

StraitWay



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Changes In The Church

Brethren, do you remember with fondness the time, in the not so distant past, when one could visit in churches of Christ across this great land and find uniformity in worship? Oh, there might be differences in the order of service. Occasionally, you might visit a congregation that used only one cup in the Lord's Supper. But, generally you knew what to expect when you visited a church of Christ, where ever you might be on the Lord's Day. A brother in Christ, perhaps one of the elders, would call the worship service to order by welcoming the visitors and making announcements concerning the congregation and it's work. The service would then be turned over to the song leader, who would lead the congregation in a few songs. At some point an opening prayer would be led, the Lord's Supper would be served, the contribution would be collected and a sermon preached from the Bible. The non-Christians would be encouraged to obey the gospel and the unfaithful Christians would be encouraged to return to God. A closing prayer would be led and the church would be dismissed. All of this was in keeping with the revealed word of God, Acts 2:42; Eph. 5:19, 1 Cor 16:1-2; 1 Cor 11:17-34; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-12.

Unfortunately, things have changed that make it necessary to plan travel very carefully to avoid the surprises of unscriptural worship. The sign outside might still say "Church of Christ" but once inside very little may be familiar. The announcements may be concerning the church members and the Scriptural work of the church, or it could be concerning the church's participation in the latest Billy Graham Crusade. The song leader may be a man or a woman. The singing may be "a cappella" or they may use instrumental music. Faithful men may serve the Lord's Supper, or some of the sisters may also serve at the Lord's table. The preacher may be a man or a woman and he or she may be a member of the church of Christ or a member of some denomination. The Lord's Supper may be served on Sunday and/or any other day of the week. Perhaps, you have seen some of these changes where you worship.

Why are these changes taking place? Why are preachers taking the lead in promoting unscriptural practices, instead of fighting them? Why are elders allowing the changes to come in, instead of resisting. **WHY ARE MEMBERS STAYING WHERE THESE CHANGES HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED AND IMPLEMENTED???** In my opinion, the main reason for the change is that many churches are made up of brethren, from pew to pulpit, who are more concerned about numbers, popularity in the community and being entertained than they are concerned about a "thus says the Lord."

Brethren, what we need is to Restore, the Restoration Movement. For almost 200 years, here in The United States, church of Christ pulpits have rang out the cry for the return to New Testament Christianity. Now, at the beginning of the 21st Century many of those same pulpits are ringing out a call to return to Denominationalism. The preachers who promote it, the elders who allow it and every member who stays in those apostate churches will give an account, 2 Cor. 5:10. I am not saying, "Leave immediately!" Stay and fight, fight it as long as you can, influence as many as possible to stand for the truth, try to save the congregation. But, "... do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them, Eph. 5:11. If your efforts are unsuccessful, be willing to recognize the principle taught in 2 Cor. 6:14-18 and "come out from their midst and be separate, Says the Lord." There are still churches of Christ standing for the truth. There may even be one in your community or city. You may have heard them referred to as "Antis." You may have heard they were "orphan haters"

(continued on back page)

Bible Authority The Pattern

Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount Heb. 8:5. In a study of bible authority we must always think about the pattern found in the New Testament for any particular practice or teaching Col. 3:17. Sectarian people, liberal minded people who would like to be called brethren, and others refuse to see a pattern, or do not care for the pattern in God's word for such things as the work or worship of the local church. Other self-willed people, even among brethren seem forever to misapply passages and call them patterns. The New Testament bible pattern for any particular thing is simply all that the entire New Testament has to say about that subject; no more and no less.

