

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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THE CHURCH IS NOT A BUSINESS

Rusty Stark

Congregations of the Lord's church must conduct business. They have bills to pay and items to purchase. They have overhead and salaries and insurances to consider. Leaders often meet for "business" meetings. But the Lord's church is not primarily a business. If we forget this fact we are in danger of departure from the Lord's pattern.

DENOMINATIONAL DEPARTURES

Many in the denominational world have long since gone the way of professional business: As Adam McClane puts it:

- Churches hire HR professionals...
- Churches acquire other churches.
- Churches hire MBAs to be "Executive Pastors."
- Churches hire CPAs to run their finance departments.
- Churches hire advertising executives to run their marketing departments. Churches have departments!
- Churches have board rooms, safe rooms, and even war rooms.¹

There are many, even in the denominational world, who see the error of this:

- The Church has been using business models for a long time. It has been quite fashionable for church leaders to borrow jargon, organizational structures, mission and vision foci, and leadership styles from the business world in recent

memory. In this paradigm, making disciples of Jesus Christ is equated with selling a product or service.²

- Maybe the problem was when we thought that it would be a good idea for the church to follow business models in the first place. Maybe what we should do is stop trying to be like the business world and start trying to be the church. Maybe God has a better model for the church than a market-driven consultation firm.³
- When our leaders think in business terms, we ought not be surprised when they act like corporate executives and our parishioners act like consumers. We are not peddlers for God. Neither are parishioners people who ought to be shopping for the next best experience.⁴

GOOD STEWARDSHIP

This article is not against wise stewardship. As individuals, we must be *good stewards of the manifold grace of God* (1 Peter 4:10). If we should be thus in our households, regarding our own private affairs, how much more important is it that we exercise stewardship over the Lord's money and business?

We must acknowledge at the outset that many principles from the business world come under the heading of good stewardship. Keeping overhead low, avoiding wasteful practices, making necessary purchases in a wise way — all of these are things we must be

concerned about. In addition, many principles of salesmanship are also natural and scriptural elements in the spreading of the Gospel.

But still, we must insist that the Lord's church is not a business. 1) It is not to be 'MARKETED' as the business world markets itself. 2) It is not based on a BUSINESS MODEL. And 3) DECISIONS for the body must not be based primarily on business principles. These three points will provide us with an outline.

MARKETING

Marketing is not the same as selling or salesmanship. There are 4 Ps to marketing: Product, Place, Price, and Promotion. Marketing is the process of adjusting these 4 things to reach the greatest number of consumers.⁵ The trouble with bringing this over into the church is that we do not have God's authority to adjust these things.

1. With the goal of attracting people to the church, some have tried to make adjustments to the **Product**. This has resulted in efforts to make the Gospel less offensive and more appealing and to leave out hard doctrines regarding hell and sin and guilt. God's word has been forever settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89). We have no right to add to, take away from, or adjust it in any way. It is the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
2. Some have tried to adjust the

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Not A Business...



Editorial...

WHAT MUST ONE UNDERSTAND IN ORDER TO BECOME A CHILD OF GOD? #1

Garland M. Robinson

You can't meet someone on the street, enter into a conversation of the Bible and that person become a Christian right there on the spot. The man-made system of denominationalism says a person can. It says an individual can simply ask Jesus to come into their heart to be their savior and that's all there is to it — salvation is the result. But, such is far from the truth. Salvation does not come by man's ways and thinking, it comes from God (cf. Isa. 55:8-9). What does the Bible say?

One thing common to all mankind is sin. *"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:...For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:10,23). Because of their sin, there are a number of things people must *learn, understand, believe* and *do* in order to have their sins forgiven and become a child of God — a Christian.

Jesus said, *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me"* (John 6:44-45). The Lord plainly said people must be **taught**. This is done by **hearing** the word of God and **learning** what God's will is (cf. Rom. 10:17). The end result therefore is to **obey** what has been **learned**.

There are certain essential things that one must *know, understand, believe* and *obey* in order to be saved.

