

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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God's Message To The SHEPHERDS Of His Sheep

Earl Gieseke

The following passages give some of the instructions as well as some of the responsibilities of God's SHEPHERDS under both the Old and New Covenants.

"His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are SHEPHERDS that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter" (Isa. 56:10-11).

"Son of man, prophesy against the SHEPHERDS of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the SHEPHERDS; Woe be to the SHEPHERDS of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the SHEPHERDS feed the flocks" (Ezek. 34:2)?

"My people hath been lost sheep: their SHEPHERDS have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace" (Jer. 50:6).

"Therefore, ye SHEPHERDS, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to

every beast of the field, because there was no SHEPHERD, neither did my SHEPHERDS search for my flock, but the SHEPHERDS fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye SHEPHERDS, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the SHEPHERDS; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the SHEPHERDS feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them" (Ezek. 34:7-10).

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you OVERSEERS, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

"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.

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

The man with the most awesome responsibility is not the president or any politician, it is the responsibilities of being an elder (a SHEPHERD, bishop, pastor, overseer) in the Lord's church. However, to see how some who claim to be SHEPHERDS treat those responsibilities, you would probably come to the conclusion that they have little real concern about the duties described in the Pattern found only in the Bible. Some of these men would appear to be a board of directors over a social club, rather than SHEPHERDS over God's church (spiritual Israel).

I have quoted passages from the Old Testament (cf. Rom 15:4) to show that God has always held His shepherds responsible for their duties to the flock for which they are given oversight. I have quoted the inspired writers of the New Testament to show that the duties of the shepherds under Christ is not so different from those under the prophets. Further, we learn that God will not take lightly the neglecting of duties by shepherds under either Testament.

The "better" translation (in my opinion, E.G.) in Ephesians 4:11 of

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God's Message...



Editorial...

IN THE NEWS

HIGHLAND CHURCH OF CHRIST, ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

On April 5, 2004, there was an observance of “Palm Sunday” by 300 young people in Abilene, Texas. A report in the Abilene Reporter News (April 5, 2004) by Loretta Fulton, Staff Writer, reveals that high schoolers “gathered at First Baptist...from Highland Church of Christ, St. Paul and First United Methodist churches, First Central Presbyterian Church, First Christian Church and the Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest, as well as First Baptist” to observe Passion or Holy Week. This is their second year to meet. She reports, “the kids loved it.”

“The youngsters will meet each evening through Friday and then will top off their experience with a sunrise service on Sunday on the east steps of the Biblical Studies Building at Abilene Christian University.”

“The youth leaders who planned the weeklong event said they met no resistance from parents, who sometimes aren’t as open to new ideas as their children.” “Our people have been nothing but supportive,” said C. V. Blake, youth minister at First Baptist.” Jim Hinkle, youth and family minister at Highland Church of Christ, also took part in the occasion. “It’s easy to be a Christian on Palm Sunday,” he told the youngsters as they waved their palm branches. “But it’s not easy to be a Christian on Good Friday.” One 15-year-old member of the Highland Church of Christ said the event was especially meaningful to her last year.

“The mixing of youths from various denominations in central Abilene

proved to be so successful that the organizers are hoping churches in other parts of town will follow suit.” “Trey Gillette, director of youth ministries at St. Paul UMC, said the response has been inspiring to watch. The youths gather to worship as a group and leave denominational stereotypes behind.” “It’s neat to see those walls are breaking,” Gillette said.

This report was taken from: www.reporter-news.com/abil/nw_localarticle/0,1874,ABIL_7959_2783639,00.html

Editor’s Note: There are at three things unscriptural with this.

1) There is no Bible authority to commemorate or celebrate Palm Sunday, “Holy Week” or Easter. Such may appeal to men’s carnal appetite and desire to be “spiritually” minded, but no one can point to a “thus saith the Lord” for such an observance. Ash Wednesday, Lent, Palm Sunday, Passion Week, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday all stand with absolutely no Bible authority. These are all inventions of men that came about in the apostasy from the Truth — “the faith once delivered” (Jude 3). They constitute “vain worship” (Matt. 15:8-9), no matter how sincere and well-intentioned its participants may be.

2) It is a violation of Bible doctrine to join hands with denominations in a religious service. Second John 9-11 reads, “*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.*” The practice and observance of religious holidays is not the doctrine (teaching) of Christ. Those careful to

hold fast to “sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13), cannot receive or fellowship those who do not. When we do, we become a partaker of their evil deeds. We are counted as guilty as they are.

3) How can we expect to convert lost souls when we participate in the same activities with them. We have lost our distinction. Instead of joining hands with them, we are to “come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17). We are to “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*” (Eph. 5:11).

OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

The following letter was sent to Oklahoma Christian University regarding their February 2004 lectureship.

TO: President Mike O’Neal, And The Board of Directors, Oklahoma Christian University, P.O. Box 11000, Oklahoma City, OK 73136

January 16, 2004

Dear brother O’Neal and The Board Of Directors

This communication is meant to represent deep, profound concern for some vital spiritual issues.

After a careful reading of the 2004 OCU lectureship program the group of brethren who have signed this letter will not be attending the lectureship nor encouraging others to do so. In fact, we will be discouraging anyone from attending.

The reason for this is that there are several speakers or presenters on the program who are absolutely unacceptable to us because of their doctrinal positions and practices.

Among them are specifically the men from Quail Springs church which has become well known for its unscriptural views and worship activities. The liberal tone represented by various speakers include a denominational view of the church; a false view of the essential nature of baptism; the use of instrumental music in worship; and the expanded role of women in the work and worship of the church.

This program does not represent the convictions of past leaders of Oklahoma Christian and it certainly reflects a change from the views of those who founded the school. It also does not mirror the stated positions of the new president when he took office.

Because of events in recent years, OCU can no longer assume the support of the churches and brethren of Oklahoma and the surrounding area. Trust must be continually earned. This lectureship program clearly undermines the confidence many, many brethren have had in the school. Steps should be taken to reestablish that faith Christians have had in it.

May God bless the work of His people.

This letter was signed by approximately 150 men.

In response to the above letter, Mike E. O'Neal (from the office of the President), responded with an Open Letter to Churches of Christ (1/13/2004), saying...

"May I personally encourage you to come and be a part of the 2004 Lectureship at Oklahoma Christian University. There are some who are expressing concern about a few of the speakers we have invited, fearing that it signals a change of spiritual direction by the University. Some are attempting to organize a boycott of the Lectureship. I personally assure you that the selection of speakers and topics for the Lectureship was not intended to signal any change of direction and that we deeply regret the extent it may have offended or alienated our friends. Even though they may disagree with some selections, I pray that our brethren will acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of the speakers are from mainstream Churches of Christ.

We have scheduled a meeting on the morning of Friday, February 13, to allow those who are interested to return to the campus and share their thoughts and suggestions with us. While we will not exclude those who cannot attend the Lectureship, I believe the discussion will be more informed and productive if it includes principally people who have attended the 2004 Lectureship and

observed for themselves. Therefore, we will provide an opportunity at the Lectureship for people to sign up for that meeting.

We plan to listen carefully and then to prayerfully consider how we might shape future programs to strengthen the church and edify all who come. We will also ask the counsel and direction of our Board of Trustees on this important matter.

