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Urgent Questions Which Elders Should Consider

When man sinned in the Garden of Eden, God already had a plan for his salvation. This "wisdom of God" which was evidenced by the church was "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Among the various instructions given to enable Christ and his church to accomplish God's purpose is the very special emphasis upon elders as overseers and leaders in the churches.

Looking back over the year 2003 and reflecting on the state of the Lord's church, there is great cause for serious concern. Whereas the church should be increasing in number and in spiritual strength, and reaching out in a forceful way to the millions of lost in the world, such has not been the case. To the contrary, we have not seen an increase in God-approved mission efforts and the faith of an increasing number has not been increasing as God intended. That the faith of many is waning is seen in the growing affinity for the religions patterned after the minds of men. Forty years ago, brethren who were truly converted knew that denominationalism was wrong, and tried to convert those people rather than join with them in their unscriptural teaching and practice.

While some brethren across the land are deeply concerned about the well-being of the body of Christ, for whom we are so thankful, sheer indifference continues to increase at an alarming rate virtually every place. Our loving Savior must shed bitter tears, as he did over the indifference of those in Jerusalem.

A most important question is — To what can the present state of the church be attributed? Surely, no one would claim to have all the answers. Various factors are involved. There are, however, some things which are plain to see, and one does not have to have unlimited knowledge to observe those things.

THE PART PREACHERS PLAY. It is simply a fact that preachers have a great part to play in the direction the church is taking. The preacher is before the congregation more than others. He generally presents four lessons every week. It is understandable then that the preacher's influence

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would outweigh that of others. When the preacher is outgoing, friendly and congenial, his influence is even greater, be it for good or for evil.

Many people are inclined to be followers of men, which, or course is contrary to God's will. The apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians to be his followers, but that was qualified. "Be ye followers of me, even as also I am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1). The real danger comes when men are inclined to follow a man, regardless of the direction he takes. This inclination is much more widespread than many realized. We have seen the evidence of this in the past several years in the increasing number of religious cults. Such examples as: Waco, Heaven's Gate, Jim Jones, and others should serve as reminders of what can happen to people and their minds.

It is tragic enough when people of the religious world in general blindly follow men, even to their doom, but when this happens among those who claim to be the Lord's people that is even more tragic. Just think. We are talking about people who have been

fortunate enough to hear the gospel and tragic. Just think. We are talking about people who have been fortunate enough to hear the gospel and render obedience to its first principles, and then allow the influence of someone to lead them into error, even to the extent of becoming "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18).

To deny that we have cults within the Lord's church, as a result of following men, is to show one's denial of the truth as shown by mountains of valid evidence. We need to bear in mind, however, that one of the insidious things about following men is that one doesn't look for evidence of what is right and wrong. That one's will is virtually in the hands of the one being followed.

Cults Within The Church? Yes. Where is the evidence? Let's begin with **Crossroadism**. The Crossroads Movement had its beginning in the early 1970s in Gainesville, Florida. The Leader was Chuck Lucas. This movement experienced considerable growth for a number of years. It was reported that more than 150 congregations were split before the influence of the movement waned, and Chuck Lucas was relieved due to "recurring sins in his life." The influence of Crossroads didn't die.

The Boston Church. The cultic influence of Chuck Lucas and the Crossroads movement in Gainesville shifted to **Boston**. Kip McKean, Lucas protégé, was the head of the Boston movement. Around the mid 1980s McKean's group had grown from a congregation of around 50 to 1,800. There was much in common with Crossroads. Brain washing or mind control played a major part. By the mid 1980s Boston had planted churches in several places in the U.S. and in Toronto and London, with plans for church plantings in a number of other foreign countries.

The International Church of Christ. With Kip McKean still at the top of the pyramid in leadership, the above term was chosen rather than the Boston Church. A few years ago, when I made my last trip to Kiev, Ukraine, the group claimed to have 2,000 members in Kiev alone. In Malaysia I had the opportunity of talking at with a young man who was a part of the Boston movement. But I was pleased to know that he later saw his error and came out. Only the Lord knows how many people were adversely affected by Kip McKean's movement before it began to break up.

Relatively recent news is that the above movement has pretty well collapsed. Even the leader, Kip McKean, has admitted error. Many of the congregations are falling apart and money is not coming in. This is good news, to see the efforts of error come to a halt and cease influencing minds of men.

Max Lucado and Followers. This teacher of error in many areas gained additional attention very recently when an article appeared in the *San Antonio Express News*, Sept. 6, 2003. Lucado claimed that a “vision” had “crystallized” for him. The “vision” involved changes in the congregation so that it would have “a greater impact.” The changes included “modifying ‘Oak Hills Church of Christ’ to ‘Oak Hills Church’”. Lucado made the bold statement that “some find the Church of Christ name to be an insurmountable barrier.” Lucado’s “vision” includes the developing of Oak Hills church into a “mother church,” which would be linked to “campuses in other sections of the city.”

Needless to say that Max Lucado and his followers constitute a cult. This man who hopes and believes that some will be saved even without baptism, and that the name of Christ serves as a “barrier” has his followers who follow him blindly.

Rubel Shelly and His Followers. This is another example of a cult within the Lord’s church. This man had his followers when he upheld the truth, and he has his followers now that he has become an enemy of the truth (Phil. 3:18). He upholds and encourages denominationalism, as demonstrated by his support of the Billy Graham Campaign in Nashville, not very long ago. Though Shelly is now destroying the faith which he once preached, a great many still follow him.

Although we have given only a few examples of cults within the church, many others could be given which are not as well known. We are reminded of God’s instructions to the Israelites, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil” (Ex. 23:2). We have many followers of men in their evil of perverting and denying the truth of God.

THE PART TEACHERS PLAY. Also a source of influence within the church is seen in Bible class teachers. Though they do not have as much influence as preachers, they do have a part to play. In various instances class teachers have come up with some teaching of error, which in time reached out to more

more than the class they taught. All teaching of error starts some place.