One must believe and understand that **God exists**. *"Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture"* (Psalm 100:3). There is *"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"* (Eph. 4:6). *"Thine, O LORD, is the*

greatness, and the power; and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all" (1 Chron. 29:11). *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! ... For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever"* (Rom. 11:33,36). *"For the LORD is a great God"* (Psalm 95:3).

One must believe and understand that **sin is a violation of God's Will**. *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law"* (1 John 3:4). *"...For where no law is, there is no transgression"* (Rom. 4:15; cf. 5:13). *"All unrighteousness is sin..."* (1 John 5:17).

One must believe and understand that **sin separates us from God**. No one is exempt from sin. *"There is none righteous, no, not one. ... For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23,10). *"The LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear"* (Isa. 59:1-2). Before becoming a child of God, one is *"...dead in trespasses and sin"* (Eph. 2:1). Sin defiles a person (Mark 7:20-23). When one turns from what is right and commits that which is wrong (sin), he will pay for his evil, if not in this life, in the judgment to come (Ezek. 18:26-30).

God desires that all men everywhere turn from their evil so they will not have to suffer for it. *"...Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and*

make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die? ...For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, ...wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye" (Ezek. 18:30-32).

One must believe and understand that if **he dies separated from God (because of his sins) he looses his soul for eternity in hell**. *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23). The death spoken of here is spiritual death — eternal separation from God. To be separated from God means separation from everything that is good, true and holy. *"...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"* (1 John 1:5). Heaven is a pure place where only righteousness dwells. *"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie"* (Rev. 22:14-15).

Eternal separation from God occurs when one dies and leaves life on this earth. No provision has been made by God to be saved from sins after we die. *"Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him"* (Isa. 3:11). *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. ...The wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him"* (Ezek. 18:20).

Those who sin and die without forgiveness will perish in utter destruction (Luke 13:3,5). *"...He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"* (John 3:36,18). Sinners shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The unforgiven *"...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone..."* (Rev. 21:8).

Though sinners will perish, there is continual consciousness of suffering, pain and agony. Jesus talked about those who *"...go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched"* (Mark 9:43-44). Hell is an everlasting place of torment. Jesus said, *"...depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ...these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal"* (Matt. 25:41,46; Luke 16:23).

Few are those who see the danger

and approaching destruction. Many laugh and scorn. Don't be among that number. Jesus died and shed his blood for you (Matt. 26:28). Without your obedience, you will perish in a devil's hell.

One must believe and understand that **only in Jesus Christ can one have forgiveness (salvation) from sins and peace with God.** The religions of the world think there are many saviors. But salvation is found in only one — Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16). Jesus plainly said, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life: and no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"** (John 14:6).

When Peter and John were being examined for healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, they said, **"Be it known unto you all...that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead... This is the stone**

which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12).

Christ died on a cross and shed his precious blood in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins for all humanity (Matt. 26:28). **"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ... But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life"** (Rom. 5:6-10,1-2). **"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and**

gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Only Jesus has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). Jesus said, **"...if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"** (John 8:24). God made Jesus, Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36) and appointed Him judge of the living and dead (Acts 10:42; John 5:22). There is no other foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). **"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all..."** (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

Do you believe? Don't let life slip by without obeying the Savior, Jesus the Christ. There's no salvation without it (Matt. 7:21-23). Jesus will only save those who obey him (Heb. 5:8-9).

Part 1 of 3

IS GOD'S WORD TOO NARROW?

Earl B. Claud

Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13,14). The way to heaven is not a super highway with no hills. The way to heaven is NOT the easy way. But some say it is just too hard. Is God's way too hard?

The most difficult part of following God is to first give ourselves into his control. Jesus said, **"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"** (Matt. 16:24). Again Jesus said, **"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"** (Matt. 6:33).