We have planned a portion of the Wednesday morning Open Forum to share with you the many steps we are taking to strengthen the spiritual mission of Oklahoma Christian University. If you can attend that session on January 28, I think you will be encouraged by hearing what OC is doing to nourish its spiritual dimension and deepen its faithfulness to the scriptures.

Thank you for your prayers. We hope to see you at the Lectureship. May God bless you.

Your brother, Mike E. O'Neal"

Concerning the above letter, Jerry Brewer of Elk City, Oklahoma wrote: "I suspect that his statement that this lectureship does not 'signal any change of direction' is true. This school has been headed in this direction for a number of years. Notice also that he does not address anything in light of the scriptures, only that it 'may have offended or alienated our friends.' Those of us who met with Smith and McMillon at Lawton were not personally offended. Our concern was, and remains, the unscriptural things that are promoted by men like Mark Henderson and OC's fellowship with them and churches like Quail Springs. O'Neal speaks from a postmodern perspective, i.e. we may be 'personally offended,' but what they are doing is still truth to them, although we 'disagree with some selections.' This is the old tired denominational philosophy that we will all just agree to disagree. As for speakers 'from mainstream Churches of Christ,' it would be interesting to know how he defines that term. A church of Christ is a church of Christ. I didn't know we had some kind of creed that defines 'mainstream' or otherwise. O'Neal speaks the language of Ashdod and his speech betrays him."

Notice his statement that "the overwhelming majority of the speakers are from mainstream Churches of Christ." This implies there were speakers who were not from the mainstream. Where were they from? Upstream or Downstream? Where they from another stream? If what OC represents is the "mainstream" of the church today (as they define it), then I guess the Lord's church of the New Testament is not even in the "mainstream." Personally, I'm not concerned with being in what some might call the mainstream or some off-shoot stream. My concern is being in the Lord's stream and drinking from the living water the Lord and savior talked about with the woman at Jacob's well (John 4). We must not be looking for acceptance with men. Our desire must be to meet with the acceptance of God, whether or not that agrees with the "mainstream" of current opinion or not.

Another significant point needs to be observed in O'Neal's statement that is very common today. He appeals for people to come to the lectureship and observe for themselves. The point is this, what if we were to attend and heard only the Truth. Must we conclude that all the speakers were therefore sound and faithful? That conclusion would not necessarily follow. What must also be considered is what those same speakers have said and done at other places.

If a man teaches false doctrine at point "A" and not teach false doctrine at point "B", shall we support and fellowship him simply because he did not teach falsely at point "B"? If we know he taught error at point "A" and he promises not to teach that same doctrine when we comes to preach for us, shall we ignore his teaching at "A"? Not if we're going to be true to the Lord. If he was wrong at "A", then he is wrong at "B" even if he doesn't teach the same there. He is in error and must not be fellowshiped.

If a man is a liar when at point "A" and he does not lie when at point "B", shall we accept him as a true and faithful brother? If he is steals while at point "A" and does not steal when at point "B", shall we accept

him as a good and faithful brother? If he fellowships the denominations while at point “A” and does not do so at point “B”, shall we ignore his practice at point “A?”

Some years ago, Jeff Walling was invited into North Mississippi. His doctrine and practice was examined and exposed in *Seek The Old Paths* as it should have been in every congregation. However, an elder in an area congregation said, “I’m going to go hear him and see for myself.” His report afterwards was that he did not hear any false teaching and that his presentation was great — everyone needed to hear it. How naive can one be? Did this make what was exposed about him false? Even if it were the case that he did not teach false doctrine while in North Mississippi, did that wipe away what he taught in other places? Of course not!

How can anyone say they are not concerned with what some have done

at other places — they’re only concerned with what is done where they live. That contradicts the Scriptures from beginning to end. It is far too often the case that many are not able to identify false doctrine even when they do hear it. And, it is even more sad when elders don’t know error when they hear it! Second John 9-11, Eph. 5:11, and Rom. 16:17-18 still reads the same. We cannot support, condone or fellowship those who do not hold to and defend the doctrine of Christ.

CHURCH FUND RAISER

The Lee Summit Church of Christ of Lee Summit, Missouri, is hosting a fund raiser for their youth. It consists of a “Bluegrass Youth

fundraiser” to be held on May 15, 2004 at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. Intermission-food and beverage will be sold. Tickets are \$5 each. The cover letter sent along with their announcement says, “We are more than glad to sponsor such fund-raisers.” “We hope that you can attend, enjoy the music and have a good time at the fund-raiser. Please announce and place this flyer on your bulletin board.” These announcements were mailed to area churches.

At least a couple of things are unscriptural about this:

1) The Lord’s church does not have any Bible authority to sponsor “fund-raisers.” The instruction given by the Holy Spirit is for Christians to give as they have been prospered on the first day of the week. “*Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him...*” (1 Cor. 16:2). There is no command, example or implication in the Bible that the church is to receive its funds through any means other than the first day of the week collections from the free-will offerings of its members. For the church to sponsor a fund-raiser, through whatever means (car wash, yard sale, other business ventures), is not authorized by the Lord. To do so, is to add to God’s inspired word. Those who add to the word are accursed (Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11).

2) There is no Bible authority to have any connection to the denominations of men. To sponsor an event at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church is a blatant violation of Christian fellowship. Ephesians 5:11 tells us to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Even if St. Paul’s is not involved in this activity, the appearance of such remains. How can the Lord’s church teach people out of denominationalism, while at the same time, we make it appear we are in agreement with them? The Episcopal Church does not hold to the teaching of Christ and therefore are not of God (2 John 9-11). How can we make it appear that we are in fellowship with them?

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Would you please publish the scriptures where a person having only adopted children could qualify to be an elder in our Lord’s church?”

The qualifications of one to become and remain an elder are given in two passages: 1 Tim. 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-9. Three verses mention children: 1 Tim. 3:4,5 & Titus 1:6. “*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?)*” “*...Having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.*” His children must be Christians themselves because of the requirement that they must be “faithful children,” i.e. children that believe.

From First Timothy 3:5 we learn the reason he must have children and that they must be Christians. It is to give the man experience in ruling those under his care. If he has proven himself in having charge over (ruling) his children in teaching and training them to be faithful Christians, then he is equipped to do the same in the local congregation.

Since the Bible does not specifically address the question of adopted children, is such a man still qualified? The Bible answer would have to be yes. The point of this qualification is not that he is biologically able to bare offspring, but is he able to control, rule, superintend, shepherd, train those under his rulership or authority?

The principle involved in one’s biological children or adopted children is the same. Can he rule and rule well? If he has proven he can rule well, he is qualified on this point. If he has not proven he can rule well, he is not qualified on this point and cannot be considered to be an elder.

— Editor

**SEND US YOUR
CHANGE OF ADDRESS
WHEN YOU MOVE!**

WHAT TO DO WHEN AN UNQUALIFIED ELDER(S) REFUSES TO RESIGN

Dub Mowery

A congregation is richly blessed when it has godly men who love and uphold the truth. This is especially true when the eldership of that congregation is made up of such brethren. In recent years, some local churches of Christ have had those within their membership who do not respect the Lord's arrangement for scripturally ordained elders as their overseers. There are two extreme positions held within the church concerning the authority of elders. One extreme holds that elders merely serve as *examples* for the brethren to pattern themselves after. The other extreme is for an elder or eldership to *domineer* in an autocratic manner. Both of these extremes fail to depict the true nature of the responsibility enjoined upon those men who serve as elders.

