's order not to "root up" these "tares" to mean that we are not to discipline, more particularly, we are not to "disfellowship" unruly or "disorderly" (2 Thess. 3:6-7) members of the church. This interpretation/application of this parable is **W-R-O-N-G!**

First, that would be a direct contradiction of the Lord's own orders in Matthew 18:15-17. I mean somebody, according to the Lord, is to be marked and treated as "*an heathen man and a publican.*" And, Paul said, that somebody is to be "*marked*" and "*avoided*" (Rom. 16:17).

Second, to "root up," as used in the parable, means to destroy, whereas discipline, and ultimately withdrawal of fellowship, are designed to "restore" an erring church member (Cf. Gal. 6:1).

Thirdly, as we have already shown: "Tares" are not even Christians; they are counterfeit. But, on to another lesson from the parable,

### FORBEAR AND PERSIST

We live in an imperfect world, "*Under the sun*" (Eccl. 1:3), and all around us are "*things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity*" (Matt. 13:41). We preach, defend, guard, fight against (Eph. 6:10-17) counterfeit doctrines and religions and philosophies; but, we wait for the Lord who will at the end of the world send his "*reapers*" (angels) to "*gather up*" the "*tares*" and "*burn them*" (Matt. 13:40). "*Vengeance belongs*" to the Lord (Rom. 12:19). Let us patiently wait for that day when finally "*the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father*" (Matt. 13:43).

Generally speaking, all people have ears, but unfortunately, not all use them for hearing, especially, hearing what needs to be heard. What a tragic thing to pass through life and spend hours hearing things that will not help us to get to Heaven, on the contrary hearing and heeding



things which will lead us to Hell. This parable is so important that Jesus ends by saying, "*He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear.*"

104 South Willow Street  
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### **Brother Doyle Gough Succumbs**

Our brother, Doyle Gough, succumbed to a heart attack January 16th. Funeral services were conducted January 19th, in Dresden, TN, his home. Bro. Gough is the father of Gilbert Gough, who preaches for the Chapman church of Christ, near Ripley, MS. We have had the pleasure of knowing bro. Gough for several years. We have known him as one who loved the truth of God and one who was unafraid to stand up for the truth. He will be sorely missed by friends, family, and fellow members of the church who also love God's truth. Realizing the seriousness of his condition, which occurred very suddenly, he said that he was ready to go.

Our sincere sympathy goes out to the family and friends. A great loss has been suffered but a good example, which many would do well to follow, remains. - - *Editor*

## **God Takes Great Delight In Those Who Are Truthful**

*Marvin L. Weir*

Solomon experienced all that his world had to offer. The life he lived enabled him to be acutely aware of both the good and the bad. He knew what would be profitable to a person as well as what would prove to be a detriment to one's peace of mind and true happiness. Thus, the wise man said, "*Lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah; But they that deal truly are his delight*" (Prov. 12:22).

Our society has long thought that lying is that which children should not do. It is true that young folks need to speak the truth, but so do adults. It is utter folly for adults to engage in lying while insisting that their children tell the truth.

There is no sin more common today than the sin of lying. Lying has become a way of life in the oval office, the halls of Congress, the schoolrooms and the home. Even in the spiritual realm most prefer a lie instead of the truth. If people do not have a love for the truth, God will send "*them a working of error, that they should believe a lie*" (2 Thess. 2:10-11). May we be encouraged to speak the truth as we study the subject of lying.

**In the minds of many nothing comes so easy as lying.** Without any thought or effort lies freely flow from some people's lips. Some children get lots of coaching and practice from an early age. A father goes golfing but leaves instructions with the children to tell his employer that he is sick and has gone to the doctor. When parents do not wish to speak to someone on the

phone they tell their children to say they are not at home. Children quickly learn that in certain situations it is preferable to lie rather than tell the truth.

**Even Christians are admonished to speak the truth!** It is reasonable to expect that worldly people will lie when it is to their advantage. It is also reasonable to expect a child of God to always speak the truth. Such is not always the case, however, because psychology has influenced some folks more than the Holy Bible.