It is not difficult to learn what God wants us to do to please him. It is difficult to get people to obey it. Jesus said, **"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"** (Matt. 16:16). Is this too narrow? Peter preached by inspiration, **"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"** (Acts 2:38). We are also told to confess Christ before men (Matt. 10:32,33; Rom. 10:9,10). Are these too difficult and hard to do? When one is baptized into Christ, he becomes a new babe in Christ (Rom. 6:3,4; Gal. 3:27; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Peter 2:2). As a Christian, we are told how to live (Col. 3:1,2; Gal. 5:22,23; 1 Peter 2:1,2; 2 Peter 1:5-10; 3:18). As Christians, we are also told what to avoid (Rom. 1:21-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-10; 2 Tim. 3:1-7). Are these too narrow or hard to follow to receive a home in heaven? With God's help we can overcome the world and live with God forever (Phil. 4:13; 1 John 2:14; 5:4).

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Not A Business...

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Place to something more acceptable to the masses. People who don't like to "go to church" may accept house churches, cottage groups, gymnasium or theater-like atmospheres, so long as they don't feel like they are going to church. There is nothing wrong in meeting in any of these places. The church is not the building, it is the people of God (1 Peter 2:5). But if the church is not the building, why put so much emphasis on a different type of building to meet in? To meet in a gymnasium or a theater in an effort to substitute the solemn, holy atmosphere of worship with a casual, sensational, show-time, entertainment atmosphere is wrong.

3. Similarly, some try to modify the **Price**, i.e. the demands the Gospel makes. The Gospel demands self-sacrifice (Luke 14:25-33). The Gospel demands that adulterous relationships, drunkenness, dancing, gambling and all other sins be left behind (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). We can preach a Gospel that does not demand such a high price, but it is not the Gospel of Christ; and, it will not save men's souls (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 1:6-9).
4. There are also those who want to change biblical soul-winning to worldly, wild, all-out, no-holds-barred **Promotion**. The concept of worldly promotion has resulted in bribery to get visitors to attend, smoke machines and zoo animals in the worship, and a host of unscriptural 'ministries' that we can advertise to bring people in. In an effort to compete with worldly advertisers, church groups have chosen professional singers instead of congregational singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) and professional entertainers instead of Gospel preachers (2 Tim. 4:2). God never authorized these approaches to 'market' the Gospel (Col. 3:17). The more we try to compete with the world, the more worldly we become. Do we really want a membership that comes because of the attended nursery, the free donuts, and the great jokes and stories the preacher tells?

BUSINESS MODEL

Actually, there are various business models, but there is only one pattern for the Lord's church. The Hebrew writer makes this point with extreme clarity and a very pointed warning. First, he points to the admonition from the physical mountain (Mt. Sinai) that Moses was to see that the tabernacle was made after a certain pattern (Heb. 8:5). Then he contrasts that physical mountain and that physical tabernacle with a spiritual mountain and the spiritual kingdom, the church. His warning? If they had to be careful to follow the pattern given them from Mt. Sinai, how much more careful should we be to "*see that ye refuse not him that speaketh...from heaven*" (Heb. 12:25).

There are those who try to make fun of the pattern concept, but those who do so will not escape punishment. This is the precise point the writer of Hebrews is making — follow the pattern, or else.

We are on this earth to *serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (Heb. 12:28). The church is a theocracy:

- It is not run by a board.
- It does not answer to its shareholders.
- Its mission statement is not self-defined; it is defined by God.
- Its vision must be the vision of God, grasped by faith.
- Its articles of incorporation are not subject to debate.

We cannot accept any changes to the structure of the church as laid down in the New Testament.

- Each congregation is autonomous. Our only head is Christ (Eph. 5:23).
- Our only headquarters is in heaven where our head is (Col. 3:1).
- All Authority in the church is vested in Christ (Matt. 28:18), and is exercised only through the Scriptures or through the scriptural delegation of authority to elders (Heb. 13:7,17; Acts 20:28; et al).
- Elders are authorized to oversee only the flock which is among them (of which they are members) (1 Peter 5:2).
- Qualified deacons are appointed as special servants for special jobs (1 Tim. 3:8-13).
- The concept of pillar churches or one congregation meeting in two

or more locations is contrary to the Bible pattern.

DECISION MAKING

Sometimes members think their contribution entitles them to decision making authority. In the Lord's church, such authority rests with those men who have been scripturally qualified and appointed as elders (1 Peter 5:2; Heb. 13:17). Control of the church cannot be bought by large contributions or sold to the highest donors.