WHY THE DISCUSSION OF CULTS, PREACHERS AND TEACHERS WHEN WE ARE CONSIDERING QUESTIONS FOR ELDERS?

We have considered some things relative to the present state of the church in order to call attention to the part that **ELDERS** should play in God’s plan for the church. This is a primary factor which should not be overlooked. Earlier we asked, “To what can the present state of the church be attributed?” Our response is **elders**, more than anyone, are responsible. We are not suggesting that only elders or all elders are involved, but their influence should not be overlooked as a great factor.

Elders Are Ordained of God. Obviously, God knew that His people would need leadership in order to fulfill their duties and responsibilities. The importance of this God-ordained leadership is emphasized by the fact that a number of serious qualifications are set forth in order to assure that capable men will fill the position of elders. I cannot imagine anyone thinking that elders, who truly meet God’s qualifications, were in God’s plan for no good reason. One should not think that we are at liberty to disregard the qualifications for elders and their work anymore than we are at liberty to disregard matters concerning God’s plan of salvation.

In order to afford an easy reference to the qualifications of elders we are listing them below. In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he describes the office of a bishop as “a good work.” He then sets for the qualifications as follow:

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God”) Not a novice...Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without...” (I Tim. 3:2-7).

To Titus Paul writes, with instructions to “ordain elders in every city...” (Tit. 1:5). The qualifications given to Titus are as follows:

“If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused or riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able to exhort and convince the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:6-9).

From the above inspired qualifications it is easy to see why it would be so important for a man to be so characterized in order to carry out his God-ordained duties. We can also see why having such men as overseers in congregations would greatly contribute to the well-being of the flocks. This is especially true as it relates to upholding the truth and various doctrinal matters. This is the area in which the Lord’s church has been hurting so much in the past few decades, and is hurting today.

Consider the following qualification which relate to truth and error, and the state of the church today: 1) **Apt to teach.** This carries the idea of being skilled in teaching. One of the greatest safeguards against accepting error is to be taught the truth properly. Those who aren’t taught properly need not be expected to behave properly when it comes to confronting teachings of error. 2) **Ruleth well his own house.** One who cannot rule his own house will not be able to properly rule a congregation. When Christians are not ruled properly they may be expected to be unruly, and this involves doctrines and practices. 3) **Holding fast the faithful word.** No one who will not uphold the truth is qualified to serve as an elder. A serious responsibility of an elder is to be able to stand up for the truth against those who oppose the truth. Consider the danger posed by elders who will not “contend for the faith” (Jude 3) in the face of error. The number of “gainsayers” is increasing. Not only is there a great lack of men serving as elders who fail to Hold Fast the work, a great many are actually leading the flock in the way of error. In a great many congregations today, the elders are right out front with the preachers of error, leading the flock in the path of error. Not only are the responsibilities of elders set forth in the

qualifications we have noted, there is additional important teaching relative to the function of elders and their qualifications.

The writer of Hebrews says, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account...” (Heb. 13:17). It could not be made clearer that the elders are responsible for ruling in a way that has God’s approval. When elders do not rule properly, some may not submit to them. And when there is the lack of proper rule the souls of the members are put in jeopardy.

Peter, also an elder, exhorted the elders by the following instructions:

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (I Pet. 5:2-3).

It’s difficult to think of a greater responsibility than that of feeding the flock. Those who are fed properly are not likely to be turned aside to poisoned feed. When not properly feed they may not know what food is safe and which isn’t. The responsibility of feeding the flock involves the oversight of the elders. They must not allow the flock to be fed the wrong spiritual food. They are responsible.

Paul called attention to the elders at Ephesus to: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made your overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). He goes on to warn them of men who would arise among them to “draw away disciples after them.” We have seen this warning of Paul become a reality in many instances in recent years.

Peter warned elders against “being lords over God’s heritage.” They were rather to be examples to the flock. People with a dictator spirit should never be appointed as elders. Elder should be men who serve as examples to be followed. This doesn’t mean, as some believe, that elders have no authority. They should, however, serve as examples in the exercise of that authority.

Now that we have considered a number of things relative to elders, we want to move on to the main topic of our discussion.

URGENT QUESTIONS WHICH ELDERS SHOULD CONSIDER

The following questions are designed to provoke thought on the part of those serving as elders and also on the part of those involved in selecting elders. I am affirming that elders, who meet God's qualifications, could do more than anyone to guide the church in the right course, and halt the current straying from "the old paths."

Just as people can fail to abide in the "doctrine of Christ" in many areas, this can happen and has happened with regard to elders and their place in God's plan for the salvation of man. When elders do their very best, some members are going to fall away. But when elders fail, the door of departure from the truth is left wide open.

There has never been a time in our time when the need for true elders was greater. As members of the church we can have some influence in this area. Members of the church are to select elders. Members of the church are to stand for the truth when elders will not. When elders cease to be elders, they should be rejected as elders. We ask you to reflect upon the following questions, which are directed to elders first, but to others also. The questions are by no means exhaustive:

1. Why did you become an elder? A person's reason for becoming an elder may have a great deal to do with how well one performs as an elder. Some people sort of "run for the office" to be an elder. When the tremendous responsibility of an elder is considered, not many are all that eager to become an elder. I've known those who were sort of "itching" to be in authority. Some are persuaded to serve as an elder when they know they lack the qualifications. The position is some times sort of passed down through a family. A good reason for becoming an elder would be that one feels that he is qualified and should use his capability to serve the Lord in this very responsible way.

2. Are you familiar with the qualifications of an elder? The qualifications cover a rather wide area. Are you an effective teacher? Are you established in the truth to the degree that you can withstand or convict the gainsayer? Do you rule well in your own family? Are your children faithful Christians? Are you will-

ing to stand up for the truth at all costs and under all circumstances.

3. Are you aware of the responsibilities you are to assume as an elder? Do you realize you are responsible for the souls of those under your rule and that you will have to give an account? Do you realize that you are responsible for the proper feeding of those under you? This would include the teachers of classes and what they teach. What of the preacher, are you willing to challenge his teaching if it is not according to truth.