Of course, elders of a congregation should be godly examples. The essential qualifications for one to serve in that capacity reveal this truth (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Also, it is expressly stated that elders, as shepherds of the flock, are to be ensamples (1 Peter 5:1-4). The term "ensamples" is translated from the Greek word *tupos* which includes the meaning, "an example to be imitated." However, every child of God is to be an example to others (Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:15). Being an example to others is to be in relation to our following the Son of God. This is emphasized by the Apostle Paul in the following words, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

The overseers of a congregation have specific authority designated unto them by the Lord through the inspired Scriptures. There are Greek designations in the New Testament that depict their areas of responsibility and authority. Those Greek terms are *presbuteros*, *episkopos* and *poimein*.

Presbuteros is translated as "presbyter" or "elder" and has reference to one advanced in life, a senior.

It places emphasis upon having wisdom and experience. However, simply being older is not adequate. Those selected as elders must be older in "the faith" because they will need to draw upon their wisdom and experience in living the Christian life. Since a new convert is a novice in living the Christian life, he cannot qualify as an elder (1 Tim. 3:6).

The term *episkopos* is translated as "overseer" or "bishop." Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines that word as "a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent."

The Greek word *poimein* is translated as "pastor" and "shepherd." Thayer defines it as a herdsman, especially a shepherd. As a metaphor, it has reference to a presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly: so of Christ the Head of the church. Elders are "under shepherds" to protect and to feed the spiritual flock of God (local congregation, Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Those three Greek references depict the responsibility and authority of elders.

The limitations of the authority of elders include the following:

1) In matters of faith, they have no authority to either make laws or to set aside a "thus saith the Lord" (2 John 9). Whether or not Diotrephes was an elder in a congregation, he did exercise power over one. He would not even allow the brethren of that church to receive an apostle (3 John 9-11). There are some unqualified elders that refuse to adhere to the inspired Word of God.

2) The oversight of elders is limited to the congregation that appointed them (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1).

3) If they would gain and retain the respect of the congregation, then elders must not "lord it over" the flock (1 Peter 5:3). That is, they are not to rule over the church high-handedly and autocratically. Just as

the apostle John instructed a church not to follow the evil example of Diotrephes, brethren are not to follow ungodly elders into error (3 John 9-11).

A local church is to submit unto faithful elders as rulers over them (Heb. 13:7,17). Many unfaithful members of some congregations refuse to submit unto their bishops. This causes dissension, unauthorized innovations into the church, and often division. The inspired Word exhorts, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17). There will be those on the Day of judgment that will be held eternally accountable for failing to submit unto godly elders. That is, elders who will not be swayed one way or the other from the truth that was once and for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

However, we are not to allow ungodly shepherds to lead us into error. There are many unqualified men who have been appointed as elders (or have failed to maintain the qualifications). Often, congregations ignore the essential qualifications for elders in selecting men to serve in that capacity. Their criteria falls short of the inspired standard given by the Holy Spirit. Only men who meet the qualifications given by inspiration are Holy Spirit ordained elders. In stating the qualifications for one to become an elder, the apostle Paul writes, "A bishop then must be..." as he lists those things mandatory in becoming an elder (1 Tim. 3:2). Congregations open themselves up to severe problems by selecting men (or continuing to support men) as their leaders who do not meet the inspired qualifications.

What is a congregation to do when one or more of its elders are not qualified to serve as overseers? Often those who serve in any type of leadership capacity are criticized. This is

especially true of elders. What should we do when there are accusations brought against one of the elders of a congregation of which we are members? The apostle Paul gives instruction concerning this matter as follows: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:19-20). To bring grave accusations against anyone is a serious matter. This is especially true concerning elders in that they often receive unjust criticism. Therefore, the apostle Paul commands, “against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.” If an accuser will not bring serious accusations against an elder before

two or three witnesses, then their criticism of an elder is to be rejected. However, if they are willing to present serious charges against an elder, along with two or three witnesses, then what they have to say may have credence. If the accusations prove to be true, then further action must be taken. Paul declares, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” Specific details are not given in this passage about what steps are to be taken when a rebellious elder will not repent and therefore will not resign from the eldership. However, the brethren who selected him when they believed he met the qualifications, have the responsibility to reject him as an elder when he ceases to retain those

qualifications.

Some rebellious elders will split the church rather than resign when just accusations have been brought against them. Among the seven things that God hates is “...he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:16-19).

Prayer and a love for the Lord’s church will motivate us in striving to uphold God’s Word in dealing with such a serious matter. We are taught by inspiration, “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3).

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WHY CHRIST DIED

Harold Bigham

The cross and the death of Jesus Christ is central in the theme of man’s redemption, in Christian worship, and also in living the Christian life. In the death of Christ on the cross of calvary once sees the just dying for the unjust; the righteous sacrificed for the unrighteous; the innocent paying the price for the guilty. John, the beloved apostle of love, stated, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Isaiah prophesied of the sufferings the suffering Saviour would take upon himself for the sinners of the world (Isa. 53).

Let us notice some reasons why the Son of God, Jesus Christ, died upon the cross of calvary.

Christ died in order to become King. Jesus the Christ came not as a conquering military great, riding on a prancing stallion, but he came riding on a lowly colt of an ass (Zech. 9:9). He came not to subdue nations, cities, and lands, but to win the hearts of those who would obey him. He did not come as a statesman, yet he delivered

many great sermons and was the Master Teacher. He came to minister and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). By the cross, he became King of kings, Lord of lords and Saviour of souls (Heb. 2:9-10). He died to become King over our souls.

Christ died in order to prove his Messiahship. By the cross, Christ demonstrated himself to be the Anointed One. The Hebrew writer spoke of Christ’s purging our sins and reigning on the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 1:2-4). Christ had victory over death by his resurrection on the third day (1 Cor. 15:1-19). Christ proved his Messiahship by his death on the cross.

Christ died to manifest God’s love for man. God’s love is evidenced by Paul as he wrote, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). John spoke of the degree of God’s love as he stated, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish

but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God’s tremendous love for man caused his Son to die on the cross.

Christ died for our sins. Christ’s blood was shed in his death as the atonement for our sins (Rom. 5:9-11). His blood went backward and forward in redeeming man. His blood covers our past sins and future sins as one meets his requirements for pardon. He is our propitiation (1 John 2:2). He is our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). He brings sinful man back into friendly relations with God the Father after our separation from him because of our sins (Isa. 59:1-2). Our sins put the Son of God on the cross.

In his death, Jesus the Christ sustained the majesty of divine law which sinful man had trampled under foot. Christ paid the penalty of its violation. Because of his death, sinful man can live forever in the bliss of heaven by obedience to heaven’s terms of pardon.

God's Message...

(Continued from page 25)

the Greek word *poimen* would have been SHEPHERDS, rather than, pastors. The Greek word is found 18 times in the New Testament, and is translated pastors one time, and shepherd(s) 17 times. Jesus is called both a Shepherd and a Bishop.