What then, is the bible pattern for the local church in benevolent work? It is every passage in the New Testament that speaks of the local church engaging in benevolent work. There are nine passages in the New Testament that speak of local church benevolent work. These passages are: Acts 11:27-30; Rom 15; 2 Cor 8; 2 Cor 9; I Cor 16:1-3; Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4: 34-35; Acts 6:1-4; I Tim 5:6. This constitutes the New Testament pattern for the local church in benevolent work. Notice that all these passages teach that the local church is to care for needy **SAINTS**. This is the pattern. There is then no authority for local churches to be a general do-good benevolent organization like the good will. The local church must care for its own; this is authorized and general benevolence is not. In these passages we also find a pattern for congregational cooperation in the realm of benevolence for saints in need. Acts 11:27-30 has one local church (Antioch) sending to several local churches (churches or brethren in Judea). I Cor 16, Rom 15, 2 Cor 8, 2 Cor 9 show us an authorized pattern in benevolent work for several local churches to send to one local church. These passages show the pattern for benevolent work by local churches but these passages are not a pattern for edification or evangelism. The pattern for evangelism or edification, are all the New Testament passages on those subjects and not the pattern that is given for benevolent work.

Some brethren have told me for years that Heb 10:25 authorizes church finance. How can this be? Heb 10:25 speaks of not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. This passage authorizes a place; for to assemble we must have a place. Expedients may be to rent or buy a place. It is not authority for, or a pattern for church finance! What is the pattern and authority for church finance? It is all the New Testament has to say about that subject. Only two passages are found on this subject and they both teach that the local church raises its funds to do its work by the free-will offering of saints on the first day of the week. These passages are I Cor 16:2 and 2 Cor 9:6-7.

Friends, Heb 10:25 is not authority for the local church to raise its store (treasury or storehouse) . We cannot take the bible pattern for benevolence and apply it to evangelism. Neither can we twist Heb 10:25 which may authorize a place and try to make it apply to church finance (ie - how to get the place). The only authority or pattern we have for the church to raise its store is I Cor 16:2 and 2 Cor 9:6-7. Heb 10:25 is not a blanket for local churches to do any and everything. The context is the assembling and not to forsake that assembling as some do. Let us not wrest this passage to teach things which it does not teach 2 Pet 3:16.

I ask you are we doing all things according to the pattern?

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Church History

The Early Days of the Lord's Church in Texas, Part 2

The pioneering preachers did their work well and established many congregations all over East Texas. The East Texas I grew up in was known for having many faithful churches of Christ. In fact, the East Texas region was the springboard for evangelism into the rest of the state even into my time. Since my parents and most all their folks going back to the early 1800s were members of the church, I can tap their memories for how things were among Christians before the 1950s.

In the days before World War II, meetinghouses of the churches of Christ could be found in nearly every community. In the small towns and rural communities they were typically very simple wood frame buildings, painted white, with tall windows to try and regulate some air drafts in warm weather and most did not sport steeples or any kind of bell towers, to show an obvious difference with denominational meeting houses. There was no indoor plumbing so outhouses, men's and women's were provided behind the meetinghouse. In good weather places of worship were often overcrowded with the faithful. However, inclement weather made dirt roads impassible and forced folks to worship in family groups in their homes.

My father, Truman Smith, who began preaching as a teenaged boy in the 1940s tells me that as a boy he heard such men preach as C. R. Nichol, John Hedge, Foy Wallace Jr. and many other well known men of the time. Such as these had the reputation as "fire and brimstone preachers." Their natural voices were trained to be loud and forceful and they backed every word with the profuse quoting of scripture as their authority. Their motto was to "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." The faithful who listened to their oratory were often just as knowledgeable as the speakers and if they found inconsistency as they carefully weighed the lesson, they would call it to the attention of the preacher for correction.

Gospel meetings were the high point of the year in those days. Typically, gospel meetings lasted ten days to two weeks in the summertime, after "the crops were laid by," a time when not much could be done by farmers awaiting the crops to ripen before harvest. The preachers would often speak for two and three hours at a time. There was little entertainment in those days to detract from such events, so a gospel meeting was a community event attended by nearly everyone. When the time drew close for the gospel meeting, a group of volunteers would go into the woods and cut down a number of pine trees and would construct a "brush arbor" for the preaching to be done in and to avoid the confinement and heat inside the meetinghouse. This structure of pine poles would be roofed over with pine boughs to provide shade and scant protection from the occasional "frog strangler" (thunderstorm). Kerosene lanterns and pine rosin torches provided light during the evening. However, air was moved by handheld fans only. A local saw mill would be visited for fresh sawdust to spread on the ground as a pleasant smelling ground cover. Listeners would pour in from many miles around and those unable to be seated under the brush arbor on the rough plank pews would sit in their wagons or buggies, and even in their early automobiles.

