

Our purpose is to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” and to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

OLD PATHS ADVOCATE

“To continue speaking the truth in love,” “endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” “keeping the ordinance as delivered.”

“Thus saith the Lord, ‘stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the Old Paths, where in the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest of your souls.’ (Jer. 6:16) “And they that be of Thee shall build the old waste, places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell in.” (Isa. 58:12).

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NO. 8

THE PEOPLE ROSE UP TO PLAY

By RICK MARTIN

In the past if you were to ask someone why they attended a certain religious body they would usually say they attended to study the bible and worship God. We are living in a world today that is highly entertainment oriented. There is an erroneous idea today that the main reason people attend worship is to get something out of the service, rather than going there to worship God. This is selfish motive and many are not satisfied with the worship service because their emphasis is not on the proper object of worship which is God. Religion has given in to the allurements of entertainment to get people in. Religious people try to justify this by saying, “We must do whatever it takes to get them in.” People insist that everything must be fun or they will not participate.

There are many denominations and digressives that try to convince themselves and others that offers of food, fun, and prizes is only a secondary offering, trying to get us to believe that the real emphasis is Jesus Christ and the Word of God. There are those who tell us that we cannot reach the young and the un-churched unless we have something exciting and fun. The question is does God really want us to get people to worship at any cost? Is God a god of bribery and entertainment? The answer is no. God wants people to come to Him because they love Him and appreciate the gift of His Son.

In John chapter 6 we are told how the crowds kept coming to Jesus. Jesus performed the miracle of taking a young boy’s lunch of five loaves and two fish and fed 5000 men, not including women and children and had 12 baskets left over. When the crowds saw this they were convinced “This is truly the prophet who is come into the world.” They wanted to take Jesus and make Him their King. Jesus would have none of this. He sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee and He left the crowd to be alone. Later that night He met up with them by walking on water to the boat, during a storm. When He got in the boat the storm disappeared and the boat was immediately where they were going.

The next morning, back on the other side of the lake, crowds began to gather waiting to see Jesus. They knew that His disciples had gone to the other side leaving Him behind. There were several small boats that were nearby, so when the people realized that Jesus was not there, they

got in the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for Him. When they got over to the other side and found Jesus, they began to question Him, as to how he got there. Now you would think that Jesus would be happy that this crowd went to so much effort to follow Him. There’s not a preacher alive who wouldn’t be pleased to have a crowd of people following him around. Instead of giving the crowd what they wanted, Jesus rebuked them and said, “The truth of the matter is you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you believe in me.” Instead of giving the crowd what they wanted, Jesus spoke words to them that they needed. He reminded them that there are some things more important than the physical. He told them that he was the bread of life that everyone must eat. This was a hard saying for these people, so instead of seriously thinking about what Jesus said they began to grumble. Now mind you, the day before, they wanted to crown Him king and were proclaiming that he was the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy. Now because He was speaking some difficult things they began to grumble. Why? The answer is really pretty simple. They were following Him because he had fed them, not because they wanted to serve God first. When people seek an emotional high from worship and don’t get it they are disappointed. Many want their worship experience to be entertaining. They want to get something out of it. They fail to worship God in spirit and

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DON’T FORGET THE FOREIGN POSTAGE

In the July OPA, we published a plea for help in paying the foreign postage, which is now about \$3200 every year. Since we often send the foreign subscriptions without charge, this means a huge load is now placed on the paper for postage just within the last month or so. An announcement was also made at Lebanon during the 4th of July meeting. Some promised to send later and some donated at the meeting. Others have sent donations in the mail. Your generosity is wonderful and we give you our heartfelt thanks. Unfortunately, this postage cost is an ongoing problem and we just want to remind everyone to keep us in mind from time to time. In the event enough comes in to cover this year, it will be carried over to defray next year’s cost. We are doing our best to keep the paper at its current price of \$13 a year. When you renew or subscribe for the first time, please consider subscribing for a friend as a gift. - **Don L. King**

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Guest Editorial

UNCERTAIN SOUNDS

By ALAN BONIFAY

In 1 Corinthians 14:7-8 the great Apostle Paul warned: "And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" It is absolutely amazing to me how careless some of our brethren have become with the truth of God's word and the purity of the worship of the Lord's church. We are hearing "uncertain sounds" about the pattern for observing the Lord's supper.

Not too long ago an elder in one of our congregations was ruminating as he preached: What should be done in the unhappy event that the cup was spilled during the observance of the Lord's supper? Or what should be done if the assembly proved too large to be able to commune together from the cup normally used by the congregation? This leader concluded that if the cup were spilled it could be refilled, the distribution of the fruit of the vine would begin with the first communicant who had not yet partaken, and continue through the rest of the assembly. He then went on to advance his argument by saying that in such a manner a congregation would be able to accommodate any crowd, however large. He said the cup could simply be refilled as often as was necessary in order to reach everyone.

You may be forgiven for wondering where this elder obtained the authority for such a notion. He claimed his authority lay in the fact that the Bible does not say a congregation cannot do this. To this day the elders, the evangelist, and the teachers in his congregation subscribe wholeheartedly to the idea that whatever the Bible does not explicitly condemn may be put into practice. They have since applied this principle so assiduously that they have drifted into digression.

Of course, when this elder preached these things there came an immediate outcry from the faithful, who dared to suggest that the silence of the Bible cannot authorize anything--let alone the refilling of the cup to accommodate a large crowd. After being sternly opposed, this brother said he was sorry he said it, "not because it was wrong" but because it caused such a disturbance.

Now one of our venerable preachers has taken up the cause of this elder and his congregation, and has written to all of the preachers suggesting that maybe we should reconsider our opposition to "refilling the cup in an emergency."

How should we think about this issue? First, it should be noted at the outset that this argument about refilling the cup was not only advanced as a suggestion regarding how to cope with an emergency: It was also advanced as a method of accommodating a crowd too large to commune from the congregation's communion cup. Second, the arguments offered to defend such a practice were patently false: The elder who suggested this gave two arguments to support this practical - 1) the cup is the blood (implying that therefore the container has no symbolic importance--a false doctrine

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THE QUERIST COLUMN

By RONNY F. WADE

Question: Is it good for congregations to have swimming parties along with cookouts?