I prefer the term shepherds, because not only are shepherds to see that the flock is fed, but also that they are visited regularly to see if any are ill and in need of special care. This kind of care by shepherds is almost as rare in churches of Christ as is discipline by these same men. If a sheep is found to have a disease which is fatal and contagious, it must be isolated and kept apart from the healthy sheep. Shepherds who “know their sheep,” will know when special measures are needed, and faithful shepherds will care for the sick, the lame, and will hunt the ones gone astray. Is that the way it is today? It is, only where men know and appreciate the awesome responsibilities of being a shepherd. It is only where men realize that not only are they watching for souls, but that God holds them personally responsible for souls in their fold.

In many (maybe most) places, a group of men who know little, if anything, about God's duties for His shepherds assume the “board of directors” attitude, which is completely foreign to the New Testament Pattern. They then attempt to “rule by remote control by holding closed meetings among themselves periodically. They hire a PR man called, THE Minister, and who is the “designated” sub-shepherd. He is to “feed” the flock with sermonettes full of catchy, flowery phrases which will keep everyone happy and feeling good about themselves. Thus, in the modern church, under the sub-shepherd, seldom is heard a negative word, and the board continues to play the game of being SHEPHERDS. If the college trained pulpit “puppet” forgets his “p’s and q’s” learned under the distinguished professor, he is called before the ruling committee and given his options.

The duties of shepherds (elders, bishops, overseers) is to feed and to lead: not to sit and send. While suc-

cessful elders must learn to delegate some responsibilities, they must set examples for the flock. If elders expect one under their oversight to win souls, they must lead the way. If elders expect members to be students of the Bible, they must be examples. If elders expect members to live right, they must lead an exemplary life before the sheep. Leaderless sheep are subject to all kinds of problems. Shepherds who are out of touch with the fold, leave the door of the sheepfold open to all kinds of dangers. God said, “Woe to the shepherds who have allowed my sheep to go astray.” Yet, many shepherds expect the “hired man” to keep up with the sheep, and to tend to their problems. But, that is not God's plan at all.

Why is the church of Christ in many places today ignorant, indifferent, and spiritually unemployed? Because a local church will do no better than they are taught, and most will not do as well as they are taught. Thus, the key is teaching, both in word and in deed (Col. 3:17).

In the verses quoted at the beginning of this article, God said *the shepherds were ignorant!* That is also one of the problems in spiritual Israel today (Gal. 6:16). One of the qualifications for a shepherd is desire (1 Tim. 3:1). Some congregations have taken a man's desire for the work and his ability to bare offspring, as the two qualifications necessary to be a bishop. However, ignorant shepherds will result in an ignorant membership.

Another defect in the shepherds of old was, they could not bark! What good is a watchdog that cannot bark? No one would buy a watchdog that could not bark, for that is what they do when it is needed. Their barking warns the unsuspecting of danger. Rather than being on guard, and ready to sound a warning, the shepherds like to sleep and slumber. Like dogs, the shepherds were greedy, and never have enough. Today, many shepherds, rather than leading the church in doing the work Jesus came to do (“to seek and save the lost,” Luke 19:10), sit and wish for sheep from other flocks to come and join their sheepfold. Depending on WHO the preacher is, and the message he speaks, sheep from other folds will be drawn to them. And, in many areas, this is exactly what has happened.

In one of the most powerful passages in the book of Acts, Paul addressed the shepherds of the flock in Ephesus. In Acts 20:17-35, Paul spoke to the elders in a tearful plea as he reminded them of his association with them, of their responsibilities to the church at Ephesus, and what would soon happen to the congregation due to the very men he was addressing. He began by reminding them of their primary duty to self, and then to the flock. Then he must have stabbed deeply into their consciences as he told them that from among them would arise men who would be enemies of Christ and would destroy the sheep. They would teach perverse things to draw away disciples after them. “Drawing away” meant they would be leaving the safety of faithful membership in the church of God. The shepherds at Ephesus, like those in the Old Testament, would “scatter the sheep,” and would discontinue to feed them with the proper diet, the word of God!

A group may continue to meet for years under so-called shepherds and in a building with “Church of Christ” carved on the front; but, that does not mean God still recognizes them. In chapters two and three of Revelation, some of the seven churches received warnings to repent or have their candlestick removed by the Lord. That meant they would lose their light-bearing abilities and would be lost.

Paul had done all he could. He had “not shunned to declare all the counsel of God to them.” That is all any preacher can do, whether inspired or not. There are no inspired men today, but it does not relieve any preacher from the duty to preach and teach, to the best of his ability, the word that will judge all men in the last day.

One of the most serious statements to elders, or any considering being an elder is: “...for *they* (elders, shepherds, bishops, pastors, overseers) *watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief.*” This statement, and others in the Bible, should send a chill through the body of any man who is already an elder, or is considering becoming one. It ought to cause a lot of soul searching before one assumes the most awesome responsibility known to

man: that of being a shepherd over God's flock.

Consider the reward! Consider the reward for being a faithful shepherd, but also consider the reward if one fails to live up to his responsibilities as a shepherd. No one is forced to be a shepherd; but, IF that decision is made, the rewards in this life will be minimal and the heartaches many, and the responsibilities are surely awesome and almost overwhelming.

Being a shepherd over God's peo-

ple is one of the most important and demanding duties a man is called upon to do. It is entered voluntarily and the burdens are great and yet rewarding if one continues faithful unto the end.

Let all caring saints pray that the church will raise up and train men to be elders who will be qualified to shepherd the flock. It will take much study on their part and a willingness to serve God at any cost. It will involve marrying the right woman who is capable of helping

rear faithful children.

Though men who are Scripturally qualified to be shepherds seem to be few today, the need has never been greater. Will you help someone become a shepherd over the flock of God. If you are a young man, and have the faith, knowledge, and determination, why don't you prepare yourself to be a shepherd over the church of God?

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"A DANGEROUS SITUATION COULD ARISE"

Roger D. Campbell

Well over a year ago I cut out and saved an article that appeared in the 29 January 2003 issue of *The Star*, a Malaysian newspaper. The large, bold title of the article reads: "Religious department to quiz preacher." The article's opening paragraph stated, "A Malaysian preacher...will be questioned by the Sabah Islamic Religious Council (Muis), when Indonesia deports him back here."

The article went on to quote from a government minister named Ghapur, who said that Islamic religious officers would have to question the preacher involved "to determine his background." Why the need for questioning? Because, as Mr. Ghapur stated, those wanting to preach at mosques must first get approval. Note his explanation: "We cannot simply allow anyone to preach because a dangerous situation could arise."

The scenario described above involves followers of Islam. Because Islam does not adhere to the teaching of the New Testament, it is a false religion. It is noteworthy, however, that Islamic officials take great care in determining who will, and who will not, be allowed to teach in their mosques. Per the reasoning of the official quoted above, they must be cautious because "a dangerous sit-

uation could arise."

God forbid that the followers of a false religion would be careful in selecting their public speakers, but congregations of the Lord's church would just open their pulpits or classrooms to any professed brother that comes along! Jesus said that "*the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*" (Luke 16:8). Shepherds of local churches must see to it that the flock of God is fed only sound or healthy doctrine (Acts 20:28; Titus 2:1). Not every want-to-be speaker should be allowed to teach a class or preach. Why? "Because a dangerous situation could arise."