4. When should an elder discontinue as such? Is once an elder always an elder, upheld by the truth? What about the situation when an elder is no longer able to perform the functions of an elder? It is not unusual for one who once stood solidly for the truth, to adopt some unscriptural teaching. In that case, should he step down? or continue? If one becomes like Diotrefes, desiring to rule over others, should he step aside?

5. Is it right for one elder to assume a greater position of authority than the others, or to become a "chief" elder? Is it right for the other elders to allow one to assume the chief position? Is authority determined by seniority? Is the authority of elders vested in the eldership, or in individuals?

6. Who should select elders in a congregation? Is this the duty of the congregation? Or, may the elders do the selecting of additional elders? Is it wrong for an eldership to propagate itself? Does the preacher have the authority to select elders?

7. Should elders keep the congregation informed as to the business of the church? What information should be withheld from the members? Do effective leaders have a close relationship to those they are endeavoring to lead?

8. Do elders have a right to authorize something which is not upheld by scriptural authority? An example of this was the elders of a congregation maintaining that they had the authority to authorize a woman to teach a mixed audience. Were they wrong? Do elders have a right to provide recreation at church expense? Are elders authorized to provide weight loss programs and financial seminars at church expense? Do elders have a right to provide meals for the members when it is not a matter (p. 6)

of benevolence? I was informed that one congregation just gives a feast for the community, at church expense, not a pot-luck. Some congregations provide shopping trips for members.

9. Should men who cannot control their temper serve as elders? If God's qualifications are respected there is only one correct answer. No. A person who is "hot-headed" is not a good example.

10. Should elders allow liberal-minded men to have access to the flock? True shepherds do not allow wolves to get at their flocks. This is often not the case with elders in the Lord's church. More and more they are leading the wolves into the midst of their flocks to injure as many sheep as they choose.

11. Should elders take the lead in administering church discipline? Some elders might be inclined to ask, "What is church discipline?" This means that God has provided for the well-being of the church, but in most instances it is forgotten.

12. Does being a successful business man qualify one to be an elder? Some have evidently thought it does. We might say that the Lord's church is a spiritual business, but it is far different and much more important than a secular business.

The above questions are a few that can be answered but a measure of Bible knowledge and common sense. God's qualifications speak directly with regard to some of the questions. Some things have been demonstrated by their use that they do not work for the good of the cause of Christ.

When the condition of the church today and God's plan for elders in the church are considered, a number of legitimate questions are raised. We shall note just a few of them.

1. Why are those serving as elders allowing such things as Max Lucado's outrageous error to prevail, by which untold thousands are being influenced by evil? Why are those supposed to be elders at Woodmont Hills allowing Ruble Shelly to lead untold numbers in disrespect for the church for which our Lord died? This same question could be asked at a great many places, where those who hold the position as elders are actually in league with the promoters of deadly error.

2. Why are elders allowing true worship to be turned into a jamboree session rather than a period of reverence and respect paid to God, in accordance with God's instructions? Could it be that they want to

please men by giving them what they want, rather than what God demands?

3. Why are elders allowing congregations to engage in a number of activities which have never been, nor are they today, works of the church? Many of us can remember when the works engaged in by the church fell into one or more of three categories: evangelism, edification, and benevolence. Who has changed God's law?

4. Why are elders allowing, and some times encouraging, members to fellowship denominations? The participation in a Catholic Revival by a preacher and elders, as happened here, would have been unheard of forty years ago. But not so today. To fellowship religions of men is to imply that they, too, are acceptable to the Lord! But He didn't die for a single one of them.

5. Why are elders having preachers of error for meetings and other activities? Why do elders have preachers to work with them when they know they teach error?

Elders could do more than anyone to halt the evil work of the devil, which is wreaking havoc with God's people. False teachers could be turned away. The work of the church could be limited to that which is authorized in the New Testament. Worship services could be conducted in a sane manner as they used to be, where reverence and respect were evident. Elders could demand the teaching of the distinctiveness of the one true church, purchased by the Son of God. Elders could deal with false teaching within the congregation. These and other constructive things could be done, but the tragic fact is, they are not being done.

We are made to ask, "What is the motive of elders?" Where is their love? On whose side are they? Do they want to see Christ's church suffer, as it is suffering now?

Elders who are not serving as true elders, will pay a price, as they should unless they repent. But this doesn't stop the hurt that is being done now. As faithful members of the church we can make a difference. We can "contend for the faith" and speak out in defense of the truth and in opposition to all error. We will not change things by silence or any measure of compromise. May the Lord help us.

—Walter W. Pigg, Editor

Where Is The Church Headed?

Bill King

In order to get the most from the following discussion, we ask you to carefully read the following passages: Isaiah 55:6-9; I Corinthians 1:18-31; I Corinthians 2:14; 3:18-19.

The above scriptures not only make it known to mankind that the foolishness of God is much wiser than mankind can ever hope to be, but they also make known the problem of man trying to be smarter than God existed in both Old and New Testament times. With this in mind, I must ask the question, who does man think he can make the gospel more acceptable by adding any entertainment?

Over the past several decades since I left the denominational world, I have seen the church heading in what I feel to be the same direction. When I became a Christian, I was taught that fun and games were no worship, but that the proper form of worship, “decently and in order,” were taught in I Corinthians 14:40. I was taught the need for modest dress among all members of the Lord’s church. Then came lessons on proper ways to raise money for the church, that being free-will offerings (Ac. 2:45; 4:32-37; I Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:1-8).

I see too many within the church today more and more accepting my “old denominational ways” as being right. This is happening because some preachers and elders among our brethren feel they have more wisdom and knowledge than in the past, and this advanced knowledge says it is all right to accept these changes as good. Hosea says we “are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (4:6). The lack of knowledge of God’s word from Genesis to Revelation is going to be the downfall of the church because we are failing to see that being like the “other nations” is weakening the church.