Answer: There are at least two things that need to be addressed in this question. First, the role of churches in recreational activities, and secondly, the problems that can arise from such activities. The church, according to the Bible is not in the business of providing recreation for anyone. Recreation or "get-togethers" are a function of individuals or the home. The church is spiritual, and its work is limited to that domain. The church is God's agency in the work of evangelism (Mt. 20:1-16; Acts 13:1-3; I Timothy 3:14-15; Eph. 3:21; Eph. 4:11-12), edification Ephesians (4:11-19), and benevolence (Acts 11:29-30, 2:43-45; 2Cor. 8:12). Churches have no business sponsoring church camps, ball teams, swimming parties, cookouts, or any other such activity. Today many religious bodies build gymnasiums, family life centers, kitchens etc for activities that are not a work of the church. The idea of a church sponsoring a "church camp or summer camp" is totally foreign to the scriptures. Some advertisements for gospel meetings use as much space telling about all the activities that will be provided for young people as they do the preaching of the gospel. The late B. C. Goodpasture wrote "It is not the mission of the church to furnish amusement for the world or even its own members. Innocent amusement in proper proportion has its place in the life of all normal persons, but it is not the business of the church to furnish it... For the church to turn aside from its divine work to furnish amusement and recreation is to pervert its mission. Amusement and recreation should stem from the home rather than the church." Brother Goodpasture was right and we would do well to heed what he wrote. Secondly, we must be advised of the possible danger of certain activities. The idea that a congregation would be involved in arranging a swimming party where both sexes are present and wear the swim suits representing today's fashions is beyond my ability to comprehend. Even if such an activity were arranged by individuals, the problem of modesty would still be an issue. The scriptures are plain "in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing." The modern swim suit contains very little cloth for either sex. Mixed bathing pools, lakes, beaches etc. represent a ripe field for lust and immorality. Such a "get-together" should be shunned and rejected by all Christians. There are, of course, activities that are wholesome and perfectly all right for Christians to enjoy. Under the supervision of the home or some dependable individual they offer an opportunity for young and old alike to associate and enjoy the company of others. Not only are such situations acceptable but actually good for those involved. In some places Christians never

get together except in the assembly of the church. That is unfortunate, for we all need the association and help of other Christians. In congregations that have a number of young people, wise parents and individuals would do well to provide times and opportunities for these young ones to be together in the enjoyment of wholesome company. There are two considerations that should be paramount in the selection of all activities for all Christians: (1) will the activity undermine spiritual or moral values, or will it encourage the production of such values? (2) will the activity serve to strengthen ties between Christians, will it create a sense of belonging among those who serve the Lord? May God help the church to never invade forbidden territory, and give wisdom to all in the selection of the activities of daily life. (Send all questions to Ronny F. Wade 2254 E. Raynell St. Springfield, MO 65904 or clockronny@aol.com)

"THE SOUNDS OF THE CROSS"

As the sounds of the cross
Echo in our mind,
We look at our Lord
As He's hanging there.

And what we find,
As we gaze at that one,
God's own Son,
Is a man dying in pain.

And then we remember,
That's why He came.

Even if the soldiers thought
They put Him there.

Let us remember,
Let us beware,
Of what He'd already said.

"You do not take my life,
I lay it down."

And, as we hear the sounds
That echo round,
We realize that even as He died.
Even as to the Father He cried,
He died exactly as planned.

He was still in control.
He was fulfilling His role,
As the Son of God, the Son of Man.

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FROM AROUND THE WORLD. . .

BY ALAN BONIFAY

We are pleased this month to begin a new column designed to inform and engage your interest and participation in mission work. In 1952, faithful congregations of the churches of Christ began a fledgling work in Africa, in the country of Malawi. From that small beginning, there are now thousands of churches around the world in at least 27 countries! The Lord has blessed us richly in this effort, and for 55 years every 4 days (on average) the New Testament pattern of work and worship has been established in a new place. This tremendous work consumes a lot of money and manpower, and we need your help.

The work highlighted this month is a relatively new one in Togo, West Africa. The Harrisonville, Missouri congregation has shouldered this work and over the last four years has spent about \$400,000. This work is a successful, viable one that has spread to neighboring countries. Please consider the following article and contribute directly to this wonderful work if you possibly can.

THE CHURCH IN TOGO, WEST AFRICA

BY JIM BRADFORD

The truth has been preached on the continent of Africa for well over 50 years. Long established works have been in place and supported by U.S. congregations in eastern Africa--in Malawi, Zimbabwe, and more recently in Zambia and Mozambique. The work in West Africa is newer, relatively speaking. Today West African congregations meet in Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Mali. All of these are good works that you will be reading about in future columns. This article focuses specifically on the church in Togo, West Africa.

The work in Togo began in 2001 as an outgrowth of the work in neighboring Ghana. Four congregations were established in Togo at that time by two native preachers from Ghana working with Brother Joe Norton. Since then the work has quickly grown to over 40 congregations located almost entirely in the southern third of this very small country. As a direct result of the work in Togo, congregations have already been started in Benin to the east, and from there north to the Saharan country of Mali. Souls have been converted in logo from Voodoo and other forms of idolatry, Pentecostalism and other denominations, and from the cups/classes churches of Christ. Even idolatrous Priests have been converted. They burn their idols publicly so that all will know. To God be all the glory! The brethren are sincere in their belief in the Lord, many having proven it time and again.

The country of Togo has been ruled by dictatorship

for almost 50 years. Two years ago the death of the president of the country (who had gained leadership by military coup in the 1960's) was marked by violence throughout the nation. During the transition of leadership to his son at least two of our brethren were pulled from their homes and murdered by government vigilantes. Others of our brethren fled to the nation of Benin to avoid the conflict. At the Lebanon meeting (July 2007) you were told of another recent situation where a brother and sister were robbed, beaten, and violated severely, and our sister lost her unborn child. Days later we heard that this sister died from her injuries. This is just a taste of the difficulties brethren face in Togo every day. Some have been threatened and beaten for their Christian beliefs; others have had their properties destroyed and have been offered bribes to leave the faith. Yet in the face of all of this, the word continues to be preached and the church continues to grow. Some here have said "we are not persecuted physically as the apostles were." They are wrong - "we" are persecuted today, in places outside of the U.S.