Allowing a false teacher to address the flock could cause permanent damage. The poisoning of people's minds on just one occasion could possibly ruin them for life — or even for eternity! A perverted gospel is not the saving Gospel. The person that changes the Gospel message stands accursed before the Lord (Gal. 1:6-8).

Brethren, it just makes sense, does it not? Before we open our classrooms and pulpits (as much as possible), we need to know the teaching, as well as the character, of any prospective speaker. I have heard of instances where a total stranger showed up for services and was asked to preach. Not one person in

the congregation had ever heard of him before or knew anything about him, yet he was asked to preach. Brethren, how can it be? What is going on? This is not a backyard volleyball game where anyone is welcome to just walk in and have a part. Souls are at stake.

Those who lead congregations of God's people need to take seriously their duty to "screen" prospective speakers. The same goes for their dealings with those that seek financial support. If we bid Godspeed to those that do not abide in the doctrine of the Christ, then we become partakers of their evil deeds. The Bible says so (2 John 9-11). It is not ugly and it is not unkind to ask some pointed questions of anyone we are considering as a speaker or someone that is seeking our financial support. Such a practice of asking questions is a needed one. What is the old adage that many of us learned from our parents? "Better safe than sorry."

Those that lead local flocks of God's people need to take seriously the statement of 1 Peter 5:8 when it comes to prospective preachers and teachers: "*Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.*"

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WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR ONE TO RISE AND STAND IN THE GAP?

Marvin L. Weir

If elders, preachers, and all who consider themselves to be Christians so desired, they could learn from faithful Old Testament prophets. Ezekiel is such a prophet, and God on one occasion said to him:

Son of man, say unto her, Thou art a land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey: they have devoured souls; they take treasure and precious things; they have made her widows many in the midst thereof. Her priests have done violence to my law, and have profaned my holy things: they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they caused men to discern between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, that they may get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed for them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, when Jehovah hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery; yea, they have vexed the poor and needy, and have oppressed the sojourner wrongfully (Ezek. 22:24-29).

Notice what God said was happening among His people. First, they were a land not cleansed (v.24). Second, they devoured souls (v.25).

Third, the priests did violence to the law of God (v.26). Fourth, the priests profaned holy things and made no distinction between the holy and common (v.26). Fifth, people were not made to discern between the clean and the unclean (v.26). Sixth, the princes in their midst were like wolves ravening their prey (v.27). Seventh, the prophets were seeing false visions and telling lies to the people (v.28).

As we contemplate history repeating itself, let us take note of what is occurring far too often today in congregations calling themselves churches of Christ.

First, many congregations willingly tolerate and fellowship fellow members who are not clean from sin. What is referred to are those who live in open sin and refuse to repent. The sin of adultery is a case in point. So many today are living in adulterous marriages while elders, preachers, and other members extend the right hand of fellowship. Such a situation should never be tolerated among God's people!

Second, souls are devoured today by those who teach what the Bible does not teach and refuse to teach what the Bible teaches. The majority of those who call themselves elders today have abandoned their charge to "feed the church" (Acts 20:28). What is allowed to take place in many congregations today is an absolute disgrace. Denominational programs and gimmicks are in great demand, and serious Bible study is in short supply. Souls are being devoured while those who are supposed to be shepherds cater to what the flock desires.

Third, so-called preachers are allowed to do untold violence to the Word of God. Why, brethren, why? Never have so many uncertain sounds been allowed to spew forth from those who should be setting forth the Word of life! Do people not study the Bible for themselves anymore? Why are so many so content to

allow false teaching to go unchallenged? Is it lack of backbone or do they just not care?

Why give the time of day to one who says that he feels that God has laid it on his heart to tell you something? God has told us what He would have us to know in His inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Where does the Bible teach that when one comes forward confessing sin and seeking restoration that a crowd of friends are to accompany him? Where does the Bible teach that one should come forward and confess his joys, successes, etc.?

Fourth, that which is sacred and holy is being profaned today and no distinction is made between the holy and the common. God is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) and not according to the feelings of man. Man-made innovations are common and a dime a dozen. Where is the respect for a "thus saith the Lord?"

Fifth, brethren are not being challenged with what is right and what is wrong. The all-grace, all-love concept many have adopted does not justify wrongdoing.

Sixth, why are false teachers (ravens) allowed to teach or preach to God's people? God's truth is always undermined when a false teacher is allowed to unleash his false teaching. Never invite wolves to the sheep pen!

Seventh, false visions, and lies abound today. This is what occurs when people fail to demand chapter and verse preaching. Drama tickles feelings; however, the Bible builds faith!

God sought for a man to stand in the gap so the people might not be destroyed but there was none (Ezek. 22:30).

Are you willing to rise and stand on God's truth?

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SIX REASONS WHY DENOMINATIONAL BAPTISM SHOULD BE REJECTED

Dan Goddard

Religious men have a peculiar knack of taking something the Bible teaches and revamping it to fit the doctrines of men; then passing it off upon an unsuspecting public as the genuine, scriptural thing. This has been done with *baptism*, the *Lord's supper* and the *church* itself. Hence, it should be kept in mind that a counterfeit article may resemble the genuine article in many ways, but the points of resemblance do not prove the counterfeit to be genuine! The Roman "mass" may resemble the Lord's supper, but it is not the Lord's supper. Some denomination may resemble the Lord's church, but it is not the Lord's church. Neither is denominational baptism pleasing to God just because it resembles the commanded of the Lord.

Denominational baptism is not scriptural baptism for the following six reasons:

1) **WRONG AUTHORITY.** The various denominations do not permit men to baptize unless they are duly ordained by them. Hence, what ever may be done by such preachers in the matter of baptism is done by the authority of that denomination, not on the authority of Jesus Christ. Hence, the authority of Christ is not counted sufficient. The preacher must be ordained and authorized to baptize by the particular denomination. Again, these ordained preachers are only permitted to baptize such persons as meet the unanimous approval of the church which ordained them.

Persons desiring baptism are called "candidates" (indicating they are subject to a vote of the church) and are baptized only after the church has expressed approval by casting a vote in favor of it. Hence, such "candidates" are baptized on the authority of the denomination; not on the authority of Jesus Christ. This is the wrong authority. (Sometimes preachers in the church of Christ use the term "candidate" concerning a person to be baptized into Christ without thinking what they are say-

ing. Brethren, "these things ought not so to be.")

The denomination puts itself in the place of the Lord in presumptuously authorizing sprinkling or pouring for baptism when the Lord has never even hinted at such a thing. Hence, the administration of such is done on the authority of the denominational church; not on the authority of Christ.

Denominational churches often authorize the sprinkling of infants and call it "infant baptism." Jesus Christ said people who are baptized should be first taught (Matt. 28:18-20; John 6:44-45) and should be believers (Mark 16:16). Since no infant can be taught the Gospel or believe it, Jesus never authorized infant baptism. Hence, infant sprinkling is performed solely upon the authority of the church which authorizes and practices it. Finally, denominational churches almost with one accord, deny the necessity of baptism to salvation. They say that God does not require sinners to be baptized in order to be saved. Hence, any baptism they may authorize is required by them merely as a condition of membership in their particular denomination of which the Lord never authorized anybody to become a member. Therefore, denominational baptism is performed upon a wrong authority.