Since the Lord's church is a theocracy, decisions must be made according to God's will. Many times this will be in harmony with good business sense. However, there are times when doing the right thing, i.e. following God's will, will run counter to and even fly in the face of 'good business' practices.

1. Decisions about discipline — Church discipline is not an optional matter. The commands of God are plain. We are to withdraw ourselves from every brother or sister who refuses to live according to New Testament teaching and those who teach false doctrine (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5, esp. verse 11; 2 Thess. 3:6,14-15; Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10; 2 John 9-11).

Too often elders think they have the right to decide whether or not to practice these commands. They do not have this authority.

Too often elders make such decisions on the basis of what they think is good for business. They don't want to cause strife, they might lose too many members, outsiders might react negatively, the contribution might go down, etc. One elder told me, "*If we practice church discipline, we'll be the laughingstock of this whole area.*"

It might be good business to be concerned about such things, but the church is not a business. Shepherds must be more concerned about souls for whom they must give account (Heb. 13:17) and the answer they must give to the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4), than they are about what others may think.

2. Decisions about Doctrine — Doctrine has been determined by God. There are no decisions to be made in this area. In watching over the flock, elders are to feed the flock and to protect it from false teachers (Acts 20:28-31). They do not have the right to accept false doctrine from their pulpits

or to endorse and support false teachers with their money or with a platform on which to teach (2 John 9-11).

It may seem like good business to leave out part of the Gospel, but to do so leaves us guilty of the blood of those who are lost by our actions. Paul was only free from the blood of all men because he had declared all the counsel of God (Acts 20:25-27).

Elders do not have the right to choose a smooth-talking false teacher because he pleases the members over a stuttering, coarse, unpolished but faithful Gospel preacher. Remember, false teachers use good words and fair speeches to deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

3. Benevolence — Benevolence is a part of the mission of the Lord's church (James 1:27); and, we have a special obligation to those "of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Sometimes the demands of benevolence will seem like dangerous business practices.

We have a great illustration of this in the church in Jerusalem. Thousands of people became Christians on Pentecost and shortly thereafter (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 6:1,7). Because of the great number of converts, many of whom did not actually live in Jerusalem, the early church had many needs. They responded to those needs in a very unbusinesslike way. Acts 2:44-45, *"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."* Acts 4:34-37, *"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."*

I'm afraid to think what many modern elders would have said regarding the benevolent needs of the Jerusalem church: "We can't help all the widows, what kind of precedent would that set?" "We can't have all our members selling their homes and property to feed all these people this week. What will we do next week?"

It is true, the needs of the Jerusalem church were unsustainable at first. Selling their personal property to sustain an unexpected population of Christians in Jerusalem was not good business practice for the individual Christians involved or for the church. But God knew what was coming. His plan included allowing Satan to scatter the church through persecution (Acts 8:1). If those people had not sold their property, they would have had to simply leave it all behind.

This was an unusual circumstance, but it is probably not the only time that benevolence needs don't seem like good business practices. If we tell a mother with small children to leave her adulterous marriage relationship, are we willing to support her and her children until she can get back on her feet? When members suffer great tragedy and financial loss from fires or other disasters, do we have enough faith to deplete our church 'savings' in order to extend the help that is needed?

We must not let our idea of business stand in the way of the love we should show to each other.

4. Expectations — Christianity is a matter of hard work. There is labor to be done. Tragically, getting Christians busy in the work is one of the hardest tasks we face.

Just as tragic is the tendency among some congregational leaders to lower the expectations for fear of expecting too much. Elders often decide against certain programs because they are too labor-intensive. They don't want to expect too much of the members' time. It's hard enough to get members to attend services, much less getting them to show up for extra works.

In many places, the days are gone when members would spend hours a day for weeks at a time working on VBS material. The generation has passed that would show up for a building project evening after evening, after laboring on their own jobs, to advance the cause of Christ. Too many Christians are simply too busy with their own lives to seek the kingdom first.