The congregation at Harrisonville has been supporting this work since 2002. We maintain communication with the native preachers and make visits every 9 to 12 months. During our last visit in January 2007 we held a study with 65 preachers and leaders of local congregations and worshipped with 14 congregations. We focus a portion of our teaching and training on the need for the Togolese congregations to be as financially independent as possible. Although the congregations are becoming more independent from year to year, they are still in need of some financial support from other places.

The congregation at Harrisonville is searching for congregations who will assist us in carrying this work into the future. Can your congregation help by supporting at least one or two preachers? In addition, other items requiring support include the cost of local radio programs (very important to spreading the gospel in Togo), worship facilities, benches, songbooks, bibles, and other written materials. Can you send a one-time amount in support of one of these items?

Please feel free to contact any of us for additional information regarding the work, where to send support, how support is transmitted, etc. Each of us has traveled to Togo and seen the results of the work first hand. Additional information may also be found at the congregation's website, www.harrisonvillecofc.org. Please consider this work as part of the evangelism your congregation will support in the future.

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MAXEY'S LIBERAL REFLECTIONS

BY BILLY D. DICKINSON

Al Maxey is a militant "unity in diversity" man who sends out his **Reflections** - a weekly email "letter" that contains some of the most hurtful discourses that you will find anywhere. He has made it his personal mission to strike out against those who believe it is necessary to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). He has made several attacks on me, Don King, the OPA and things that we believe. In this article I will expose his liberal, anti-obedience views. It is easy to establish from his own writings that Al has little respect for the authority of the Scriptures, all of his claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

If you were to be accused of having "liberal, anti-obedience views" in regard to the Scriptures, what would your reaction be? When I corresponded with Al some time back, here is how he responded: "I'm not sure that truly characterizes where I'm at spiritually" [From an 8/25/2005 e-mail]. Please notice that he didn't sound too positive about it, although he went on to assure me that he does believe in the necessity of obedience. The fact that he felt compelled to make such an affirmation speaks volumes! Also, he went on to say that some people actually think that he is a "conservative." I must admit that I chuckled to myself when I read that assertion.

"YE SHALL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS"

Al Maxey is a classic example of what "unity in diversity" is and the extreme errors into which it leads. In that sense he should be the "poster child" for this movement! Although he is constantly talking about grace, he often shows very little of it when dealing with those who differ with his views. The truth is that he can be as legalistic and dogmatic as anyone, even castigating those who dare to disagree with his concept of unity. How does Al react to such a charge? Read his weak denial: "As for castigating those who disagree with my concept of unity, I feel that is probably overstating the case" [8/25/2005 e-mail]. Again, he doesn't sound too sure about it! I wonder why?

Yes, he has been guilty of such and here is the kind of language I am referring to: "Legalistic patternism is one of the most devious, devilish delusions ever spewed forth upon mankind by that 'serpent of old.' Far too many in my faith-heritage... have swallowed this flood of folly like parched ground on a summer day." I have several responses: (1) Since Al says that unity does not involve "uniformity" of belief and practice, I do not have to agree with his definition of unity. That is right, isn't it? Surely he isn't going to argue that we must have unity in diversity in regard to everything but unity in diversity! (2) If I am a "faithful brother" while engaging in the above behavior, that doesn't say very much about the importance of his movement. Indeed, I am made to wonder why he is so bent on troubling the church with his "reflections." [He wrote in the 8/25/2005 email: "I consider you my faithful brother in Christ even though we may differ on a thousand different things."] (3) Al takes the position that he cannot have unity with one who does not believe that "God will call men to account, rewarding those who come

to Him and punishing those who do not." Where does he get the right to make such a declaration? How ungraceful of him! I've also asked him to explain how this truth is easier to understand than Matt. 26:26-29 and 1 Cor. 14:34-35. I'm still waiting for an explanation. (4) Because Guy N. Woods did not believe in the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit and taught that "the only impact of the Spirit on the heart of either alien or Christian is by means of the word of truth," Al has charged him with teaching **false doctrine** that is tantamount to **blasphemy**. How Pharisaical and judgmental he is!

I get the feeling that Al just makes it up as he goes along, without regard for consistency of thought or practice. He talks long and hard about God's grace and how we must accept differing views on Bible topics, but then he turns right around and accuses Guy N. Woods of being a false teacher. The truth is that Al's heart is not filled with a sweet spirit of grace like he wants people to believe! Remember what Jesus said: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34).

AL'S EXTREME POSITIONS

Al wants you to believe that we are the extremists, but we can't hold a candle to some of his radical positions! Consider what the man believes on a variety of topics:

He does not believe **in hell** (in the Biblical sense of the term): "I will seek to demonstrate that the traditional teaching pertaining to the destiny of the wicked comes, not from God Almighty, but from the deceiver himself." Think about it! He cannot have unity with a man who denies that God punishes those who do not come to Him, but he is the one who mocks what the Bible teaches about eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46). What's wrong with the man?

He thinks that the **communion** can be scripturally partaken of on any and every day of the week: "They have a tradition to promote and protect. It is the tradition of Sunday only observance of the Lord's supper." Also, he denies that **instrumental music** is an unscriptural practice: "There is not one single sentence anywhere in the Bible that even hints that God regards accompanied singing as 'sinful'."

It is even difficult to get a clear statement out of him that it is unscriptural to use **steak** (as a substitute for bread) and **milk** (as a substitute for the fruit of the vine) in the communion. I've read what he has written about this, but I'm not sure what he really believes. The problem is that Al often goes the long way around in saying something, rather than just coming out with it. If he is really comfortable with what he believes, why the circumlocution? He says that he doesn't like the idea and he can't think of a valid reason for making a change, but then he gives this qualifying statement: "That's just my perception of the matter, but I think it is at least rational and reasoned." Al, you aren't sure if "liberal, anti-obedience views" characterizes where you are spiritually? I tell you the man is in denial!

"SHEET BAPTISM"

This is the one that takes the cake! Al requested that brethren write to him and explain what they do when someone is too sick to be immersed in water. One man wrote

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WHAT THEN?

BY TAYLOR A. JOYCE

In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* Steven Covey includes the habit which he calls *Begin with the End in Mind*. He explains his belief that the person who succeeds in life must begin the journey with the image of the end of his life as the frame of reference by which everything else is measured.

The Bible agrees with that principle. In Heb. 9:27 we are reminded that "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." That is the destiny of every person on earth, and that is the one certainty which ought to shape every day of our brief span of time on this planet.