Some time ago I found the following statements and believe they may still be at the root of the problem, but thankfully, it is not in every congregation. “It is a well understood fact that much of the trouble that exists among churches today arises from an imperfect and incompetent eldership.” Another statement was, “The lack of Bible knowledge that exists among the elders is the foundation of a large amount of the troubles

and divisions among them.” These statements sound very familiar to our present day, don’t they? Both statements were made by the late E. G. Sewell in 1892. To avoid that which brother Sewell was writing about more than a hundred years ago, today’s elders must use God’s Word and not the writings of modern man as their guide for the Lord’s work.

Too many church leaders have turned from God’s Word to gimmicks, entertainment, and a non-threatening environment to draw crowds. From too many of our pulpits one no longer hears strong Bible teaching and preaching. Nor do we hear that it is wrong to divorce and remarry at every whim and desire. Neither do we hear that it is wrong to practice dancing, mixed bathing, to steal (take items from the workplace), to covet that which others have, and to forsake the assembly of the church for any reason one may choose. Rather than apologizing for preaching the gospel, preachers must ask the same question Paul asked many years ago. “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? (Gal. 4:16).

Some preachers and teachers quote more from theologians than from the Bible. The Bible, God’s Word, is still our fundamental tool in teaching and it still has the power to save the lost (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Our pulpits and the hearers include people who remind me of Luke’s words, “For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). The gospel and Christ are not going to change (Heb. 13:8).

In some congregations today there are yard sales, car washes and other types of fund-raisers to support “good works.” What happened to freewill offerings of the church as in its beginning? Who made it right today? That which was wrong over three decades ago is still wrong. God’s word hasn’t changed and will not.

Within the Lord’s church choirs are not to be; but rather all of us are to sing together in worship to God. Today within the brotherhood we have congregations using people called “Praise Singers,” including women in the song services. These are supposedly (p. 8)

the best singers within a congregation who are placed at random, with microphones, throughout the congregation to make the singing better. Whom are we pleasing with this idea? Certainly not God. This idea is nothing more than self-serving entertainment within the church. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 make no mention of such being pleasing God.

Today there are those teaching that it is all right to have fellowship meals in homes with members of their congregation in attendance and serving the Lord's supper following the meal. This is being taught by one of our learned brethren in one of our "church" schools. Also, there are those who allow women to take part in passing the Lord's supper during the worship services. Where do they get a biblical example for such? Could it be that the church has fallen into promoting its own doctrine instead of God's. Christ said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).

Read again the passages from Isaiah and I Corinthians mentioned at the beginning. Have our church leaders and preachers with their doctoral degrees of higher learning surpassed God's Word? It would seem so. Christ condemned the religious leaders of his day because of their misinterpretations of the law to suit their own goals. Remember Paul's words, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12). To much worldly education has brought about a lack of God's Word in our pulpits today.

Today the church in many places is getting into more associations with groups outside the church to do its good works. Can God receive the glory due Him when businesses and denominational groups receive the praise? No.

Within the church today, too many elders, church leaders and preachers are trying "new" things to grow the church. Brethren, these things aren't new. The denominations were doing them 40 years ago, and they failed. The fun groups, ball teams, retreats, and seminars don't grow the church because the people who come because of these things soon leave looking for something else "new" in their life. Church growth is not cruising members going from one congregation to the next around the city or town. It is teaching the people the good news of the gospel and baptizing these

new converts. It is teaching people to count the cost of Christian service (Lk. 14:18). It is seeking God's will and putting God first (Matt. 6:33), and serving only one master (Matt. 6:24), that represents true church growth.

Today there are congregations that offer special services on Sundays and Wednesdays in order the members may attend ball games or other functions of interest that take place at the regular worship time. While doing so, God's word about the "narrow way" (Matt. 7:12-14), and counting the cost are ignored or put aside completely because we might hurt someone's feelings. What about the person's soul? Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 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. 16:24-26). These words should be considered when we try to serve God at our convenience.

I am not against people attending sporting events if they like, or other entertainment. But I am against creating special services just so members of the church can be on time for this type events. Where is the true loyalty? Again, which master are they serving? When elders and preachers create ways to side step the worship services and man's duty to God in violation of the gospel, it is wrong.

Again, why did Christ condemn the religious leaders of His day? They were side stepping the law of God by creating their own doctrine. For hundreds of years the Catholic Church has offered the indulgence of penitence as a way to pay for one's sins. Today, the leaders within the church some times use gimmicks to make worship of God require no sacrifice on the part of the members. What about Paul's words, "And be ye conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds..." (Rom. 12:2).

Too many preachers no longer preach against sin, but rather whitewash the gospel and water it down to keep the numbers up and maintain their jobs and salaries.

Since the 1970s the growth of the Lord's church has declined. Part of the decline is due, I believe, to a lack of preaching and teaching God's word. Not only

that, but God's word is not being taught in the homes. The teaching in Deut. 6:6-7, is worth considering. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thy walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." We are reminded of the responsibility toward children in Ephesians 6:4.

Many members of the church are now from second and third generation families or even farther. When you ask why they are members of the church you may get, "Well, my parents are members" for an answer. This is the same answer you get from the denominational world, but it should not be. One should be a member of the Lord's church because he or she has been taught the truth of God's word and obeyed that truth from the heart. People rarely appreciate what they have until it costs them something, and being a Christian is no different.

Those within the church that came out of the worldly religions know about counting the cost in the form of giving up old ways, friends, and in many cases even their families have been left behind. Many that have grown up within the church have not paid a price for their faith and therefore, it may mean little to them. These folks are often looking for something to make it more meaningful or entertaining. This will continue to happen until they realize that Christianity is not about "my feeling good" but rather it is about worshipping God "in spirit and in truth" (Jno. 4:24). Things within the church will not change until all of us realize that God's wisdom is much higher than our own in His plan for His church.