At the gospel invitation ending each sermon, it was common during these gospel meetings for dozens of people to respond. There are many stories of groups of more than forty being baptized after being convicted by the preaching. These meetings often ended in the dark of night, so to baptize these folks, they would be taken to a local "swimming hole" or to the closest creek by the light of hand carried lanterns. At the place of baptism, several songs would be sung and sometimes an additional appeal offered where even more would decide to also be baptized. These were wonderful and very uplifting experiences for the people of that time. Acts 19:5, *"When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."* Gal 3:27, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."*

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Genesis

Key To Understanding God's Purpose For Death

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die [lit. dying you shall die, marg. note]. . .to dust you shall return. . .so all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died." (Gen 2:17, 3:19; 5:5).

When we look at the world around us, we find that we live in a brutal world of bloodshed, disease and death. We may wonder *why*? One may begin to question the existence of God by all the violence and pain that is allowed to continue. However, Genesis answers why there is death and bloodshed—sin.

Genesis shows us two kinds of worlds. We read of one world that is without the scarring effects of sin (Gen 1, 2; cf. Rev 22:15). It is a world where God and man walk together (see 3:8; cf. Rev 21:3). It is a "very good" place (Gen 1:31). The Lord God also prepared and planted a paradisiacal garden for man to keep and reside in (Gen 2:8,15; cf. Jn 14:1-3). This place had wonderful rivers and a unique hydrological system of mist coming up from the ground to water it (2:6, 10-14; Rev 22:1,2). It was a land with "good gold" along with bdellium and onyx stone (Gen 2:11,12; cf. Rev 21:18,21). It was truly a land before our time, because it was a land before sin and its consequences. It was a place where the tree of life was (Gen 2:9; cf. Rev 22:2). Today we see no comparable place with such brilliant grandeur.

In contrast, Genesis shows a different world after Adam and Eve sinned—a world where God's person is not present, yet sorrow, pain and enmity exist (Gen 3:15,16). The war against the seed of woman with the serpent's as spoken of in Genesis 3:15 began immediately with Cain slaughtering his righteous brother (note: 1 Jn 3:10-12). It continued perhaps with an angelic rebellion (cf. Gen 6:1,2,4; cf. "sons of God," Job 1:6; Jude 6, 7), and finally culminated with the Seed of woman on the cross (Gal 3:16, 4:4; Rev 12:1ff). The world became great in violence, wickedness, evil thinking and corruption (Gen 4:1ff; 6:5, 11-12). Indeed, polygamy and sexual immorality ran wild and replaced the family unit as God originally created it (Gen 4:23; 6:1-2; Jude 6, 7). Last but not least, it was a world of death. God chose death as the punishment for sin. The genealogy of Genesis 5 is not only the first one recorded in the Bible, but is uniquely different from any other in that it burdens the reader with the problem of death. Death was something new and disturbing to Adam's race. Again, God would ultimately use death to destroy the whole wicked world with water. Sin is the reason for death! Sin sets man at odds with his brother, his environment and his God. When people teach that death foreruns man and sin historically, they are in effect, turning the gospel upside down. The Bible declares that death exists because of man's sin, *"For since by man came death. . ."* (1 Cor 15:21). *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin. . ."* (Rom 5:12). We may find it hard to understand how early man could live so long, how Adam's sin could affect not only him but the whole world of animate and inanimate objects, yet that is exactly what the Genesis record tells us. We may find it hard to comprehend a sinless world where Adam could not die nor experience pain, disease, suffering or *"wearing out."* However, this is exactly the kind of world that we hope to attain at the resurrection (Rev 21:4). Consider also how Nehemiah describes the Israelites in their wilderness wandering, *"Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing,; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell"* (Neh 9:21). Today our clothes wear out and our feet swell, but when God sustains, wearing out is not an option! Simply because we cannot comprehend something, it doesn't nullify the historicity of what is written. It is disturbing to see men reinterpret and mythologize scripture to mold with their ignorance.