Unfortunately, many are concerned only with the creature comforts of the moment - what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and what they shall wear (Matt. 6:25). No thought is given to one's responsibility to "him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). Like those described by James (4:13) they say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain."

Planning for life may include getting an education, choosing a career, selecting a marriage partner, building a nest egg for retirement, and then enjoying the golden years. But that's where the planning stops. The plan is only concerned with the here and now, those few years we will spend on earth. No thought is given to the vast and ceaseless ages of eternity that stretch before us.

Such was the case of a young man who had a conversation with William Gladstone, onetime Prime Minister of Great Britain. The young man told the Prime Minister that he would soon complete his studies at Oxford University.

Gladstone: Spendid, and what then?

Young man: Well, sir, I plan to study law and become a prominent barrister.

Gladstone: Excellent, and what then?

Young man: Then I plan to stand for election and become a member of Parliament.

Gladstone: Wonderful, and what then?

Young man: Then, sir, I plan to rise to prominence in the party and be appointed to a cabinet post.

Gladstone: A worthy ambition, and what then?

Young man: Oh, Mr. Gladstone, I plan one day to become Prime Minister and serve my Queen with the same distinction as you.

Gladstone: A noble desire, young man, and what then?

Young man: Well, sir, I suspect in time I will be forced to retire from public life.

Gladstone: You will indeed, and what then?

Young man: I expect that one day I will die.

Gladstone: That you will, and what then?

Young man: I don't know sir, I have not thought any further than that.

Gladstone: Young man, you are a fool. Go home and think your life through from its end.

Gladstone's rebuke is reminiscent of the rebuke

administered to the rich farmer in our Lord's parable. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many year, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou has provided?" (Luke 12:16-20).

The parable is a reminder that our barns may be filled to the rafter, and our coffers may be overflowing with treasure. Indeed, we may be exceedingly rich from a material standpoint, and be as destitute as the poorest beggar in the sight of God, not knowing that "The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment" (Luke 12:25).

The silver-tongued Baptist preacher, Robert G. Lee, presented a message entitled "Pay-Day - Someday" to some 600 audiences. He built it around the Old Testament story of Ahab and Jezebel which has a great deal to say about human accountability to God. The sobering fact is that all of us are similarly accountable. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or Bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). The person who ignores this fact is in greater danger than any ostrich that seeks to escape danger by hiding its head in the sand!

No plan for life is complete that does not take into account the twin destinies of death and judgment. This point was forcefully made by the anonymous poet who wrote:

*When the great factory-plants of our cities
Have turned out their last finished works,
When our merchants have sold their last products,
And sent home the last tired Clerks;
When our banks have transacted their business,
And paid out the last dividend;
When the Judge of the Earth calls a reckoning,
And asks for a balance - WHAT THEN?*

*When the Church choir has sung its last anthem,
And the preacher has made his last prayer;
When the people have heard their last sermon,
And the sound has died out on the air;
When the Bible lies closed on the pulpit,
And the pews are all empty of men,
When each one stands facing his record,
And the Great Book is opened - WHAT THEN?*

*When the actors have played their last drama,
And the mimic has made his last fun,
When the film has flashed its last picture,
And the billboard displayed its last run;
When the crowds seeking pleasure have vanished,
And gone out in the darkness again,
When the trumpet of ages is sounded,
And we all stand before Him - WHAT THEN?*

*When the bugle-call sinks into silence,
And the long marching columns stand still;*

*When the captain repeats his last orders,
And they've captured the last fort and hill
When the flag has been hauled from the mast-head,
And peace seems to reign among men,
What those who rejected the Saviour
Are asked for a reason - WHAT THEN?*

There is almost a universal belief that there is something beyond this "vale of tears." The Bible calls that something heaven or hell. The wise man plans his life with that certainty in mind. - 1713 Savannah Drive, Fort Smith, AR 72901, tayjoyce@aol.com

WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

By PAUL O. NICHOLS

In a society two of the most despised of characters are liars and robbers. A liar cannot be trusted, and the robber will steal from others, even if it means running the risk of being punished.

In the Old Testament God accused His people of robbing Him. He said, "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? **Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation** (Malachi 3:6-9).

This was a terrible indictment against a people who were favored by God and who had been given the law of the Lord, but failed to appreciate their position. They had been blessed abundantly, but were too stingy and self-serving to return to their Lord that which was His. However, some Christians should be more merciful in their judgment of these people, because they themselves may be guilty of the same sin. The apostle Paul warns, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest **doest the same things** (Rom. 2:1). Are we guilty of robbing God?

Giving of our means upon the first day of the week is commanded by the Lord in the New Testament, just as tithing was commanded in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 16:1,2). Yet, many members of the church seem to take this command very lightly. The Lord is not a beggar and His demands are not unreasonable. The Bible teaches us to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33) and He promises to see to all of our needs. The Expression, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt" was an expression used by Jesus in speaking to Peter upon one occasion. Perhaps it is applicable to some of us today. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20). Do we really believe the Lord will supply our needs if we put God first in our lives?

Some have been led to believe that even though the Lord has told us to give, He has left the amount entirely up

to us. But is this true? I believe God not only tells us to give, but tells us how to give, as well. It is true that we are taught to give as we purpose in our own hearts (2 Cor. 9:7), but our giving must be determined according as we have been prospered (1 Cor. 16:1,2). If our prosperity increases, we are to give more. "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase" (Proverbs 3:9). We must have the right attitude for our contribution to be acceptable. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not (2 Cor. 8:12). One must not give grudgingly nor of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity. . ." (Rom. 12:8). The marginal rendering of the word translated "simplicity" means "liberally". "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6). Do we actually believe this?" . . . And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:36). The Lord blesses those who give as the scriptures teach.

It is possible for one to sin, even if he does give to the Lord. We have all heard the saying, "Actions speak louder than words." In Acts chapter 5 we have an incident recorded from which all can learn a lesson. Ananias and Sapphira his wife sold a piece of property and wanted credit for contributing all the money for the benefit of the needy saints. The fact was, they were only contributing a part of the proceeds and the apostle Peter accused them of lying to God and to the Holy Spirit - Ananias by his actions, and his wife by verbally claiming an untruth. They paid the penalty with their lives. We, too, may be guilty of lying to God by our actions if we do not give as the word of God teaches, and furthermore we are guilty of "robbing God" if we do not give as we are prospered.