If the church is a business, then the members are the customers and they reign supreme. If the church is a business, then we must not expect them to alter their overcrowded schedules or sacrifice their precious time. The business oriented leaders think,

"If we expect too much, our 'customers' can 'shop' elsewhere; we don't want to lose them." On the other hand, if the church is a family, a cause to be advanced even at great personal cost, a monarchy ruled over by the God of heaven, then should we not expect and insist on sacrifice by each member? What have we lost if we lose members who will not be active for the cause? We have lost nothing but their souls, and their souls are already lost while sitting in the pews.

5. Numbers — There are elders who hire and fire preachers based on the 'bottom line' of attendance and contribution. As long as attendance and contribution are good, it does not much matter what the preacher says. This may be a good bottom line for business, but not for the church. The church is not a business. David got himself and all of Israel into a lot of trouble when he started focusing on numbers instead of on God (2 Sam. 24).

CONCLUSION

If we approach things from a business model, things of the church may seem quite inefficient — inefficient at bringing in crowds, at keeping those we have, at getting the Gospel to the lost. There may indeed be things in the business world that would be more efficient. But the Bible is right, and God knows best. As one man said, *"Let's embrace some holy inefficiency and grow the Kingdom!"*

Here is the true bottom line for God's people: 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."*

ENDNOTES

1 Adam McLane, *Business Models in the Church*, adammcclane.com/2010/10/28.

2 Andy Bryan, *Church Business*, www.entertherainbow.blogspot.com/2009/06/church-business.html

3 Ibid

4 Steven D Bruns, *The Business of Church*, www.stevedbruns.wordpress.com/2011/02/10/the-business-of-church

5 This material on marketing is adapted from ideas from Rodney Zwonitzer, *Is the Church a Business*, www.mtio.com/articles

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Elder's COLUMN

PROBLEMS FACING THE CHURCH #2

James W. Boyd

PLEASE THE WORLD

The church is being overwhelmed with the emphasis and concern with this world and is failing to “set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2). While we are in the world, we are not to be of the world. Worldliness has sapped the influence and power of the church everywhere. We are to save the world, not conform to the world (Rom. 12:1-2). Love of the world has generated a lax, worldly minded and permissive people toward immorality, drinking, dancing, gambling, and many other worldly excesses we see about us, and among some so-called Christians. Pulpits have become silent as death in condemning the sins of the world among the members. (It might cost the clergy-preacher his high paying job and popularity).

It is evident that many in the church are striving for their pleasure and material gain more than the welfare of their souls and the souls of their children. If you doubt this, just observe closely the tremendous loss from the church of the young among members of the church. Family after family has so stressed this world that their children are not “in the Lord.” Jesus taught, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Paul warned, “For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:7-10).

Worldly emphasis has helped create the preacher shortage. While there is seemingly no shortage of

those clamoring to get on the “staff” and payrolls of churches, there is a shortage of faithful men who will preach the Gospel without fear, favor, compromise, or perversion. There are those who readily compromise truth in order to retain their level of income. Covetousness affects the contributions and hinders the work that could otherwise be done. Works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) still prevent entrance into the kingdom of God. We need to ask if we are influencing the world or is it the other way around. The willingness to discard as useless whatever has gone before and the craze for the **new** without regard for the **true** has captivated the ambitions of too many, and the church is reeling beneath the pounding it takes from the worldly minded members. The reproach that is heaped against Christ because of the worldly lives of so-called Christians cannot be measured for magnitude of it and the damage it causes to His cause for which he died.

How people can live for the world and claim to be of Christ is an inconsistency that cannot be explained.

THE NEW RATHER THAN THE TRUE

Change for change’s sake is the watchword with some. While we may improve our methods and expedients that are lawfully used, some have changed the message and mission in order to appeal to the world, bringing people into fellowship without converting them to the convictions they must possess to be children of God. Many are being deceived by the lies of false teachers who say they only wish to change in matters of opinion, but upon examination of their message, it is obvious that the message they preach conflicts with the doctrine of Christ. We are naive to think false teachers are sincere. It is increasingly evident that the lives of many members of the church are not lights in the world nor are they the salt of the earth. They hide the light of truth beneath the bushel of

hypocrisy and imitation of error. It still rings true, however, that we are not to love the world (1 John 2:15-17), and when we are friends with the sinful things of the world, we are no longer friends of God, but His enemies (James 4:4; cf. John 15:14).