Why then is there death? Because it was God's penalty for sin. Thus, our belief and our teaching others of the death of Christ is rooted in the penalty for sin as presented in Genesis, *"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. . .so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. . ."* (Heb 9:22, 28). **God bore His own curse!**

Trends Among Conservative Brethren “Apathy”

Webster defines apathy as: “1) want of feeling; lack of passion, emotion or excitement. 2) Indifference to what appeals to feelings or interest.” Another word which is clearly related to apathy is complacency. Webster defines this word to mean “contentment; satisfaction; esp., self-satisfaction.” Another word that is akin to both of the above is lethargy. This word is defined to mean, “a state of inaction or indifference.” A synonym of this word given by Webster is languor, which means dullness; sluggishness; a lack of vigor. Another word which has been used already in the foregone definitions is indifference. This word is defined as, “lack of feeling for or against anything, apathy.”

There has been a gradual decline in the lives of men in “going away from God” ever since the garden of Eden. In Noah’s day, this resulted in the flood which cleansed the old world and made it new. Noah found favor (grace) in God’s sight because “*he was righteous in his generations, and walked with God*” (Gen. 6:9). However, this state did not last very long. After the flood, the numbers of people grew and multiplied, and indifference became evident again. People lost sight of what was important and sought to popularize themselves, and said, “*Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name ...*” (Gen. 11:4). Their objective was to remain together and “*not be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth*” (ibid). However, the very thing they were trying to avoid by making themselves a name, was brought about by the Lord. He confounded their language which scattered them abroad. Isn’t it interesting how God can “turn things around” and make them the opposite of what man intends! Look at what He did with Balaam in turning the curse into a blessing (Num. 22-24).

We see the gradual decline and departure from God also in the material found in the Old Testament book of Judges. The people through their indifference to God and His way became complacent (self-satisfied) in attitude, and when men forsake the Lord (which the people of that day did), they begin to worship and serve themselves. But God raised up judges to deliver them. I like to refer to the experiences during the days of the judges as the A-B-C-D system, or process: Apostasy, Bondage, Correction, and Deliverance. The whole process could have been avoided had the people remained content and satisfied with God and His way; who actually was the only judge they needed.

Well, we could go on and on with these examples of departure from God through apathy, but in the space left, let us make some applications closer to home.

The church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22) is a good example of church complacency. They were neither hot nor cold but lukewarm (v. 15-16), feeling secure in their own gratification or self-satisfaction. They were rich in this world’s affluence and felt they had need of nothing. They worshipped and served a materialistic god which they created. My beloved, how true is this today! How many members of the Lord’s church are guilty of the same today!

There seems to be a general trend among members of the body of Christ in departing from the living God. So many things are on the decline which mean everything to us. Among these are: gospel sermons which prick the hearts of sinners, worship services which render to God the reverential fear or respect due Him, excitement or enthusiasm for the cause of Christ, moral values, spirituality, like Ephesus our first love, etc. Brethren, let’s be careful that we do not become apathetic in our service to God. Remember where this leads.

Church Origins: Presbyterian

Among the outstanding leaders in the Reformation Movement was John Calvin, who lived from 1509 to 1564. He was born in France, became well-educated, and, while a young man, sided with the "Protestant Movement." Due to his opposition to Roman Catholicism, he was forced to flee from France and took refuge in Geneva, Switzerland. There he developed what has since been appropriately called "Calvinism." Many denominations have embraced some of its tenets. It contained five cardinal points:

1. Hereditary Total Depravity. Calvin taught that, as a result of Adam's sin, all of Adam's descendants are born totally depraved, "opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil," unable to do anything toward being saved.
2. Unconditional Predestination. He taught that God, before the creation, unconditionally elected certain ones to be saved. In fact, he believed that everything that came to pass was according to God's unchangeable decrees.
3. Limited Atonement. Since only the elected ones could be saved, according to Calvin, then Jesus died only for those who were to be saved.
4. Irresistibility of Grace. He taught that when God in His own due time acted upon a sinner who was among the unconditionally elected that the sinner could not resist God's grace. He, of course, believed in a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
5. Perseverance of the Saints. He taught that none of the elect, having received the grace of God, could fall away and be lost. **NOT ONE OF THESE FIVE POINTS IS TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE: IN FACT, ALL OF THEM ARE REFUTED BY WHAT THE BIBLE DOES TEACH.**