The Jews were compelled by God to tithe - give 10% of their income to the Lord for His cause. The Pharisees tithed (Luke 11:42), but with a wrong attitude. Their unrighteousness was pointed out by Jesus. And he taught His disciples, "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20). Giving to the Lord and His cause is serious business. It would be terrible to go through life thinking that we are serving the Lord in an acceptable way, only to hear in the final day the Lord say to us, "**You robbed me. Depart from me into everlasting punishment prepared for the devil and his angels.**" - *Bonner Springs, Kansas*

THE PEOPLE ROSE UP TO PLAY

continued from page one

in truth.

These people were not too pleased with what Jesus had to say. Jesus continued to speak some difficult words to these people. He told them they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Soon many left and no longer walked with Jesus. When He offered them the physical they were willing to follow. They were even willing to cross Galilee.

When he offered Himself to them, they lost interest and went home. Only a few remained when they realized He was not going to continue to hand out free meals. Jesus could have kept the crowds by continuing to feed them. Instead He let them walk away. He refused to cheapen the call of the Gospel for the carnally minded. Christianity is a serious and demanding religion, and to give people the impression that it is all fun and games is a mistake. Worship to God is holy and sacred. To pervert and corrupt it with entertainment and what we can “get out of the services in trying to please and gratify ourselves” is nothing short of blasphemy. The sacredness of true worship must not be sacrificed on the altars of entertainment. In worship we are to be the participant and not an observer. Many want to be pleased and entertained.

What method does God use to draw men and women to Him? The answer is found in **John 12:32**; Jesus says, “And I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.” When we see the love that God has shown us through the crucifixion of His Son, we will be drawn to Him. If that is not enough, He will let us walk away. God has never asked His people to try to bribe or entertain people to get them into the church or to keep them there. There are some people who are always demanding a handout. Many religious bodies are no more than a social club or recreational center. They offer family life centers, divorce groups, singles groups and youth groups. This is a blatant attempt to gain members without concern for true conversion and holiness. These things may draw a crowd, just as the multitudes followed Jesus when they thought loaves and fish were available. You let these religious bodies stop these things and the crowds will quickly disappear, just as they did in the first century.

God has chosen the foolishness of preaching to save those who are lost **1 Corinthians 1:21**. The early church offered the world nothing but the Gospel. It was not a message of fun. It was a message that called for a life of sacrifice and obedience. They offered nothing physical. There were no games, no retreats, and no amusements. They offered the opportunity to come to God, be forgiven of sins, and have the privilege to be a child of God. Nothing was offered as far as the world was concerned, yet the church experienced unprecedented growth. This message will still bear fruit today among any with a good and honest heart. The message of the Gospel when adulterated with physical appeals will draw large crowds, but it draws crowds, whose “god is their belly”. Keep them entertained and they will stay. Talk of hardship, self-discipline and sacrifice and they disappear.

The Lord’s work simply cannot compete with temporal activities at the level of fun. We need to recognize the fact that when it comes to the physical we cannot compete with the denominations and digressives of this world. In our efforts to gain the crowds, we cannot let the physical become the focus. There is a place for recreation and good times, but that is not what God has chosen to draw men to Him. The Church has a divine purpose. That purpose is not political, environmental, educational, or social, it is

spiritual. The church has the God-given purpose of making known to the entire world that salvation is in Christ Jesus. The Lord was all the early church had to offer and that is what we must offer today.

We are living in a day and age of entertainment and fun. It’s “fun, fun, fun for everyone”. We see marriages that don’t last because all the “fun” has gone out of them. We see people who can’t hold jobs because work is just not “fun” any more. Students can’t succeed in school and complain “we never have any fun” and some have embarrassed the church by just wanting to have “fun”. We are like the Israelites of old. **Exodus 32:6** “And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” - 300 Clubview Terrace, Woodstock, GA 30189

MAXEY’S LIBERAL REFLECTIONS

continued from page five

that he just **poured** water when the occasion demanded it. Another man explained that he “baptized” a woman in a **sheet**- covering her with the sheet (to represent a burial) and then pulling it back open (to represent a resurrection to new life). What did Al say about these two unscriptural practices? Here it is: “In all honesty I don’t know that I would have chosen the same course of action he did. But at the same time I understand his intent and heart.” “Again, would I have performed either of these two actions? Probably not.”

For a “conservative” who is committed to doing what the Lord has specified, I must say that Al really waffled on this one! If this is the kind of foolishness that “unity in diversity” leads to, I want no part of it. Indeed, **only liberals** could come up with a practice like that and then open it up for discussion in an attempt to see if it can be justified. If you want to know what is wrong with “unity in diversity,” you need to look no further than Al Maxey. - 2850 N. Oakland, Springfield, MO 65803, bddickinson@juno.com

UNCERTAIN SOUNDS

continued from page two

embraced by our brethren in digression); and 2) the Bible does not say a congregation cannot do this. As to his first defense, *the cup does not represent the shed blood of Christ* (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). The cup used in the Lord’s supper represents the New Testament - and as such, is a critical element of the supper. The fruit of the vine presents the shed blood of Christ (Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24). As to his second defense, the silence of scripture cannot logically authorize anything.

But in addition to the logical fact that silence cannot authorize, does the Bible explicitly teach Christians how we are to regard its silence? The answer is, “Yes!” Notice Colossians 3:17: “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” First, this passage refers to everything we do. This is stated three times: “Whatsoever ye do”; “in word or deed”; “do all.” Second, everything we do is to be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” In other words, all that we do is to be done by the authority of Jesus.

Third, where do we find Christ's authority expressed? It is found only in the New Testament scriptures (Jn. 14:26; 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jude 3; 2 Pet. 1:3; Gal. 1:6-9). Therefore, since everything we do, in word or deed, must be authorized by Jesus; and since He only does that through the written word, Colossians 3:17 refutes the notion that Bible silence permits. Bible silence never permits. It is always prohibitive. (2 Tim. 3:16-17 and 1 Thess. 5:21 can also be advanced to prove the same thing as Col. 3:17.)

So where is the Bible passage that either explicitly or implicitly authorizes a congregation to refill the cup and continue with the distribution of the fruit of the vine at the place in the assembly where the first cup was exhausted? There is no such scripture.