LIBERALISM AND MODERNISM

Doctrinally, the church is beset with modernism and liberalism. This really has no relationship with being modern or generous. Modernism is a system of thought that denies the Bible is the Word of God, denies the miraculous, denies even the existence of God, including the Deity of Christ and the evidences of it. Modernism contends the first eleven chapters of Genesis are myths and only figurative language. Liberalism embraces the doctrines that have divided and torn the church apart through the years, as men imitate the substitute churches of denominationalism, adopt doctrines of men, slander faithful brethren to gain their own fame and fortune, and generally disrupt the brotherhood in order to create a “do-your-own-thing” approach to religion. Forsaking the need for authority for what is said and done, they go their own way, ridicule the “old paths,” and heap unto themselves teachers of error. Many churches, once faithful, are submerged in liberalism.

This attitude toward Scripture has seeped into the church through brotherhood papers, books, Bible departments of schools, modern speech so-called versions of the Bible, and the “scholars” who have absorbed the modernistic teaching they studied while gaining their religious titles and degrees at the seminaries operated by modernists and denominationalists. It has gained favor through big-name brethren who have had influence, but who have digressed from the truth. For years on end these people have been polluting the minds of generation after generation until the church is

staggering from the blows of digression and apostasy. The climate that only the “intellectuals” have any right to say or know anything, that others need to keep quiet, has captivated the “thinking” of too many. As in the day of Paul, those who profess themselves wise are fools because they have turned their heads from Biblical teaching and adopted the ways propagated by men in contrast to truth (1 Cor. 1:17-29).

LETHARGY/APATHY/PEACE AT ANY PRICE

Atop all this is the pathetic and tragic lethargy and indifference that holds control of the minds of members and their leaders alongside the disposition to “go along to get along.” This is not a problem with all, nor is this something brand new among brethren. Revelation 3:16 and the lukewarm church in Laodicea blazed the trail for this kind of religious stupor. So many manifest a “who cares” attitude. So many are unwilling to take a stand. So many are unwilling to work and bear their part of the load.

You may see a lot of activity here and there, but often it is activity that is not the Father’s business, but just busy-ness. You hear a lot about love, love, love, but it is not the love of which one reads in Scripture, but a permissiveness and tolerance of sin, an acceptance of false doctrines and doctors, a pseudo-love that appeals to emotions but fails to manifest itself in genuine deeds that seek the other’s highest good as God defines the good. Some who cry for love are among the most vicious people on earth. They have no love for the truth nor those who stand for it and defend it. Their love is for their own bellies, their own way, and whatever means that gains for them their goals and ambitions.

This lethargic indifference is seen in letting the other fellow do his work and mine too. It is seen in being against everything and for nothing. It is evident with the lessening interest in evangelism. Many churches are merely “house keeping” for the Lord and not even doing a credible job at that. It is seen in the decline of accepting personal responsibility, the unwillingness to cooperate and work. Interest is centered on self and what

one wants, what makes one feel good, rather than what is the revealed will of God. There is compromise of truth, and “dialogue” with those in apostasy under the guise of seeking unity. They seek not unity, but fellowship in spite of division, and in spite of God’s prohibition of it. They preach we are to have “unity in diversity” which means to agree to disagree, and that doctrinal differences make no difference.

The church is now plagued with the development of the “staff” and clergy of congregations, the soul-winning experts without each Christian making his or her effort to even be faithful, let alone be soul winners. It is seen in the attitude that nothing applies to me, but everybody else ought and will do what is necessary. This is a strength-sapping and energy-draining disposition against the

welfare of the church.

Nonetheless, all is not evil, and the Lord has promised to be with us. With these and other problems, like the lack of discipline, weak leadership, failure of training, absenteeism, the Lord’s people face hard times. It is up to the faithful to try to prevent, face, solve, overcome, and endure the problems in the church without developing hatred and bitterness toward those in error, for that would destroy us. Problems mean that we must be sure and more determined to keep step with the Master.