Paul tells Christians to "*lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings*" (Col. 3:9). But if the **situation** warrants it or the **circumstances** encourage it, many members of the body will not hesitate to lie. The great lesson to be learned is that the *situation ethics* mentality and the "end justifies the means" philosophy are as false as night. God has never been pleased with those who do not speak the truth.

**Lying is an abomination to God because His great enemy is the father of lies!** Jesus told the Pharisees of His day, "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father thereof*" (Jno. 8:44). Satan has again and again distinguished himself by wearing the title of liar. Since the devil has been called the "*father of lies,*" the wilful liar is testimony of his parentage.

**Lying is the exact opposite of God's nature!** The Old Testament declares, "*God is not a man, that he should lie, Neither the son of man, that he should repent: Hath he said, and will he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and will not make it good?*" (Num. 23:19). The New Testament is also quick to remind us that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Truth comes from God (Jno. 8:40) and Christ testified that His Word was true (Jno. 17:17). It is truth that will free one from the bondage of sin (Jno. 8:32) and truth (Word of Christ) will judge all in that day (Jno. 12:48).

**There will be no liars in Heaven.** John says all liars "*shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone...*" (Rev. 21:8). John also notes that without the gates of the Heavenly city "*are dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie*" (Rev. 22:15). The caliber of people that will keep liars company in eternal torment shows God's disdain for this sin of lying.

May it be said of those who call themselves children of God that they will not deal falsely with God nor their fellowman (Cf. Isa. 63:8).

5810 Liberty Grove Road  
Rowlet, TX 75089

## **BANNER OF TRUTH LECTURES**

June 4 — 7, 2001

**Theme: Christ and His Church in the 21st Century**

**Place: Curris Center, Murray State University**

**Murray, Kentucky**

Activities will begin at 11:00 a.m. and end at 9:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday evening. About 23 lessons are planned, with some speakers speaking twice. We will have more detailed information in the future. We encourage brethren to make plans to be with us, if at all possible. -

*Editor*

**Has your address changed? If so, let us know if you wish to continue receiving *Banner of Truth*. - Editor**

### **Editor's Apology**

It was my intention to get the December issue of *Banner of Truth* in the mail in early January. Due to sickness I was not able to do as I had planned. About the end of December my wife came down with some sort of flu, or something. A few days later I had the same problem. I spent a few days in bed but my problem continued. On Jan. 29th I went to the doctor and learned that I had pneumonia. Today (Ground hog day) I feel much better and am able to get back to my work. I trust that I will be able to get the paper in the mail next week. I still have intentions of catching up and getting each issue out during the month for which it is intended.

The great way in which our brethren are supporting our work is most encouraging, as is the response we receive from our readers, including those from foreign countries. - *Editor*

## **Free 20 Page Tract**

Some brethren have developed a tract, defining **Non-Denominational Christianity**. The purpose of developing the Bible-based tract was for strengthening the faith of the brotherhood and for use in evangelistic efforts. The reader or student is encouraged to read and study the Bible while reading the booklet. The material is not copyrighted and may be duplicated as desired.

The material is free of charge, and may be ordered from:

Clarence E. Hall  
207 Cedardale Ave.  
Baton Rouge, LA 70808  
(225) 344-6519

## **Would You Believe — "A Holy Hug Line" ? ? ?**

If you have not heard of one, look for information about one in the next issue of *Banner of Truth*.

## READERS' RESPONSE

"Dear bro. Pigg, I commend you on your stand for the truth, as presented in God's word. I enjoy reading Banner of Truth, and believe you do a good work in publishing it. We receive a bundle each month here at the Rowlett church.... Now the reason for writing you: My daughter, Bonnie Lemon, and daughter Judith, and her husband, Lyndall Jackson, plus my wife, Bess, and I wish to make this donation to the Banner of Truth in memory of Graham L. Cain, a dear friend of 58 years, who passed away two weeks ago. He was a stalwart soldier of the cross and the church can ill afford to lose Christians such as he who speaks where the Bible speaks and is silent where it is silent. And, especially since so many liberals are trying to water down the word - **Fred C. Johnson.**" - TX. (*Sad indeed is the loss of true soldiers of the cross. Those who love and respect God's truth are direly needed. We sincerely thank you for the help for Banner of Truth - Ed.*)