1 Corinthians 10:16 says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" The word *communion* means "close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship... participation, sharing (BAGD 553). According to Louw & Nida it means "to share one's possessions," with the implication of some kind of joint participation and mutual interest-to share (1:569). Clearly, the very purpose of the whole congregation partaking of the one cup is so that they jointly participate and share together in the communion or fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:17). A congregation cannot jointly participate in the communion of the body and the blood of Christ unless they partake of the same loaf and the same cup containing the same volume of the fruit of the vine that has been blessed. There is no scriptural authority for observing the communion in any other way.

So what should be done if the cup is spilled or some other emergency arises? The entire process of participation in the communion of the blood (that is, the partaking of the cup) must be started over - including the prayer for God's blessing. This is taught implicitly by all the passages which require congregational communion (Mt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:23-30).

No! We do not intend to consider even for a moment the idea of "refilling the cup in an emergency" as described in this article. Such would entail sin and digression. We will not, must not countenance such a corruption of the Lord's supper. Uncertain sounds concerning the doctrine of Christ cannot be tolerated (2 Jn. 9-11). - Lodi, CA

Announcements

WARNING

A man has scammed members of the church out of a good bit of money in Indiana and Kentucky. He claims to be a member of the church and is very familiar with the church and its history. He told us he has a new job, but had no money to eat during the training part of his job and had to work two weeks before being paid. Please beware as the man turned out to be a scam artist. - Cecil Smith, Orleans, IN

CASSVILLE, MO

The church in Cassville is currently not meeting. If you should be traveling to that area, please call ahead or contact one of the nearby churches in Aurora or Neosho, MO.

A NEW BOOK

Brother Steve Bowen has written a new book titled Inspiration Point. It is a series of articles written by Steve involving especially his grandparents E. H. and Zonie Miller, many of which center around the annual July 4, Sulphur, OK meeting. It is enjoyable reading and brings back a lot of memories especially to those who attended the meeting in bygone years. Steve's style of writing is both interesting and entertaining. To order the book write to Steven Bowen P.O. Box 2125, Red Oak, Texas 75154 or steven.bowen@redoakisd.org The cost is \$10. plus \$2.50 shipping and handling (no additional s & h for multiple books).

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Joe and Sondra Ferguson will celebrate their golden anniversary on August 23, 2007 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They were united in marriage by Oscar Johnson of the Beef Branch congregation near Reddings Mill in southwest Missouri. They were married in the old home place of Jessie Demasters, the maternal grandmother of Joe, near Beef Branch. Soon after the wedding they moved to Tulsa where Joe labored for over 49 years as a Sheet Metal Workers employee and retiring just last month. Joe and Sondra have three children - Sonja Baysinger who is married to Dennis Baysinger, Bill J Ferguson who is married to Ruth Ferguson, and Steve Ferguson. They have 5 grandchildren: Andrew and Andrea Baysinger and Jacob, Lacey, and Caleb Ferguson. Due to extenuating circumstances there will be a small private reception for the family on Saturday, August 18th; however, they would enjoy receiving a card or letter from those who have known them through the years. Any memory that you would like to share about them would be cherished dearly by the family. Please send all correspondence in care of Bill J Ferguson, P.O. Box 140524, Broken Arrow, OK 74014.

CUP OF THE LORD - BACK IN PRINT

The Cup of the Lord by J.D. Phillips is now back in print, thanks to brother Bill Ferguson. You may order one or multiple copies for distribution from him at P.O. Box 140524 Broken Arrow, OK 74014 or call him at 918-486-3715. His e-mail address is fergy1259@yahoo.com. This tract has been a standard for many years. Churches would do well to order several for distribution. The price is one dollar per book plus postage.

Our Departed

THOMPSON - Leonard Thompson was born April 16, 1922 in Oil Center, OK to Ausbie and Floy Roberts Thompson. He died Sunday, June 17, 2007 at the Ballard's Nursing Home in Ada, OK at the age of 85. He married Clara Bernice Bowerman on July 9, 1941, in Ada. He is survived by his wife of the home; three sons: David Thompson and wife Debbie, Harold Thompson and wife Sharon, and Melvin Thompson and wife Sharon; one sister Shirley Sloan of Bethany, OK; five grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by

his parents; one sister, Gredith Bethune; one grandchild, Michelle Thompson Hopkins; and great-grandchild, Kaylee Spencer. Leonard worked for Evergreen Mills for 40 years. We will miss Leonard. He was a faithful member of the church for many years. He and Bernice were so regular in their attendance, always being the first to arrive for services. He was a dependable song-leader and was a wonderful help to his brothers and sisters in Christ. Among other things, he insisted on keeping mine and Joe Hisle's yards mowed when we were away on meetings. A large crowd of family, fiends, and brethren gathered at our church building in Ada to remember Leonard and pay their respects to the family. Joe and I were honored to be asked by the family to officiate the service. - *Carl M. Johnson*

ROBERTSON - Lois Alice Robertson was born on October 17, 1939 in Cloud Chief, OK to Virgil and Martha Cox. She died June 1, 2007 at Deaconess Hospital in Oklahoma City. She was preceded in death by her parents and one sister Lena Faye Copeland. She is survived by two sons: Eugene Robertson and wife Raydonna of Maud, OK and C.V. Robertson of Mustang, OK; three brothers: J.F. Cox, Loye Gene Cox, and Loyal Cox of Dibble, OK; three sisters: Eva Jackson, Lucille Bryant, and Leta Novotny; grandchildren: Trevor and Taylor Robertson of Mustang; Derick Robertson of Maud, OK; Erica and Stephen Grimes of Maud, OK; one great-grandchild, Amos Matthew Grimes of Maud. I knew Lois for many years and saw her often at worship services at Galey, Seminole, and Okemah, OK. She had worked as a home care provider for the elderly. She loved to be around people and derived great satisfaction from the care she provided. She battled severe diabetes in her last years, but we are comforted in the thought that she has been set free from her physical afflictions and has the hope of an eternal house not made with hands in the resurrection. Joe Hibbs assisted me in officiating the funeral services before an over-flow crowd in Maud. - *Carl M. Johnson*