Where is the church going? Is it going to seek God and His wisdom, or follow its own path? As a closing reminder I offer the following: "O Lord I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

—3607 Rainbow Place, Nashville, TN 37204

A Critical Response From A Disturbed Reader

We invite responses from readers of Banner of Truth, and we receive a great many. Nearly all responses are positive, but there are exceptions as in the case of the e-mail from Joe Ankar, which is printed in full below—

I am writing to you regarding the Banner of Truth publication Vol. 12 No. 8 published in October 2003. I would like to know why this publication was sent to me and who sent it.

"As a member of the Roman Catholic Church, I take particular offense with you editorial in this publication entitled 'Informative Notes on Roman Catholicism.' This editorial is an affront not only to the Catholic Church and its millions of followers, it is also an affront to the Church of Christ that you represent.

"It is one thing to argue the biblical positions or teachings of the Catholic Church, but it is entirely a different matter when you have to resort to name-calling to make your point. Your editorial begins with biblical warnings of 'false prophets'...fair enough. However, you yourself undermine the legitimacy of

your argument by writing, 'Whether or not the warnings have specific reference to the Catholic Church makes little difference. What is important is that it is included in principle.' Who's principle, Mr. Pigg. Yours and only yours, I'm afraid.

"This article is an abomination to all those who would call themselves Christian, including members of the Church of Christ. Instead of throwing stones, do Christ's work. We all can learn from others, even Catholics, as we strive to do Christ's work.

"You bring indignity and shame upon yourself and your church with the publication of this article. It is a shame that so many of your followers will believe YOUR words as being gospel.

Sincerely, In Christ, Joe Ankar.

"PS. Please remove my name from any of your future mailings."

Please turn to page 10 for my response to Mr. Ankar. This response (also sent by e-mail) will be word-for-word as carried on page 10. —Editor

Address changing? To receive BOT, send us the change. Don't miss an issue!

Dear Mr. Ankar:

I am unable to tell you who sent you the copy of Banner of Truth. Your name is not on my mailing list. Therefore it was not me who sent it. As to why it was sent to you, I cannot say. However, if I were to offer a guess, it would be that someone who is concerned about your spiritual well being sent it to you as a favor, trusting that you might seriously consider the information about the Catholic Church. Indeed, the sender may be a true friend, just wanting to help in the important area of spiritual things.

Mr. Ankar, I fail to understand why the article is offensive to you and an affront to the Catholic Church and the church of Christ, unless I stated something which is untrue. And, it is very noticeable that you do not mention even one thing which is not according to fact. Truth should not be offensive to anyone who loves the truth.

As for the article being an affront to the church of Christ, you may not understand that the New Testament teaches that the true church of Christ is to support and/or uphold the truth (I Timothy 3:15). Supporting the truth includes "Contending for the faith" (Jude 3). No, it is not an "affront" to the true church to speak the truth and oppose error, whether the error be in religion or otherwise.

Why is it out of order, in your way of thinking, to call names? Names are called in the New Testament, including the names of those in error. When people representing the Catholic Church make statements as to what the Catholic Church believes and practices, why not call their names, as they claim to speak with authority?

The New Testament warns of false prophets a number of times, even pointing out things they would teach. I'm somewhat surprised that you do not understand what I said about the warnings of false prophets applying to the Catholic Church in principle. You see, it is said of the false prophets that they would teach error. Since the Catholic Church also teaches error, it is included in the warning of false teachers. In principle, if false teachers were condemned in New Testament times, false teachers are also condemned today.

It is strange, Mr. Ankar, that you are so caustic in your criticism, and yet you have failed to point out one single thing in which I'm in error. I stand by what

I said because it is based on facts.

Since you are a member of the Catholic Church, your understanding of what the Catholic Churches may be somewhat limited. I just wonder if you ever question anything that you are taught? According to Catholic doctrine, you are not supposed to question anything taught by Catholicism. In other words, the hierarchy is virtually in control of your mind.

Mr. Ankar, if you believe Catholic doctrine, you do not believe that God's word, as contained in the Bible is sufficient. You are taught that "Tradition" is equally as authoritative as the Bible. Have you ever stopped to think that "Tradition" can be found for just about anything people want to do? Catholic doctrine upholds many things which are in no sense of the term authorized by God's word.

For example, there is the teaching that the "pope" is the vicar of Christ. You must know that no one can take the place of Christ. History is replete with the record of "popes" who were evil men. Even women have served as popes. There is the teaching that priests have the power to forgive sins. Where did this teaching originate? It didn't come from God's word. If it originated with "Tradition" that tradition is clearly wrong. There is only one mediator between God and man, and that is Christ, not a mere man (I Tim. 2:5). The perpetual virginity of Mary is another teaching which is not from God's inspired word. There is also "purgatory" and a host of other teachings which are not upheld by the Bible. Since Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9), is that not sufficient reason to listen to Him and His word rather than the words of men?

You must have heard about all the evil which has characterized many Catholic priests during the past couple of years, or it has come open to the public in the past two or three years. These men are supposed to be able to forgive sins? Yes, according to Catholic doctrine.

As I stated earlier, some true friend may have sent you the article about Catholicism. Would you please take the time to carefully study the article and if it is in error, do me the favor of pointing in a specific manner the error that you have found and let me know. If, on the other hand, if the article is not found to be in error, please consider its content.

—Editor

Non-boring Worship, Designed to Please

Marvin L. Weir

The Saturday, February 15, 2003 *Dallas Morning News* featured an article by Berta Delgado in the “Religious” section entitled, “Lights, camera, worship.” The caption noted, “high-tech wizardry is as expected at these churches as pipe organs are at others.” The article notes, “many houses of worship now have somewhat the look and feel of performing arts centers,” and then gives the following information regarding the Fellowship Church in Grapevine:

The church, which draws 16,000 people or more, has a sanctuary with comfortable, theater-style seating. The stage can be changed, even moved around to suit any message the Rev. Ed Young, Jr., senior pastor, is delivering. (Once, while preaching about God’s armor, he sat in an Army tank). The stage also has a ramp, so Mr. Young can walk down among the congregation while preaching... “Most people think church is boring, that it’s something they have to suffer through and don’t really want to be part of,” said the Rev. Rob Johnson, Fellowship’s worship pastor. “We’re trying to tell them we’re excited that we live in our faith. God is the author of all creativity. He gives us all these wonderful things, so use them”... “Media Ministry” members working in a control room decked out with \$800,000 worth of electronic equipment, also roll video onto the giant screens. Craig Janssen, co-founder of Addison-based Acoustic Dimensions, called the technology trend in the church “a steamroller.” His company says a basic system runs around \$500,000. A system to accommodate concerts and other productions costs about \$1 million. But many churches spend beyond that. “It’s not a luxury anymore, it’s expected,” he said.