(2) **WRONG ACTION, SOMETIMES.** In the case of sprinkling and pouring for baptism, denominations authorize the wrong action. The Bible describes baptism as a burial and a resurrection in water (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:12; 3:1; Acts 8:35-39). Hence, the action in sprinkling and pouring is wrong.

(3) **WRONG SUBJECT.** First, infants are not subjects of baptism because they are incapable of faith and repentance (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). They are not lost; hence do not need to be saved, and if they did baptize them, baptism alone could not save them.

Second, denominations claim that people are saved before baptism. This has given rise to the expression "Christian baptism," implying that baptism is for Christians only. All Christian duties are repetitive (must be done repeatedly); therefore, if baptism is a Christian duty every Christian should be baptized repeatedly. But no saved person needs baptism, for baptism is "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), or in order to be saved (Mark 16:16). There is no such thing as "Christian baptism." Baptism is a command of the Lord, not an ordinance of the church. Baptism is an alien duty.

(4) **WRONG CONFESSION.** Denominational churches require the "candidate" to tell an "experience of grace" and/or to confess that he believes "that God for Christ's sake has pardoned" his sins. The Lord does not promise such pardon before baptism, hence those who so confess make a false claim whether they know it or not. The right confession is recorded in Acts 8:37.

(5) **WRONG PURPOSE.** Denominational baptism is not "for the remission of sins," but for the purpose of admitting one into the membership of a man-made church. The Bible nowhere instructs anybody to become a member of a denominational church; therefore, such baptism has the wrong purpose.

(6) **WRONG RESULT.** Denominational baptism accomplishes its purpose and puts the person baptized into a sectarian fellowship, brands him with an unscriptural name and binds him to an unscriptural creed. It puts him into a body which claims to contain only part of the saved; not into the body of Christ to which the Lord adds all of the saved (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23), and fosters division which the Lord condemns (John 10:16; 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 1:10-15).

For these six reasons, denominational baptism should be rejected!

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ONLY THROUGH THE WORD

James W. Boyd

Every false teacher, in order to save his cause, must repudiate the Bible as the guide in religion. He must do this either by contradicting the Word, ignoring it, taking from it, equating other authorities alongside the Word as claimed latter-day revelation, emotional experiences which he attributes to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, receiving special communications and revelations from God, warm feelings, small voices, visions, dreams, creeds, manuals, catechisms, confessionals, edicts of councils, conferences, synods, popes, or some other human ecclesiastical body or source. There are all sorts of religious authorities to which men look today rather than, or alongside, the Bible. Without them the false teacher is silenced.

Currently, there is an emphasis on the alleged activity of the Holy Spirit “separate and apart” from the Word, the Bible, the Scriptures. The doctrine is “the Bible plus.” Some have even gone to such extremes as to claim the Holy Spirit leads them regarding where to work, parking their car, which airplane to ride, what clothes to wear, which school to attend, etc. The Holy Spirit makes all their decisions for them. Still others claim their preaching is directly guided by the Holy Spirit in a special and miraculous way, entering the preacher and speaking through him, illuminating the Word for the reader and hearer by special operation. Such claim has been also the basis for the tongue speakers and other so-called “miracle workers.”

UN SOUND WORDS

Those of this doctrinal persuasion have developed a distinctive vocabulary among themselves. You can hear them talking about the Holy Spirit laying a burden on their heart, witnessing for Christ, giving personal testimonies, claiming the Lord spoke to them, being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (Some

teach a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit but deny any special miraculous power.) Their language is not “sound speech” (Titus 2:8) nor do they speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11).

We must realize that claiming activity by the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word has historically given rise to occults, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science, Romanism, Pentecostalism, the electronic church (PTL Club, 700 Club), teachers like Oral Roberts who saw a giant Jesus, Pat Roberson, Jim Bakker, etc. It is a basic stone in the foundation of Calvinism. Nearly every denomination looks to something other than the Bible or in addition to the Bible, as their source of religious authority, and claim it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

A very fair and sobering question we ask of those who make such claims and cite such authorities is, “If the Holy Spirit is guide of all such things, why all the contradictions, confusion and division? Is Deity that confused to give different messages and doctrines and attribute them to God?”

THE CLAIMS ARE FALSE

We can know these claims are false, not only because they contradict the Biblical teaching, but because of the fruit being borne. The position of the false teachers is that if you cannot prove something from the Bible, then “prove it” by your feelings, your claims of God speaking directly to you, the “extra” something to which he is privileged that nobody else ever receives.

God has revealed His mind to man concerning man’s duty to God, how man must serve and worship God, and the kind of life God expects man to live. God has spoken to man (Heb. 1:1,2). There are only two ways for a mind to communicate with another mind. There is either a *direct* and *miraculous* communication or there is the use of a *means*, such as agents, symbols, words,

through which one acts to produce effects in the mind of another — to convey thoughts. On Pentecost, God miraculously guided the minds of the apostles and what they spoke. First Corinthians 2:12,13 teaches miraculous guidance, as does 2 Peter 1:20,21. Christ had promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Paul warned against any doctrine other than what he had preached. Peter said they received all things that pertain to life and godliness (John 14,15,16; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Peter 1:3). Unless God still miraculously guides us, He must guide us the only other way, namely, through some medium, means or agency.

RESPECT OF PERSONS

If God guides some miraculously and not everyone, then He is a respecter of persons in spite of Paul’s and Peter’s denial of that. If God miraculously guides even certain ones, why does He not guide them alike, for they differ tremendously? Why do they not all have the same knowledge and teach the same doctrine? Why is their message at such variance from what the apostles taught in spite of the warnings against teaching such things? Where are the genuine signs, wonders, and miracles to confirm their claim as was done by the apostles, the ones to whom the promise of miraculous guidance was made as they went about revealing the whole counsel of God? Where goes the claim, must go the demonstration of that claim. Just to simply “claim” the Holy Spirit, proves nothing.

AGAINST SCRIPTURE

To claim the direct and miraculous guidance of the Holy Spirit today is to speak disparagingly of the all sufficiency of the Scriptures even though the Scripture claims that for itself (2 Tim. 3:16,17). We hear those who claim “the Bible plus” contend that the Bible is not adequate and sufficient, that we

cannot understand it. The truth is that God either could not give us revelation we could grasp, lacking the power to do so, or He would not provide such revelation we could grasp, but still holds us responsible to obey it. Which horn of the dilemma would you like to take? Either He could not or would not. But we contend that He did reveal His will, sufficiently, within the grasp of man to read and know (Eph. 3:1-5; 5:17), and allows for no other guide than what He has provided (2 John 9; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18,19).

The claim of Scripture for Scripture is that it is verbally inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all sufficient (2 Tim. 3:16,17). It either is or it is not. If it is, then all else is eliminated. If it is not, then why should we have confidence in anything else that Scripture tells us? Faithful Gospel preachers who rely on and preach the Word are sometimes accused of being obsessed with the Bible as the sole authority. Certainly, they are. Indeed, they must be, if they be true to the Lord.

To deny a special and miraculous operation by the Holy Spirit does not make one anti-Holy Spirit, nor negate the power of the Holy Spirit, nor challenge the providence of God, nor deny Deity answering prayer. We confess the reality of the Holy Spirit as one of the Godhead. What all Deity may do we would not profess to know fully. But as for the way Deity has and does communicate the message of salvation through Christ to mankind we can be certain because Deity has revealed in the Word how Deity has done this.

DWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

But someone asks, "Does not the Holy Spirit dwell in us?" The answer is, "Yes." There are many passages that so teach, such as Romans 8:11. That is not the question here. It is not argued about the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. He does. But understand that Christ dwells in us also (Eph. 3:17), and so does the Father (1 Cor. 3:16). But none of these passages that teach the Holy Spirit dwelling in us teach that they dwell in us literally, personally, actually, as if our bodies are occupied by any

spirit other than our own. Yes, the Lord lives in us, but HOW does He live in us (Gal. 2:20)? The Bible teaches that the Word dwells in us also (Col. 3:16).

I have had it said to me, and considered it a compliment, by some who knew my father, "I can see your daddy in you." How do they see my father in me? Is it because my father's literal spirit has come to occupy my body? Indeed not! At this writing my father is physically dead and his spirit is in the hands of God, not in my body. They see my father in me as I partake of the ways, attitudes, and manners of my father. As I follow him, he is seen in me. So it is with Deity dwelling in humanity.

HERE IS HOW

John 15:1-10 teaches us how Deity dwells in humanity. Read the lengthy passage and consider these comments. Notice the verses speak of man abiding (living, dwelling) in Christ, Christ abideth in man, God and Christ abiding one with the other. This is accomplished, *"if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."* The concept of the "indwelling" of Deity in humanity is nothing more or less than the doctrine of fellowship between Deity and humanity (1 John 1:3,7). Deity no more operates and possesses people apart from their will than does Satan. Satan uses a "means" to influence man such as words, false doctrines, temptations, false teachers, deceptions, and other various Satanic servants. But God also uses a "means" also. Man is a free moral agent with the power of choice to decide his own will, whether he will serve God or Satan. To suggest some direct operation of either is to surrender man's power of choice and he becomes but a pawn and robot. What a degrading doctrine!

As far as the Holy Spirit leading, guiding, and influencing us, nothing is taught in the Bible of Him that is not also taught of the Word. The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Word, but the truth is that the Holy Spirit operates by and through the Word. They do not act independently (some use the word conjointly, which is at best confus-

ing) one from another, but the Holy Spirit uses His sword which is the Word (Eph. 6:17) to accomplish His operation. The Word is the medium of Deity. God's Word once was embodied in inspired men, but now is in the inspired Scriptures.

THE WORD

We urge each reader to consider such passages as James 1:18,21,22 to learn we are begotten with the Word, saved by the Word (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15). We must be born again, but we are begotten by the Word (1 Peter 1:23). Ephesians 5:26 teaches Christ cleanses by the Word. The parallel passages, Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16, show the Spirit dwells as the Word dwells. Psalm 119:105, we are led by the Word. Our hearts are enlightened by the Word (Psalm 110:104, 130). By the Word we get understanding, We shall be judged by the Word (John 12:48). We are called to God by the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Faith comes by the Word (Rom. 10:17). Christ came to give the water of life (John 4:14). But what is the water He gave? He gave the Word. God draws man, but through learning, teaching (John 6:44,45). To resist the preaching of the prophets was to resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). God testified against Israel by the preaching of the Word done by the prophets (Neh. 9:30).

Let us hear the conclusion of the matter. Every effect, emotion, and direction the Holy Spirit produces is engineered by the use of the Word. Only through the Word does Deity lead us. If it is not found in God's Word, then it is not God's will. For this reason we should try the spirits whether they be of God (1 John 4:1). The standard of measure is the Word (Acts 17:11; Psalm 19:7,8).

Beware of those who claim something special, some revelation and guidance that nobody else ever receives. Isaiah 8:20, *"To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."*

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"AM I THEREFORE BECOME YOUR ENEMY BECAUSE I TELL YOU THE TRUTH?"

Ronnie Whittemore

There is never any reason to be unkind to another person. Though men and women may stand "poles apart" on an issue or concerning a problem, anger and hatred are always out of place.

The book of Galatians was written to the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2). This epistle opens immediately by dealing with an error that was plaguing the churches. Many brethren were going back to the law of Moses and forsaking the law of Christ which had freed them from the bondage of sin. Paul challenges his readers to put away the perversions of God's Word and to reject the teachers of these perversions (Gal. 1:6-9). It seems rather strange these people would allow the law of Moses (which contained no forgiveness of sins) to influence their lives once again. One might read these passages and this situation and shake his head in disbelief. One might say, "I cannot understand that" or "I would never have done that." And yet there are people who are constantly going back to their former way of life or who are allowing former circumstances or people to influence their spiritual lives. There is no difference between these people who rejected their salvation by returning to the law of Moses than men and women today who reject their salvation by returning to religious indifference, sentimentality or denominationalism. The times and people may have changed, but man's desire to please other men has not changed! So Paul exhorts these churches to hold to the "certified gospel of Christ" for which there is no substitution!

In Galatians 4:16, Paul asked this question: "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" Though this question is rhetorical, let us examine the truths that are implied in its asking.

TELLING THE TRUTH REQUIRES...

1) The responsibility of a true friend. A sincere friend will tell you the truth. When the apostle Peter showed partiality and prejudice,

Paul "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11-14). Paul did not shirk his responsibility to help a brother in Christ (and a fellow apostle) to overcome a weakness. A friend will take a genuine interest in his friend's welfare and seek to promote it. Jonathan proved to be a true friend to David (1 Samuel 18:1). A friend will recognize that liberty is realized in telling the truth (John 8:32). How can one profess to be a true friend if he is unwilling to express Biblical truth concerning salvation from sins?

2) The character of a true friend. A friend will be a person of clear and fair judgment (John 7:24). He is interested in what is right. He shows no partiality. He will be observant, even of his own errors, so that he will have the basis to be honest with the errors of others (Matt. 7:1-5; 2 Cor. 13:5). His prayers will be that his friends be delivered from temptations, weaknesses and evils (Luke 22:31-32). He finds no joy in the sins of others (Rom. 1:32).

REGARDING A FRIEND AS AN ENEMY

Why do men regard a friend as an enemy because he tells the truth?

1) Because of the nature of truth. Truth must say many things that are often displeasing (John 8:44). But rather than dealing with the message, many people choose to deal with the messenger. Ahab "hated" Micaiah the prophet of God because "he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings 22:8). Truth shows no respect of persons whether princes or peasants, rich or poor (Rom. 2:8-11). Truth sometimes must hurt in order to heal (Heb. 4:12). Though one never wants to hurt the feelings of another person, sometimes truth does hurt. But the hurt of truth is far better than the hurt of a sinful life.

2) Because of the nature of humans. Human nature lacks the earnest desire to be set right in all things (Rom. 3:10-11; 5:12). Human nature is filled with pride and envy which often hinders one in admitting and overcoming wrongs (1 Tim. 3:6; Mark 15:10). Human beings many times have unfavorable opinions or surmise as to the motives of the teller of truth (1 Tim. 6:3-4; 1 Thess. 2:4). It is not unusual for people to assume the reproving brother is self-righteous, rather than expressing concern for the wayward and lost. Human nature does not always recognize the truth (John 1:4; 14:6). Fear, doubt, disbelief and pessimism will often persuade one to point an accusing finger toward another when the error lies within self. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent (Gen. 3:10-13). Both should have looked inwardly, not outwardly.