SMITH - Cleota departed this life March 30, 2007 at her home in Washington, OK at the age of 85 years. She married Delbert Smith in 1941, and she and Delbert were baptized in 1947 by Homer Gay. She was a very strong and dedicated Christian mother and wife and a faithful member of the Washington Church of Christ. Her husband preceded her in death 20 years ago. The couple had two children, daughter, Phyllis Smith; son, James Malone Smith both of Washington. Survivors also include two brothers, one granddaughter, one step-granddaughter and two step-great-grandchildren. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her. Charles Pruitt and Steve Martin conducted the service. - *DLK*

HAYES - Sister Mildred L. (Wilson) Hayes of McAlester, OK passed away on June 6, 2007, when her earthly tabernacle surrendered to cancer, at the age of 80. Survivors include: one daughter & son-in-law, Gloria & Jack Ridenour of Sapulpa, OK; two sons, Danny Wilson of Boston, Mass. and Roger Wilson of McAlester, OK; two step-daughters & spouses:

Becky & Terry Hancock of Kentucky, and Janice & Herman Scott of Kentucky; one step-son & spouse, Bob & Donna Hayes of Kentucky; one sister, Leola Luker of Arpelar, OK; two brothers & spouses, John & Jackie Kuykendall of McAlester and Donald & Bobbye Kuykendall of Arpelar, OK. It was my privilege to speak words of comfort and encouragement at her service. - *Randy Tidmore*

MUNN - Sister E. Dianne Munn, of McAlester, OK passed away on July 4, 2007, after a long battle with illnesses and complications of diabetes, at the age of 57. Survivors include her husband, Freddy Munn of the home; one daughter and son-in-law, Mindy Leigh and Christopher Ray Bailey of Broken Arrow, OK; two sisters and brothers-in-law, Sondra and Benny Johnson of Victoria, TX, and Kaylen and Tommy Ball of McAlester, OK; two brothers-in-law and their spouses, Jim and Barbara Munn of Coweta, OK and Bobby and Marcia Munn of Rockwall, TX. She was preceded in death by her parents, C. B. and Martha Merle Sutton. I was honored to speak words of comfort and encouragement at her service. - *Randy Tidmore*

Field Reports

Greg Gay, 1820 Casterbridge Dr., Roseville, CA 95747, papagregao.com, July 18, 2007 – I was in a meeting at the Fairbanks congregation in Houston, Texas June 17-24. Cassie and I stayed with Randy and Kathy Ballard and enjoyed our time with them immensely. Randy and the entire congregation were still mourning the recent loss of his mother, Marie. The congregation is blessed with a fine eldership and Randy works very ably with the congregation. Brethren were hospitable and area congregations supported the meeting well. It was nice of James Starks from Paris, Texas to take a week of vacation to come to the meeting. Our next stop was the Fourth of July meeting at Lebanon where it is always good to see so many from around the country. I love to hear the singing of nearly a thousand of God's people! Our work continues with the 64th St. Congregation in Sacramento. With recent birthdays, we have the honor of having five members who are over 90 years old: Ruth Blankenship, Earl Helvey, Bertha Howard, Dora Malig, and Ed Powell. Of the five, only sister Ruth is in a nursing home and unable to attend, but we are thrilled to have all of them in the congregation. My, what changes they have seen in the world in their lives!

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, old_paths@juno.com, July 15 – Pat and I returned from the Marietta, GA meeting last night. We enjoyed the meeting as always. We were made to feel right at home with Rick and Jane Martin, old friends of ours, and enjoyed being with the brethren there. Visitors came from a number of surrounding congregations, and were greatly appreciated. Though the meeting closed this time with no visible results, we pray good was done in unseen ways. The church at Marietta is fortunate to have Rick Martin. He does a good work there and will hold a good meeting for you when you call him. Lord willing, we leave Saturday for Lawrenceburg, TN for a week's meeting. We look forward to seeing some of you

there, though the meeting will be history by the time you read this. While we never enjoy hearing about problems anywhere, we want to encourage all to stand for what is right, no matter who, or what, may discourage you. The Lord's reward will surely be worth it all. Don't forget to renew your subscriptions to **Old Paths Advocate** promptly, please.

Brett Hickey, P.O. Box 68, Mountain Home, AR 72654, 870/424-4481, unityseeker@hotmail.com, July 11 – Joey and I enjoyed Karl and Kathy Modgling's hospitality during our meeting in Ceres, CA and value the renewal of friendships there. I was glad to preach the gospel to people from the community and those recently added to the body. Brethren in the area were so good to support our efforts. We look forward to upcoming meetings in Earlytown, AL July 15-22, Clayton, NJ August 3-5 and Grants Pass, OR September 12-16. Lord willing, we will also be at the Labor Day meeting in Neosho, MO. We have been in Mountain Home, AR for a month now and the Lord is already blessing our collective efforts. The Usery's and Duncan's also moved here in June and have contributed significantly to the energy and optimism within the body. The church here is hungry for the word and it shows. In addition to good attendance on Sunday afternoon and Wednesday evening the church is committed to a regular study of God's word and to being more tightly knit together. We had private studies with twenty-seven members this month. I began a monthly study with the brethren on the qualifications of the elder and other leadership issues. The brethren are also walking in wisdom toward them that are without. Most of the ten non-members we have studied with this month are from relationships developed by five brothers and sisters. One of these resulted in the baptism of a forty year old woman who has three teenage children. Lord willing, we will sustain this kind of zeal for God's word and work and have a fruitful meeting with Brandon Stephens September 6-9. Thank you for the many prayers, etc., for mom and dad. Dad is now at home and slowly, but steadily, improving. Remember us when you pray!

Bruce Roebuck, 1666 E. 2060, Hugo, OK 74743, June 11 – It has been some time since my last report. Time moves by so fast. Meetings this year have been really enjoyable. First, I was in Brookhaven (84 west) for a brief meeting in Feb. The church is thriving there and we look forward to hearing good things from them. Next we were in Lexington, KY for a week long meeting. Since Michael Conley began working there they have made great strides. Not only have they added several members, as well they have purchased property and are preparing to build a church house. Staying and working with these two churches was a great pleasure. Presently, we are in West Monroe, LA. The church here is strong and growing. We are looking forward to a great meeting. My summer schedule is: Bandy, KY July 11-15, Linnville, OH July 16-22, Jasper, TN, 25-29, Huntsville, AR Aug. 22-26. Please remember the church and our preachers in prayer.