It is obvious that **modern, man-made** worship is designed to appeal to one’s emotions and feelings rather than one’s reasoning and intellect. The statement that “most people think church is boring, that it is something they have to suffer through and don’t really want to a part of” is indicative of man’s distorted view of worship.

The Bible makes it clear that God is to be the object of one’s worship. The Scriptures declare, “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). What is sad is that denominational ideals and innovations have more influence over men than the Holy Scriptures. Brethren, it is not whether I am pleased with worship, but whether God is pleased with worship. God is only pleased when one worships “*in spirit and in truth*” (Jno. 4:24). Christ has made clear His disdain for those who give lip-worship while their heart is far from Him. He says, “*But in vain do they worship me, Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men*” (Matt. 15:8-9).

Most people today believe that if **they are** happy with their worship that **God** is happy with their worship. Not so! The Creator has the right to demand **how** His creatures worship Him. Scriptural worship will never be “boring” to those who truly love and appreciate God.

Mr. Johnson stated, “He [God] gives us all these wonderful things, so use them.” Thus, folks who possess certain objects and have certain talents convince themselves that these objects and talents should be used in worship to God. By whose authority is anything and everything to be used in worship to God? Only the Bible tells us **how** we are to worship God. There is Scripture for preaching and teaching (Ac. 2:42; 20:7), praying (Ac. 2:42), the Lord’s supper (Ac. 2:42; I Cor. 11:20ff), and giving as we have prospered (I Cor. 16:1-2). Where are the Scriptures for theatrical dramas, inspirational concerts, and dancing, shouting, and swaying to the beat of instrumental music?

In the same paper’s religious section Kristen Holland titled her article, “Place of Worship – Greenville Avenue Church of Christ.” She declares that the junior high students of this congregation in Allen spend a great deal of their time “clowning around.” The article states:

In the past year, the G.O. Clowns have performed at church events, birthday parties and

hospitals...and also assisted My Guardian angels in the 2002 Allen Christmas parade. (p. 12). For a donation of \$25 and two week's notice, the ensemble will schedule a "drive-by clowning," with less-than-stellar singing and colorful balloons ... The program is still in its formative stages, but **church leaders** (emp. MLW) say it's full smiles ahead for **innovative ministry**. "We know the kids enjoy it," said Galon Jones, minister of congregational care.

You will notice that this "program" belongs to the Greenville Oaks church of Christ and the congregations leaders admit it is only in its "formative stages." "Minister of congregational **care** (emp. MLW) is a misnomer if this is an example of their "caring" for the congregation. Wonder if the chief concern of Paul and the other apostles was "non-boring worship" and "innovative ministries"? I think not.

—5602 Liberty Grove Rd., Rowlett, TX 75030

Editor's note: We have all heard the adage, "As the home goes, so goes the nation." There is, indeed, a lot of truth in that statement, as we have seen. There is also a lot of truth, as we have seen, in the following

statement: The University congregation here in Murray, Kentucky had their "first" Christmas Program Dec. 21, 2002. The year 2003 brought on other programs. Included was the Easter program by University. The Acappella Vocal Band performed. The "JULY 4 CELEBRATION" by University was billed in the Murray paper as: "Gospel Music and Pickin' & Grinnin." Come December 2003, the following sizeable add was run in the *Murray Ledger & Times* by the University congregation:

"University Church of Christ
invites the community to our
2nd Annual Christmas Program
Monday, Dec. 15•6:30 p.m.

Join us for a night of singing, food & fellowship"

One wonders what the agenda of University and a growing number of congregations will include in this year of 2004. The valid evidence that "As the denominations go, so goes the church," is abundant. If this doesn't arouse our concern, what would?

Moral Standards Continue to Plummet

USA WEEKEND•Jan, 16-18, 2004, carries an article by Dennie Hughes, entitled "IS IT SO WRONG TO 'LIVE TOGETHER'?" The first two paragraphs of the article are as follows:

NEVER HAVE I received such a torrent of angry mail as I did over a column I wrote last winter about living together. I received more the 1,300 letters, mostly upset about the advice I gave a young woman. I told her it would be OK to move in with her boyfriend, but only after establishing the relationship was stable and happy, and after serious consideration about her ability to be independent from her disapproving mother."

Many objected to the 'immorality' of living together. I was surprised, given that more than 11 million Americans live with an unwed partner and that the number of cohabiting senior tripled between 1990 and 2000. Nevertheless, the overwhelming consensus from readers was that that unwed couples who live together don't stay together."

One encouraging note by Hughes is that "Many objected to the 'immorality' of living together."

After Hughes gives the results of some studies, some agreeing with her position and some not, she comes to a conclusion. Quoting research psychologist Catherine Cohan, "an upcoming study indicates that living together does not doom a marriage – if a couple is engaged when they cohabit," Hughes says:

"Sounds good to me. The decision to move in together should be based on love and real commitment ... I do stand slightly corrected, but I also stand by my original advice: It's common sense and common goals, now cows and milk (as in 'Men who get the milk free don't buy the cow,' a comment in the original reader's question), that matters.

The time was that people with such immoral minds did not flaunt their evil thinking, even in a boasting manner. But how times have changed. It appears that many are striving and longing for the day when there will be no moral guidelines at all.