ADMINISTERING REPROOF

1) Knowledge is required (2 Tim. 2:15; Col. 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15). Though a person may have good intentions, he needs to possess knowledge of the Scriptures which is the standard of right and wrong, and, he must have accurate knowledge of wrongs and circumstances. It is a mistake to assume a wrong on the part of an individual without investigating the truth. Many times miscommunication or a misunderstanding leaves a person with a wrong assumption or a faulty accusation. Once truth has been established concerning a person by talking with him and those involved, then God's truth of correction must be applied.

2) The instructor should present the truth to show that its authority lies within the truth itself and not in the instructor (John 8:26; Gal. 1:11-

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Am I Your Enemy?...

DISCOURAGEMENTS IN THE CHURCH

David B. Jones

Discouragement is one of the tools employed by Satan to try and undermine the work of the Lord. Frequently, discouragement comes from the outside, but all too often it comes from within the body of Christ also. Soldiers of Christ expect those outside the body to attack their work. We are reminded of the apostle Paul and how he had to be taken out of cities by night because of the Jewish persecution: *“But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him. But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket”* (Acts 9:22-25). We also read in Acts seventeen of various times he had to be moved by night because of outside persecution. This type of persecution can discourage the soldier of Christ. The soldier must remind himself of the example of His Lord and how He overcame.

Persecution also comes from within. Paul was a victim of this type persecution also. We read in Second Corinthians: *“In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren”* (2 Cor 11:26). Notice he had perils among false brethren. No doubt this was a source of some discouragement, but again He trusted God and relied upon His strength.

Today, soldiers of Christ face persecution from without and from within the body of Christ. Atheists outside the body attack the very existence of God and liberals inside the body attack the very existence of the authority of God’s Word. We have grown to expect this discouragement so we handle it and keep going. However, there are other discouragements we face from within and these

will more easily defeat us if they are not corrected.

Let us notice some of the discouragements we may face today.

CRITICISM

There is a place for what we call “constructive criticism.” Parents use this in the home. They show their children how they could have done something more efficiently. The children often do not like this type of teaching, but good parents know it is needed.

In the church we need to be able to take constructive criticism when it is given from good and honest hearts. Those giving this advice should first search their own hearts and make sure they are pure and sincere. Second, the listeners should take the advice and apply it to their actions. We truly have to be careful in this area.

However, there is criticism which is not constructive, but rather, destructive. This criticism comes from hearts which have no care of compassion, they simply want to point out the faults of someone else at the other person’s expense. Sad, but true, are the cases where young and well-meaning Christians have been severely criticized by others to the point of discouragement. Perhaps they were doing something and the other person disagreed with the way it was being done. Instead of tactfully approaching the party and making a suggestion as to how it could be done better or differently, the criticizer attacked the person with no concern for his/her feelings. Vindicated, the attacker went his/her way never realizing the harm done. Not only did the attacker discourage the worker, but also any witnesses to the attack. If the accuser were questioned, he would not even realize he had done wrong. We can discourage some innocent people and never even know it! This is why we should watch our criticism very closely. Let us be sure someone is WRONG before we accuse. If we disagree with a matter of opinion, we

had better be careful how we criticize. Everyone has the right to his opinion. Of course, there are matters of doctrine which are not left up to our opinions. In these cases, we had better stand up for what is right no matter the cost or the foe!

CASUAL WORSHIP

We mean by this term a casual attitude when it comes to worshipping God. Jesus said: *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24). God has always demanded His people worship Him in this manner: *“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt, serve ye the LORD”* (Josh. 24:14). God is a jealous God and His nature demands His people put Him first or no place. Only those of the correct tribe could come before Him and offer sacrifices during Old Testament times and then He decreed it must be with the proper attitude and actions.

Today, Christians are the ones who can offer spiritual sacrifices to Him: *“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2:5). Our actions and attitudes must be correct if we want this worship accepted. God only approved and saved those who worshiped Him correctly in the Old Testament and the same is true today. Far too many members of the Lord’s church take this privilege too casually. Many believe if they come and sit in the pew, they have worshiped God. If we approach God casually and not with conviction and consecration, He despises our sacrifices.

Many are too casual in the ATTENTION they give to worship. Grown-ups are guilty of not paying attention to the singing and sermons as they should. They often play with babies and dose off because of the casual attention they pay to worship.

Young people are also guilty of passing notes and amusing themselves with other things during worship. Parents ought to watch this and put a stop to it. However, if something is said to the young people, the parents too often get upset with the one who brings it to their attention. Many wonder why young people quit attending worship services after they leave home. In many cases, it is because they were not taught in the home the joy and responsibility of truly worshipping as they should have and they too often do not see this attention in their parents' worship.

The singing may not be the best, but God expects us to sing from our hearts and our worship does not depend upon every note being hit perfectly!

The preacher may not be the best speaker who ever preached, but if he is speaking the truth in love, we are to give the study of God's Word our undivided attention. It is discouraging for the preacher to see the lack of attention during the sermon, especially when it involves the parents or the parents have no concern for their children's attitude. It is also discouraging for those sitting beside those not paying attention.

COMPETITION AMONG BRETHREN

Another discouragement is the competition which exists in the church. Jealousy is an avenue Satan uses to discourage brethren. Just as James and John wanted to sit next to Jesus in authority, many brethren desire to have all the attention of certain brethren. Preachers are often the battleground for these confrontations. Members will despise other brethren if the preacher shows them too much attention. Work is halted because brethren are not willing to work together due to competition. Some members have to have the limelight or they are not happy. Some members must be the only ones involved in something or else they want no part. As Satan sees these attitudes expressed, he sits back with an attitude of success because he has discouraged the work in the church. Brethren, let us guard against these and other discouragements we could notice.

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Am I Your Enemy?...

(Continued from page 25)

12). It is a weak and inaccurate position to place the authority of correction in the rebuker and not the source of the truth — God. Man does not speak of himself, but he is a messenger of the Lord. His words are true and right only when they agree with the Will of God. God's power to save is found in the Gospel (Rom. 1:16).

3) There is a proper time and place for truth to be exercised (Eccl. 3:1; Prov. 6:20). Circumstances, situations, and people should be considered before reproving wrong. Though well-intentioned, some brethren fail to use common sense. Private sins may not need to be rebuked publicly (Matt. 18:15-20). Public gatherings, such as, funerals, weddings, hospitals, etc., are not the proper environment for a religious debate. A little tact and diplomacy may be the difference between gaining a brother and losing him to the world.

4) There is a proper manner in which truth is to be spoken (Eph. 4:15; Gal. 6:1; Matt. 10:16). There is never any reason to be unkind to another person. Though men and women may stand "poles apart" on an issue or concerning a problem, anger and hatred are always out of place.

RECEIVING REPROOF

1) By cultivating a disposition of mind which earnestly desires the truth in whatever manner it may come to him (Acts 10:33).

2) Sometimes one is silent when he should have spoken the truth, afterwards finds that he is the object of rebuke (Prov. 27:5).

3) By being receptive to the proper kind of rebuke, now will be able to give it properly (Prov. 15:5,12; 17:10).

Friends, regardless of the motive or manner in which one tells us the truth, we should be objective enough to listen to TRUTH. But may we always tell the truth even though it may cause friends to become enemies.

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