Paul O. Nichols, 14217 Rosehill, Overland Park, KS 66221, pon.wjn.ks@juno.com – We are still working with the

church at 79th and Kansas Ave, Kansas City, KS. I gather that some people in the brotherhood seem to think that we have retired from the Lord's work which we have been engaged in for over sixty-six years. However, this is not the case. We still work with the church, helping to do what we can for the Cause which we love. We have had to retire from travelling all over the world as we have done through the years, but we are still active in furthering the gospel as we have opportunity. Here at the home congregation, with the help of the Lord we have succeeded in developing some good teachers who continue to grow spiritually, in knowledge of the truth, and in presentation of their lessons (2 Tim. 2:2). I take my turn along with the others (Acts 15:35). This month I am on the schedule for five lessons. We seldom have an outside speaker except for meetings and periodic drop-ins. We edify one another. (1 Cor. 14:31). We recently had a good meeting with Cullen Smith, who gave us some very timely lessons. He spoke with boldness and without partiality, the kind of preaching that we prefer. In September we have a young speakers meeting scheduled. In the meantime we will continue to "edify one another in love" (Eph. 4:16). We have moved. Please note the new address and phone number. The address is: 14217 Rosehill, Overland Park, KS 66221, and the phone number is: 913-549-3068. May the Lord bless all the faithful.

Virgilio O. Danao Sr., 94-371 Ikepono Street, Waipahu, HI 96797, new e-mail address: vdanao@hawaii.rr.com, July 2, 2007 – Greetings, in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to all the faithful brethren everywhere! The Church here continues to be at peace. We are trying hard to reach other people, and when given opportunity, we exert efforts, "...while it is still day..." We are saddened by the passing away of our late Sis. Rita Alontaga, the mother of Sis. Lilia Tapang who was baptized last April. Bro. Eric Stone made a long flight from San Angelo, TX, to attend her funeral. He arrived here in the evening of June 25, and flew back to Texas in the evening of June 27. I delivered the message in the wake and presided over the interment services, while Bro. Stone, on the funeral service, on June 26 and 27, respectively. Sis. Lilia's husband, Gene Tapang, who arrived from Portland, Oregon, attended our evening study on June 24. After the service, we took the chance to talk to him about the gospel and how he can avail himself of salvation. He also attended the Sunday worship service on July 1, and when the invitation song was sung, he came forward, together with Jaysanel Daguio, and made good confession of faith in Jesus. They were baptized the same day. Despite their plan to go back in the coming days to Hawaii, in the Big Island, where Bro. Gene originally came from, but because of his work in Oregon, Bro. Gene and Sis. Lilia said they are to return there. They assured us to look for the nearest congregation to their place in Portland, so they will not miss Sunday worship services. They are still very young in the faith, and we are praying earnestly they will continue to be faithful. Almost every Sunday, we have visitors, brethren, from the mainland U.S., and from the area, for which we are very grateful. We continue to solicit your prayers, particularly for the Lord's work here. Please, note my new e-mail address.

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RESTORING THE CHURCH

BY CARL M. JOHNSON

The concept of restoring the church to pure, New Testament Christianity does not originate with the American Restoration Movement. The cycles of falling away from and being restored back to God can be seen even in Old Testament days. Josiah, king of Judah during the days of the prophet Jeremiah, leads just such a restoration. Unlike his father and grandfather, Josiah is one of Judah's good kings. Under the reign of his ancestors, the temple in Jerusalem has fallen into disrepair and the book of the law of God has actually been lost. Upon assuming the throne, Josiah orders the temple to be repaired, and the book of the law is found in the rubble. When Josiah has the law read to him, he can see how far his people have fallen away from God, and he makes a solemn covenant to return to the Lord and to keep His commandments. The pagan idols his ancestors have erected are broken down, and Josiah and the people of Judah observe the Passover for the first time in many years. The Bible says that there was no king like Josiah, for he "turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses" (2 Ki. 23:25). The movement led by Josiah is a restoration movement, calling the people back to the will of God. This cycle is repeated often in the Old Testament.

The New Testament church is established on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) in about A.D. 33, and since that time simple New Testament Christianity has existed in every age. Shortly after the establishment of the church, however, Jewish Christians and subsequently Gentile Christians begin to depart from the church's divine pattern. Most of the New Testament epistles are written to correct those departures. However, since departures from the divine pattern have taken place in every age, sincere Christians in every age have been faced with the task of restoring the church to the ancient order.

As important as the principle of restoration has been in the history of God's people, we must keep in mind that there is a distinction between a movement and the church itself. Some people argue that the churches of Christ actually began during the American Restoration Movement, and they will appeal to the writings of the leaders of the American Restoration Movement in order to justify some practices that cannot be found in the Scriptures.

We owe a great debt to such men as James O'Kelly, Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott. These men were not inspired apostles, however, and they did not presume to be pontifical in their pronouncements. They did not claim to be the final authority in matters of faith, but they tried to point men and women to the inspired Word of God as that authority. These men led a noble movement, but the Lord's church was not established within that movement.

It is important to keep the distinction between the Restoration Movement and the New Testament church clear in our minds. God has put salvation in the latter but not in the former. The Restoration Movement may result in leading men to the church, but the movement itself is not the church nor did it give birth to the church. The church is built by Jesus Christ and Him alone, not by men. All churches built by men will find that the gates of hell will prevail against them, and not one of them will survive the resurrection. The only church that will survive the resurrection is the one built by Jesus Christ; the one predicated upon the sensational fact that He is the Son of God. Death cannot hold the Son of God (Mt. 16:16-18), and since He built His church upon this fact, it is not possible for death to hold the church either. The church will survive the resurrection just as surely as Jesus arose from the dead. None of the movements of human origin will survive the resurrection, but the church will.

As we struggle with the continuous ebb and flow of departures from and efforts to restore the divine pattern today, it is easy to become weary and discouraged. Conflict is a natural by-product of the work of restoration. Within the last year I have had numerous concerned brethren ask me about the palpable tension in the church today, while wondering about the church's future. I do not know about the immediate future of the church, but there is one thing about which I am absolutely certain. Regardless of what you and I do, the Lord's church is an eternal kingdom that is going to continue to stand (Dan. 2:44; Lk. 1:32-33; 2 Pet. 1:11). The only question is whether we shall choose to have a part in it. As the chorus in H.R. Trickett's song declares, "It shall stand/It shall stand/Forever/And ever/Amen/And amen." carmj@cablone.net