—Editor

“They Took Knowledge That They Had Been With Jesus”

Roger Scully

It has been observed that the company we keep has an effect on our behavior, and on the way we think. Paul said, “Be not deceived; evil companionships corrupt good morals” (I Cor. 15:33). In other words – “If you roll with the dogs, you are going to get fleas.” However, influence is not always a bad thing. Influence can be positive.

The apostles spent some three years with Christ. After his death, resurrection and ascension the apostles returned to Jerusalem where they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and began to preach the remission of sins in the name of Jesus. In Acts 4, we find Peter and John being imprisoned because they were preaching the gospel. The next day they were brought before the Sanhedrin, where they begin to preach Jesus. Their behavior, attitude and message received this response: **“...they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”** (Acts 4:13).

From the two scriptures above, we learn that we can be influenced **positively** or **negatively**. Sadly, we often find that Christians are being influenced by the world in a negative way, rather than being positive influencers. Instead of people taking knowledge that Christians have “been with Jesus,” they take knowledge that they have been with MTV. Let us consider influence both a positive way and in a negative way.

Rehoboam was influenced in a negative way by his “friends.” After the death of Solomon his son, Rehoboam, took the throne as King of Israel. We are then told that “Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and spake unto Rehoboam.” They told him that his father, Solomon, made their “yoke grievous” and they desired to make it “lighter.” Rehoboam told them to “depart for three days, and then come back” (I Kings 12:3-5).

Rehoboam went to the wise men who counseled his father, asking: “What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people?” They told Rehoboam to make the yoke lighter and they would serve him forever. However, we read that he “forsook the counsel of the old men, and took counsel with the young men that were grown up with him” (vv. 6-8).

Rehoboam was told by his “friends” to sarcastically tell the people that he would not lighten their yoke, but make it heavier than his father. We know the rest of the account.. Rehoboam listened to his “friends” and the kingdom was divided, and later destroyed one half at a time. Rehoboam allowed the wrong people to have an influence him. So do many Christians today. Instead of listening to the wise counsel of the “old paths” of God’s word (Jer. 6:16), brethren listen to their worldly “friends” and make bad decisions. But not all influence is bad.

When we come to end of Acts 18, we are introduced to a man by the name of Apollos, who is described as an “eloquent man” (vs. 24). Apollos had gone to Ephesus and “taught accurately the things concerning Jesus” (v. 25). However, there was a problem – he knew only “the baptism of John.” When Aquila and Priscilla heard him in the synagogue they “expounded unto the way of God more accurately” (v. 26). We then note that he, Apollos, “mightily confuted the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.” Notice the positive influence that Aquila and Priscilla had on Apollos. It led him to do many great works for the kingdom’s sake (cf. I Cor. 3:6).

It is true that there is good and bad influence that people can have on us, and we can have on others. Paul speaks of making ourselves “an example unto you to follow us” (2 Thess. 3:9). Can we say the same of those with whom we come in contact?

There are many people and many things that influence us in this life. It is up to us to make sure that we surround ourselves with the positive godly influence from those of “like precious faith” (2 Pet. 1:1). If we surround ourselves with those who are not Christians, and allow ourselves to watch, and listen to things we ought not, we are sure to find ourselves with “corrupt morals.” So, do people “take knowledge” that you have “been with Jesus,” or do they “take knowledge” that you have been with those of the world?

—917 Fig St., Morgan City, LA 70380

Roger is a graduate of the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies in Pensacola, FL.

Seed Reproduction: An Inviolable Law

Alan Adams, Assistant Editor

In both the physical and spiritual realms, Jehovah has decreed that things “yield...seed after their kind” (Gen. 1:12). An excellent application of this Law is seen in the Parable of the Seed and Soils.

In Luke 8, the record says, “And when a great multitude came together, and they of every city gathered unto him, he spoke by a parable.” A parable is an analogy or comparison, and it was a regular method of teaching used by the Lord. He would often point to something in nature, or something typical of culture during that day, and then say something to the effect: Now, the kingdom is like...

In this particular case, probably right during planting season—in fact, it’s likely that some folks were then and there busy in the work of planting—the Lord seized the opportunity and this common scene of a man out in the field, by hand, sowing seed, to make some points about the new universal religion of which He was to become, and now is, the author. We call it Christianity.

In the telling of this parable (Lk. 8:5-15), the Lord said, “The sower went forth to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side”; then in verse 6, “And other fell upon the rock”; then in verse 7, “And other fell amidst the thorns”; and, finally, in verse 8, “And other fell into the good ground.” The “wayside” was the beaten path, perhaps around the perimeter of through the field, so seed falling there was “trodden under foot, and the birds of the heaven devoured it.” “The rock” refers to stony sections of the ground, and because of the shallowness of that soil, the seed, “as soon as it grew, it withered away, because it had no moisture.” “The thorns” refer to areas in the field, or perhaps around the field that had not been well-cleared; seed falling in there was in for a tough time, because “the thorns grew with it, and choked it.” The “good ground,” of course, refers to well-tilled and fertile soil, into which the seed fell and “grew, and brought forth fruit a hundred fold.”

In verse 11, we have the Lord’s application of all this to the Christian religion: “Now the parable is this,” He said, “The seed is the word of God.” He then explains that the four different places where the seed “fell,” are four different kinds of people and their attitudes toward the Word of God. Some people are like

the “wayside.” Their hearts are beaten down and hard, and when “they have heard, then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word from their heart that they may not believe and be saved.” Those “on the rock” were not totally lacking in spiritual sensitivity, for “when they...heard, *they* received the word with joy.” Unfortunately, however, “These have no root, who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. Yet another case of “seed reception” was “that which fell among the thorns.” Their end, too, was not productive: “these are they that have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection. The third, “seed receptor” is represented by “the good ground” which denotes those that have “an honest and good heart, *who* having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

Some fundamental points from this well-known parable are: (1) Nobody becomes a Christian without having heard the Word of God; (2) Nobody becomes a Christian without his having believed the Word of God; (3) Not everybody who initially “believes” the Word of God will ultimately be saved. Three of the four kinds of people “believed” the Word when they heard it; one “fell away,” one was “choked,” and only the fourth—that is, one out of the four having heard the word—“held it fast” and “brought forth fruit to perfection.”