"Appreciate receiving B.O.T. Best wishes to you and your loved ones for the New Year - **Grace Davis.**" - TN. (*We trust you are having a good New Year and that there will be many yet to come. Thanks for the gift for BOT. You help make our work possible. - Editor.*)

"Send no further correspondence please! - **Mike Nichols.**" - TX. (*Thanks for letting us know. -Editor.*)

"Want to thank you and Naomi for the lovely visit in Oct. We made it home safely. Thanks so much for BOT. I sure enjoy reading it. I'm so glad that we still have sound ministers who will stand up for the truth. So much going on it saddens my heart. Here's a little something to help with BOT - **Pearl Bryant.**" - WA. (*We enjoyed seeing you. I'm glad that we have members of the church who are greatly concerned about the truth. Thanks for you help for BOT. "Stand fast in the faith." - Editor.*)

"Dear workers for the Lord. Keep up the good work with Banner of Truth. May 2001 be a Banner year. - **Millard and Marian Shivers.**" - TX. (*Good to hear from you again. Thanks for the gift. You will help us to have "a Banner year." Due to sickness we are off to a slow start but trust we'll catch up in days ahead. - Ed.*)

"Thanks so much for the fine way that you present the truth in your publication. I have been receiving Banner of Truth for just a short time, but it has really helped in my studies. Two of my friends would like very much to receive this publication...- **Brenda Scherffius.**" - TN. (*Thanks for sending the names of your friends. This helps us to add to our mailing list those who have an interest in the paper. Many have helped us to build our mailing list this way. Few ask to be taken off the list. - Editor*) P

"I have just read your November 2000 issue of BOT including the article on homosexuality. It is a classic. Have you thought about putting it in tract format? It is the most complete treatment of the subject I have read in any one article of a size that most people will read....You remember the night you spent with us in Enville. There were seven preachers there that night....Just thought I would make contact with you again and wish you and yours God Speed in all your good work - **Dea Buchanan.**" (*Good to hear from you. I sure remember that night; it was an enjoyable occasion. I haven't thought about putting the article in a tract. I could do it myself but it seems that I never get the time. Who would have thought, back at the time*)

*when I spent the night at your house, that we would at this time be getting as close to Sodom and Gomorrah as we are? Wish you the best! -Ed)*

"Greetings in Christ. The first day I was given BOT I read it many times and I am still keeping the issue. It is a very old issue of Aug. 1999, but to me it will never expire. I am a member of Vosloorus church of Christ here in South Africa and will be happy if you will send BOT every month - **Mudau Vhonani.**" - **South Africa.** *(I'll be happy to add your name to our mailing list, and will send you some back issues of BOT. If you think others would like to receive BOT, I could send a bundle of 15 each month. Postage is much less that way. - Editor).*

"We enjoy the "Banner of Truth" so much, and share it with all that will read it. Please send it to.... Sending this check to help with expenses. We remember the good times in Memphis, TN, with you, your lovely wife and daughter. Enjoy every issue of BOT. - **Bro. & sis. Herman Carter.**" - **MI.** *(We well remember those times in Memphis. Time does fly, doesn't it. Good to hear from you and appreciate greatly the check to help with expenses. We wish you the best in every good thing. - Ed.).*

"Please send me "Banner of Truth." I heard about it though another Christian in a nearby county - **Don Nowland.**" - **AL.**

"We look forward every month to receiving B.O.T. We read it from cover to cover! Please add my parents to your mailing list - **Janis Dukes.**" - **TX.**

**Editor's e-mail:** < [wpiggbot@apex.net](mailto:wpiggbot@apex.net) >

View BOT on bro. David Lemmons' web at:

<http://www.hcis.net/users/dlemmons/BOTlist.htm>

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