From the foundation laid by the work and teaching of John Calvin have come the various Presbyterian Denominations of today as well as other kindred denominations. The "Huguenots" of France, the "Puritans" of England, the "Covenanters" of Scotland and the "Dutch Reformed Church" of Holland were early allies in the movement called "Presbyterianism." The "Westminster Assembly," which convened in Westminster, England from 1643 to 1648 produced the "Westminster Confession of Faith" and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, which have long remained the creed of Presbyterianism. A meeting was conducted by a Southeast Texas Presbyterian Church. A leaflet advertising the meeting stated of the speaker: "His platform is that of the acceptance of the Bible as affording full and final authority in all matters of faith and practice." This is a wonderful platform, but the man-made creed of Presbyterianism and the Presbyterian Church itself are living demonstrations that deny this platform. The 178th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, which convened in 1966, drafted a revised and updated confession of faith for the denomination. Some of the changes have aroused the ire of many Presbyterian members. The worst offender is this: "The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current."

Lessons From First John: Fellowship (5)

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ....God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:3-7).

The basis of the fellowship of which John wrote is “That which we...declare...God is light...if we walk in light...” This is why the apostle said in II John 9-11, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

If what the apostles declared is the basis of all fellowship acceptable to God, then it follows that there are some things which are not the basis of such fellowship: (1) the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:9), (2) what the denominations do, (3) what brethren have done in the past, (3) some congregational decisions (I Corinthians 5), (4) the consensus of prominent brethren, (5) the position of religious journals, (6) what Diotrephes, then or now, believes (II John 9), or (7) anything other than the teachings of the Holy Spirit-inspired word of God (II Timothy 3:16,17; Ephesians 5:11).

If the Divine word of God is the basis of fellowship pleasing to Him, can fallible men understand it? With a diversity of conclusions among children of God on such subjects as the Deity of Christ, fellowship, MDR, Romans 14, modesty, the AD 70 Doctrine, and the One Covenant Doctrine, one might think it impossible to understand the Bible. Yet, we have proclaimed to our religious neighbors that the word of God is understandable. This conviction has been reached as the result of studying such passages as Ephesians 3:1-6; Ephesians 5:17. Then, add the fact that God addressed the Bible to man. Yes, the Bible is understandable. It is not responsible for the divided state among men, hence it is not responsible for the divided state among brethren. Inspiration commands us to be of the same mind (I Corinthians 1:10). That says we can understand God’s will.

Let us keep in mind some principles we have taught our religious neighbors about doctrinal disagreements. When men disagree (1) one could be right, the other wrong, (2) both might be wrong, but (3) both cannot be right. This is just as true of differences among brethren as it is of differences with our religious neighbors.

Those who fervently desire to please God must, with one mind, strive “...together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). It must be our intent to do only those things pleasing in His sight. We, like the great men of the restoration movement and prior times, must be willing to speak as the oracles of God (I Peter 4:11). That will produce unity in matters of faith and liberty in matters of opinion. And it will prevent the kind of thinking that leads one to believe we can have unity in diversity and God will be pleased. Scriptural fellowship is in the light. In that light there is no darkness.

In the bounds of scriptural fellowship is to be found the peace that passeth understanding (Philippians 4:6,7), the good and pleasant circumstances of unity (Psalms 133:1; Ephesians 4:1-6), the approval of God (Romans 16:10), and the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:23). Study carefully.

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-- Glenn Melton, Editor

Changes In The Church

(continued from front page)

who don't believe in "church cooperation." These churches have not, as predicted "died on the vine." Remember, in many cases, the same people who told you those things, are now telling you to fellowship denominational people. Can you really believe what they have said? Why not check it out for yourself. Once you meet these brethren, listen carefully to what they teach and apply the Berean test, Acts 17:11. You may be pleasantly surprised.

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"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (II Tim. 4:2-5).

"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

"As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (I Tim. 1:3).

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

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