We work for a remnant to keep the flame of truth burning brightly after our term of service ends in physical death. May God help us to be faithful to Him.

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Holy and Reverend...

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use his name in flippant, frivolous and profane fashion. ... One is profane who uses sacred things in an irreverent and blasphemous manner. The word vain, in the third commandment of the decalogue, is translated from a word which means in a light, flippant, and contemptuous fashion. (*Questions and Answers*, pp.180,181)

Several years ago I noticed an announcement in the bulletin of a well known conservative congregation about “JC’s Kids.” Upon reading this I sent the preacher of that congregation the quote from brother Woods. A few days later he called and assured me they were not trying to be disrespectful or use the name of Jesus Christ in an irreverent and blasphemous manner.

My friends, to reduce the name of Jesus Christ to “JC” is to trivialize the name that is above every name! When the angel explained to Joseph that Mary was with child of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 1:78-20), he then said, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their

sins” (Matt. 1:21). When the Ethiopian eunuch made the good confession he said “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (Acts 8:37). Pray tell me the difference in reducing the name of Jesus Christ to “JC” and asking someone if they believe that “JC” is the son of God?

Of the Christ, Paul wrote: “*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus Christ every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil. 2:9-11). Furthermore, James wrote, “*Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called*” (James 2:7)? I submit to you that to reduce “that worthy name” to such trivialization as “JC” is to “blaspheme that worthy name!” My friends, I assure you, this is not a trivial matter!

Remember, how one views God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God’s Word, determines how he lives!

“*O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. ... God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him*” (Psalm 34:3; 89:7).

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"HOLY AND REVEREND IS HIS NAME" — PSALM 111:9

Ivie Powell

God has made known His existence through His inspired Word. The first verse in the Bible clearly states: "In the beginning God..." (Gen. 1:1). This same verse also informs man that "God created the heaven and the earth." Concerning God's creation, the Psalmist wrote: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psa. 19:1). While observing nature one may conclude there is a Higher Being, but he cannot know anything about God and His will unless he studies the inspired word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4). When one turns from God's word in pursuit of how the universe and man came into being, he will find himself on the road of fools (Psalm 14:1). Paul wrote of those who traveled this identical road and its consequences in Romans 1:20-32.

The first two chapters of Genesis enlightens man not only of God and how all things came into being, including man (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:19-22), they also let us know how sin entered the world (Gen. 2:17,3) and the implementation of God's plan to redeem man (Gen. 3:15).

A truly humbling experience is to study the attributes of God, some of which are:

God is *Omniscient* — A being of infinite knowledge, that is, he knoweth all things. "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33).

God is *Omnipotent* — Unlimited in power or authority. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light: there was light" (Gen. 1:1-3).

God is *Omnipresent* — Present in all places at the same time. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? Saith the Lord" (Jer. 23:23-24)?

God is *Infinitely Just* — "Justice and judgment are the habitations of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face" (Psalm 89:14).

God is *Infinite in Holiness* — "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3).

God is *Eternal* — "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psalm 90:2).

As one reads and meditates upon the marvelous attributes of God, he cannot help being overwhelmed, and like David stand in "Awe of God" (Psalm 33:8)!

One of the great blessings of being a child of God is that of prayer (1 John 5:14-15). With great "confidence" we can (Heb. 4:16) approach the throne of grace, not in an arrogant, but humble manner (1 Peter 5:7-8). A practice, no doubt, that many have adopted from the denominational world is that of approaching God as though He were a man. Hosea 11:9 states an unchangeable truth, "...for I

am God, and not man..." His nature, like that of Christ, "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Man is flesh and blood whereas "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Our Lord instructed the disciples regarding the manner in which they were to approach the Almighty, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9).

The use of God's Holy and revered name is never to be taken in vain! It is a common practice among many, including some brethren to throw out the expression "**Oh, my....**" Whether intended or not, this is taking God's name in vain! "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exod. 20:7). Again we read, "...neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:12). In commenting on this, brother Guy Woods wrote:

"Jehovah has ever regarded, with the greatest displeasure, any disposition on the part of man to

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Holy and Reverend...

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