Another obvious, yet fundamental, point from this parable is that fact that in all four cases it was the same “seed” which was sown. The farmer did not reach into a bag a draw forth a hodgepodge of different “seeds.” Let’s say that the seed being sown was wheat. Some of that seed “grew” on the rock. What “grew”? Wheat. Some of the seed grew “with the thorns.” What grew? Wheat. And some of the seed grew in good ground and had a hundredfold yield. What grew? Wheat. — “after their kind.”

It is impossible that the same seed planted in the hearts of people would produce Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and so on. Those can only be produced when their own unique seed is sown. The denominations can no more produce a Christian than can corn seed grow wheat. Only the Word of God can grow a Christian.

Fourth Annual (2004)

Banner of Truth

Lectures

Murray, KY, at the

Curris Center, June 14-17

**Theme: God's Inspired
Word — A Discussion of
Various Bible Texts**

**Twenty-eight lessons on
timely Bible texts will be
Delivered by twenty
or more speakers**

**Lectures hosted by the
Dexter and Hickory
Grove congregations**

**Why not make plans now to
Attend? Please plan other
activities as much as possible so
they will not interfere. Never
has been a greater need for
God's Word than NOW!
More information will be made
available soon.**

READERS' RESPONSE

"I read Banner of Truth often, and praise God for men who still stand on the word of God. I am curious as to why advertisement was used in the July 2003 mailing on churches looking for ministers, both men and women? Was this put in to show the error these churches are doing? Please respond – **Erick Smith.**" (*You are right. This is just another example, of many, which show the direction the Lord's church is going – Editor*).

"Please remove my name from your mailing list. Thanks – **Ray Green.**" (*We will – Editor*).

"We hope you and your wife are doing well. Enjoy getting each new issue of BOT. It is a great source of knowledge and information. You are to be commended for your effort. The Sullivan, MO, congregation is again without a minister. Darrell Conley & wife moved to Jacksonville, FL. We wish you two the very best in the New Year which is fast approaching – **Gene Johnson.**" (*I should have asked you if you wanted me to put a notice in BOT. If you have not as yet found someone, let us know and we will put a note in BOT. Wishing for you and yours a wonderful year in 2004. – Editor*).

"Recently, some questions have come up concerning the reliability of the NIV version and doctrinal errors that are promoted in this version. I am seeking a reliable source of information that will help me teach others of the dangers of using the NIV. As you know, this is becoming a more popular usage Bible in the Lord's church. ...I would appreciate so much if you can direct me to publications that will be helpful. God bless you in the work of keeping the Lord's church informed on trends and your willingness to expose those who are false teachers. I read Banner of Truth faithfully and look forward to each issue – **Ernie Harrison.**" (*If I didn't send you some material, just let me know and I will. The NIV has not, to my knowledge, contributed to the edification of any of its users. Many liberal people use it – Editor*).

"Hope this note finds you and your family doing well. Keep up the good work. It really hurts to see the condition the main stream of the church is headed. It's pretty much the same as the 1906 split. I wish someone would look back and see where that group went after 1906. From all the warnings in the Word you can understand that they knew false teachers would be everywhere. I just never dreamed they would be in the church of Christ – **Bob Price.**" **FL.** (*This very thing is on my mind often! While this condition should not be a surprise, due to all the New Testament warnings, that doesn't lessen the hurt and sadness one bit. We are made to wonder what has gotten into the Lord's people, yet there is only one true answer to that question. It is the devil. Editor*). *Next page*

Hickory Grove church of Christ

1131 Hickory Grove Rd.

Almo, KY 42020-9332

Return Services Requested

Sunday Services:

Bible Classes

9:00 a.m.

Worship 10:00 a.m.

6:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study

7:00 p.m.

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READERS' RESPONSE, Continued

"Greetings from Nepal, with wishing happy New Year. We are looking forward to see your Banner of Truth to use as personally and congregation. But we are unable to pay amount. Please enroll for us in your regular mailing list for this Baneshwor church of Christ. Thanks for your cooperation and great work of God to win abundant life in Christ. May God richly bless all of you in His service – **Krishhna Prasad Oli.**" – **Nepal.** (*We will send BOT without cost to you. Do enough of the people speak English that 12-15 copies could be used?* – Editor).

"I read Banner of Truth at a friend's house and I would love to receive it. Thank you very much and may God bless. I am a member of the church of Christ – **Dorris H. Lowery.**" – **AL.** (*Your name has been added* – Editor).

"Please find enclosed check to help in the work of Banner of Truth. We are privileged to spread this wonderful work around. Keep up the good work – **church of Christ.**" – **VT.** (*Thank you for the check to help and we are thankful that you are able spread the work around. God has richly blessed us with his written work, which enables us to know His will for us.* – Editor).

"Greet you in the name of Christ. I absolutely appreciate your publication of 'Banner of Truth!' I read one I received from bro. D. Cox and I found it very helpful. I am a preacher working with Karoi church of Christ, I established early January this year. It has a membership of 15. I hereby apply for your 'Banner of Truth.' I shall be happy to hear from you. May the Lord God continue to keep, bless and use you to his Glory and excellence. Greet the saints. Pray for us – **Ignatious Mabiko.**" – **Zimbabwe.** (*We are adding you name to our mailing list. Are there enough people who speak English that 12 or 15 copies of the BOT could be used each month?* – Editor).

"We appreciate your efforts with Banner of Truth. Just keep up the good work. Please add the following... – **Shirley White.**" – **IN.**

Editor's Note: I preach for the church at Dexter, KY. The Hickory Grove church is the sponsor of Banner of Truth. Brethren from both congregations assist in getting the paper ready to mail. The congregations are only two or three miles apart.

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